

“Novels with a Purpose”; The Interventionist Literature of Dinah Mulock Craik and
Contemporary Domestic Legislation

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Abstract:

Dinah Craik's interventionist literature aimed to promote a progressive agenda in female-centric domestic legislation. However, to maintain her respectable female reputation, she utilised conservative ideals and arguments. She capitalised on contemporary debates around essential femininity, maternity and the problems of inherited evil to argue for women's property rights, adoption rights and the repeal of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act. Her work exposed the gap between the legal framework and women's lived experiences. It also exposed the difference between women's private, invisible lives and the public perception of them which informed male discourse and legal debates, accentuating issues of influence versus power and questions of agency within this debate.

The intermingling of class and gender is a key theme in Craik's work. She equated the position of women of all classes with the position of working-class men under the law, particularly in terms of reification, being transmuted into property and owned. Women, Craik argued, share a common bond of sisterhood which transcends class, and this thesis examines the way in which the universality of femininity is questioned and constrained in light of the subjugations of male-made laws. Craik particularly examines the universality of femininity within the confines of inter-related identities. Though she does not reject the notion of inter-related identities, Craik places them within a hierarchy in order to argue for reform.

There is a tendency to appropriate Craik as a feminist writer despite her disavowal of female suffrage. This thesis examines the complicated way Craik viewed female rights, especially critiquing the level to which she examined her own social biases, and absorbed the ideology and social expectations of the society she lived in. Finally, it questions the level to which the dissonance between her avowed conservatism and the message her story conveys was deliberate and effective in reform.

“Novels with a Purpose”; The Interventionist Literature of Dinah Mulock Craik and contemporary domestic legislation

Introduction

Although Dinah Mulock Craik (1826-1887) started her career as a published writer at the age of nineteen, writing voraciously across a wide range of genres to support her family, once her financial security was assured by the success of her most famous book, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856) she deliberately turned to writing interventionist novels.¹ She focused on domestic debates, examining the treatment of women by the law, and participated in a wider campaign to repeal or change legislation detrimental to women. This focus on legal reform within her texts affected the way Craik chose to publish her novels, as well as their content and style. She often serialised her works in women’s magazines, which could be bought and kept, rather than books, which were borrowed from libraries and would have to be returned, so that maids could read the pieces after their mistresses had finished with the magazines (Mitchell, *The Victorian Web*). This was a deliberate move, so that the moral messages within her novels could be accessed by women of all classes – and her novels reflect this classlessness.² The common bonds of sisterhood that transcend class is a key theme within her novels, with Craik focusing both on her own femininity as an author and the shared femininity of her target readership.

Recent criticism surrounding Dinah Craik, including that by Karren Bourrier, Sally Mitchell, Kiren Mascarenhas and Elaine Showalter, designates Craik as a feminist writer despite her disavowal of the female suffrage movement. Mascarenhas, for example, discusses the “somewhat permeable boundary between antifeminism and feminism” in Craik’s work (Mascarenhas 256) using John Halifax as a metonym for the “vampiric patriarchy” (259). Showalter argues there is a “dark complexity” about women’s domestic novels and that “Victorian women often chopped away at all the branches of the patriarchal myth without questioning its basic truth” (Showalter 21). Showalter also argues that there is a subversive gap between what Craik outwardly says and what her work demonstrates –

¹ I am defining interventionist literature in the context of this essay as a text with a specific legal or moral issue which it works to defend or retract, avoiding the term ‘didactic’, as this term is both emotionally weighted and does not adequately support the intricacies of these interventionist texts.

² It may also have been a decision influenced by her husband’s position as a partner in Macmillian publishers, giving her the opportunity to publish serially within the magazines – but as there is not the scope within this work to examine the relationship and disparity between the avowed moral reasons and practicalities of publishing as a woman in the Victorian era, I will be taking Craik at her word for the purposes of this essay.

“covert messages” that Craik expects her readers to silently understand (Showalter 6). This subversive gap is demonstrated through the discrepancy in her interventionist novels and her essays. For, though Craik fought hard for specific female-centred issues within her novels and examines the inter-relational identity of her female characters in a way that suggests the double standard is visible to her, she argues in *A Woman’s Thoughts About Women* (1858) that it is “blasphemous” and “harmful” to assert “the equality of the sexes” (65). The scale of conservatism and liberalism is, of course, nebulous. One does not have to subscribe to all of the tenets of liberalism to have liberal ideologies, and rejecting female suffrage is not necessarily enough to make one a conservative, especially as this was not an unusual stance amongst female Victorian authors. However, despite her progressive views on many key female issues, Craik encourages a public conservative reputation, vocally disavowing equality between the sexes with strongly worded language; ridiculing a “female House of Commons”, “courts of justice stocked with matronly lawyers” and “colleges thronged by “Sweet girl-graduates with their golden hair” (65). Therefore, to some extent, her own perception, or intended public perception, of her ideologies was conservative, something she fashioned herself.³

The discrepancy between her essays and novels is further complicated by the way that Craik utilised her female characters’ inter-related identities for her own purposes. By using conservative arguments and deliberately cultivating a reputation as the author of “one of the wholesomest novels in the language”, Craik could broach controversial issues safely (Reade 76). Craik intervened in these legal debates with a progressive agenda, but maintained a respectable reputation by using conservative ideals so as to make her work less contentious and more accessible to the wider public.

Craik’s interventionist novels examine several clear legal issues such as the Married Woman’s Property Act, the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Act and adoption, but they also raise wider social issues too; issues of class, the inter-related identity of women and the invisibility of women’s private lives in the public sphere. For Craik, the natural world is full of universal and instinctive rights for women (such as the ability to own themselves and their innate maternity). These instincts, however, are contrasted to the artificial laws of society, which suppress these natural laws (through, for instance, slavery and a mother’s

³ Authors such as Felicia Skene were also notoriously against suffrage, despite being progressive in some areas such as prison reform and the Contagious Diseases Act (1864, 1866, 1869) and Eliza Lynn Linton betrays an unintentional sympathy for modern women in her novels despite her vocal anti-suffrage stance.

lack of custodial rights). In Craik's novels, the artificial laws are especially visible through issues of class and this study extends the discussion of Craik's gendered ideals by examining her works through the lens of class. For Craik, class and gender are always intertwined.

Class

The Victorians had their own perception of class boundaries and their own class consciousness which narrated the way they interacted with society on both a personal and larger scale. These self-imposed class boundaries made social mobility difficult, and placed a moral weight on certain behaviours (such as working in trade).⁴ An awareness of class was echoed in much of the literature of the time, including some of Craik's female contemporaries, such as Gaskell's social problem novel, *Mary Barton* (1848). Social problem novels, although often difficult to characterise and without a solid consensus on which texts belong to this genre, were a helpful precursor to interventionist texts. The last agreed social problem novel, *Felix Holt* (1866), was written before most of Craik's interventionist work. Social problem novels primarily focus on working-class politics such as the abuses industrialisation often created, urban growth and the problems of poverty it exacerbated and the issues of enfranchisement. They were often written by middle-class writers about working-class issues and there is a significant overlap in themes between them and interventionist texts. A key distinction between them, I would argue, is that interventionist texts focus on primarily female (that is, domestic) issues and social problem novels focus on larger, work-related, issues. Thus Craik looks back at the work of previous female authors intervening politically and socially, and creates her own place on the back of their work. However, Craik's treatment of class as interconnected with gender – the

⁴ R.S. Neale examines this theme in his essay 'Class and Class-Consciousness in Early-Nineteenth Century England: Three Classes or Five?'. His central theme is that there are five classes (Upper, Middle, Middling, Working A, Working B) and that there are four principal concepts which need to work together to establish class as a whole: social stratification, social class, class consciousness and political class. Therefore, we cannot disregard the Victorians' own perceptions of their social standing when examining their class interactions.

similar position of working-class men and women of all classes under the law – distinguishes her from other authorial voices at this time. Uniquely, Craik uses class to focus on the inherent issues in women’s legal problems, arguing consistently that the common bonds of sisterhood transcend class differences.

Inter-related identities

Whereas a man, like the eponymous John Halifax, is defined by his actions, a woman is defined in relation to the men around her – or the lack of them. She is a mother, a sister, a daughter, or a spinster and old maid. The identity of women in this era was a crucial aspect of many different debates, primarily because it was always seen as relational. Instead of being judged by what they do, “the labour of [their] own two hands” as her self-made hero John Halifax is, a woman is judged by her relationship to the men around her. Ursula Halifax’s identity is erased throughout the text until she is referred to only as “the mother” (*John Halifax, Gentleman* 223). Moreover, in *A Brave Lady* (1869-1870), Josephine’s identity is slowly reinvented, with “the wife ... gradually becoming absorbed in the mother” (*A Brave Lady* 44-45). Thus, not only are these identities relational, but they are also conflicted. As we will see in Chapter 3, the hierarchy of women’s identities is malleable, and Craik used this traditional concept of inter-related identities to defend her own arguments.

This inter-related identity results in what Judith Lowder Newton describes as middle-class women being “urged to relinquish self-definition; she was urged to become identified by her services to other, in particular to men” (Newton 4). The reward for being defined by inter-related identities as opposed to self-definition is “influence”. This trade-off between feminine “influence” and masculine “power” is also played out through the dichotomy of private and public lives.

Influence: Private and Public Lives

As a woman’s identity is bound to a man’s, she does not have power in her own right; she only has “influence” over men’s power. The helplessness of middle-class women, particularly unmarried ones, is something Craik examines in depth in *A Woman’s Thoughts About Women*. She uses the combination of class and gender to examine several domestic issues which keep women helpless and defined in comparison to men. Craik’s depiction of marriage is often grim, focusing on the lack of protection women face once they are

married. This apprehension is shown consistently throughout her novels but most starkly, perhaps, in Josephine De Bougainville's marriage in *A Brave Lady* (often assumed to be based on the marriage of Maria Mulock, Craik's mother). Even in the idealised marriage of Ursula and John Halifax there is conflict – Ursula is forced into the marriage by Phineas and gradually loses all sense of identity as it progresses, until, devoid of her own personality, Ursula dies when John does, unable to survive without him. Craik holds this marriage up as ideal, and yet her own complicated opinions on marriage colour the presentation of this relationship, and it cannot stand up to the exposure it receives. This negative presentation is also reflected by those characters who do not get married. As Mascarenhas argues, “[Muriel Halifax] finds an alternative to the marriage plot [by dying] – and the very darkness of her alternative plot throws some light on Craik's view of marriage” (Mascarenhas 265). This negative view of marriage even permeates her essays and in *A Woman's Thoughts*, Craik writes that above the bridal chamber there should hang the sign from Dante's gate of hell, which translates as ‘abandon all hope ye who enter here’ (215). For Craik, it seems, women are trapped – un-provided for as spinsters, untrained and uneducated to take care of themselves, and forced into a feminine dependency on the men in their lives, and yet open to abuse and neglect without legal recourse for these injustices once married. As the narrator in *A Brave Lady* says, “according as the law of England then stood and, with little modification, now stands, a married woman has no rights at all” (100). The relational identity of women and their legal invisibility are indivisible and are a crucial part of the exploration of their characters in these interventionist texts.

Therefore, I will examine three domestic-centric legal battles in terms of the inter-relational identities of Craik's female characters, both within her interventionist literature, and in *John Halifax, Gentleman*, a novel which in many ways shares the same imagery, characters and ideals. I will examine *A Brave Lady* in regards to the Married Woman's Property Act, *King Arthur: Not a Love Story* (1886) in regards to the adoption laws and *Hannah* (1871) in regards to the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act. These three novels, forming some of her latest work, are important to examine not only because they are written with a purpose and give a snapshot of the cultural reaction to issues facing women in this era, but also because they intervene in politics in a specifically feminine way. They contrast the feminine reaction to feminine issues with the public, male-dominated political sphere. They also contrast with her earlier work which, although it shares many of the same issues, are written to be popular fiction, and for primarily financial reasons. These

latter works are freer from such constraints and therefore provide a more unalloyed view of Craik's beliefs on these complicated issues.

I will contrast these novels with *A Woman's Thoughts About Women*, which provides a more direct presentation of Craik's political opinions in a non-fiction genre. I will suggest that Craik uses the issues of inter-related identity, class, religion and inherited genetics to intervene in domestic debates, but that she does so using traditionally conservative arguments. By taking the middle-class conservative position, and by using her reputation as a woman to safeguard and protect her reputation as an author, Craik fights progressive debates in non-controversial ways.

The Married Woman's Property Act affected most women, and *A Brave Lady* was one of the first examples of Craik's direct intervention into legislative social issues, informing the later interventions, so we will examine it first. The language Craik employs here emphasises the way she is using her works both as literature and political activism simultaneously.

Chapter One: The Married Woman's Property Act

"Heirship - money! It seems all to hinge upon that" (Hannah 190)

The connection between women and property is well established. In the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson famously said that on "the chastity of Women... all the property in the world depends" and Owenite Socialists, who based themselves on the teachings of Robert Owen and Mary Wollstonecraft, argued that the eradication of private property would end the status of women as property themselves. By the Victorian era, the fact that women were regarded not only as property, but crucial to the legal inheritance and security of property, was well established. This is reflected in the struggles of women to own and control their own property which had been going through the law courts for years. Decades earlier, Caroline Norton, another interventionist writer, who wrote *Stuart of Dunleath* (1851) amongst other texts, was embroiled in a divorce case by her husband on the grounds of adultery (which she won, but which nevertheless irreparably damaged her reputation). She fought tirelessly for women to be allowed custody of their children. She was influential in forcing through the law-change which allowed women of impeccable character to have access to their children, amongst other campaigns. Norton's case opened the floodgates for women to take their grievances to court to try to gain some justice and reparation from the unbalanced judicial system, making women legally visible. When Craik published *A Brave Lady*, she was writing into an existing space within the social consciousness of female authors such as Norton and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, who wrote *The Wrongs of Women* in 1844, using interventionist texts to throw light on the way that male public discourse affects women's domestic lives.

The law saw a married woman as a *feme covert*, under the control of her husband, rather than a *feme sole* or a legal entity in her own right, the way that single women were recognised. Thus, prior to the Married Woman's Property Act of 1870 though a married woman could own property or land, she could not sell it or receive rent from it, and all money she was given or earned was her husband's property in law. The Married Woman's Property Act sought to amend this, allowing any wages she earned, or any investment she made with those earnings to be owned by the wife, allowing her to inherit property, land

and up to £200 in money, and to hold or inherit rented property in her own name. The first Married Woman's Property Act passed in 1870 was amended in 1882.⁵

The first act was primarily focused on a woman's earnings, giving her the right to her own earnings in any business held separately from her husband. She was also enabled to inherit and control up to £200 in personal property, and, importantly, became liable for any debts she incurred before marriage. It also made her liable for the maintenance of her husband if he should require care of the parish. (It is worth noting that this act was not retroactive, which limited its effects socially.) The second act (1882) amended the laws of coverture (where a married woman was covered by her husband in the eyes of the law and subsumed into his legal identity) and allowed her her own legal identity, enabling her to buy, sell and own real property. It also allowed her to sue and be sued independently.,

Economic historians have long debated the various complicated reasons for the Act being passed but Mary Beth Combs convincingly argues that the Act was passed in 1870 as an attempt to stop fraud cases where married couples would collude to "defeat the law of debt" by keeping married women's property as separate, and therefore not liable to be claimed for bankruptcy (Combs 1029). The disparity between the judgements of the Court of Law, Court of Equity and Court of Bankruptcy provided much confusion in the legal system at this time. The 1870 Act was therefore initially designed and legalised, not as an attempt to defend women's rights or generate some sort of financial equality between the genders, but to close the legal loopholes, and protect the interests of men as business owners, enabling them to collect debts. There were more than just financial and legal repercussions to the Married Woman's Property Act though. There were also literary repercussions, with Wilkie Collin's *Man and Wife* (1870), George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) and Henry James' *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), all focusing on women's new found property ownership as a key tenet of their narrative. Mona Caird's *The Wing of Azreal* (1889) also raises issues of coverture and women's legal identities in their husbands, which the Married Woman's Property Act touches on.

The Married Woman's Property Act dealt with a range of issues surrounding inheritance, and problems of female wills and estates are implicated in a number of female-centric domestic laws at this time. It is these laws that Craik sought to make visible throughout her texts, specifically the effect that the public male-centred debates had on the private,

⁵ For the purposes of clarity, I shall be referring to the first 1870 Act throughout.

everyday domestic lives of women, lives that were often not visible or valued. By expounding political debates within typically domestic novels, using both the themes and the language of these debates in her stories, Craik's interventionist texts combine a feminine genre and political activism.

The Married Woman's Property Act greatly affected the legal position of women in the nineteenth century, and this chapter will argue that Craik used her literature not only to help campaign for the passing of the Act, but also that she used the language and imagery of the Act (property, commodities and possessions) to highlight the position of women in a broader sense throughout her novels, and in *A Brave Lady* in particular. Craik demonstrates how the natural rights of women clash with the restrictions placed upon them by the law prior to the Married Woman's Property Act, therefore supporting the relative freedom that the Act provides. This chapter will also examine the way in which Craik uses conservative ideals and imagery to support the ability of women to own their own property.

The Married Woman's Property Act highlights the conflict of women's identities as inter-relational, that is, dependent upon others. This inter-relational identity is specifically tied to the domestic sphere, as is demonstrated through a number of contemporary texts such as Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854) and John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lillies* (1865). Whilst Ruskin initially seems to be advocating for women's education, arguing that they should be trained in all the things that men are (enabling them to help their husbands successfully), he also not only says that a woman "grows as the flower does", delicately and unable to be "hammer[ed] into anything" useful, as the boys are, but also that if men *do* fail, if there is "a war in the world" or "an injustice...women are answerable for it; not in that [they] have provoked, but in that [they] have not hindered" (Ruskin 41, 46). Nor was Ruskin alone in this construction of gender: women's identity at this time balances the "angel in the house" with the practicalities of everyday life, being trained, as Craik says in *A Woman's Thoughts*, in "lovely uselessness, fascinating frivolity, delicious helplessness [and ...] poetical degradations" which ultimately proves a "canker" to them (*A Woman's Thoughts* 65, 64). The paradox here is that the fragility demanded of women is reflected in their purity, which, in fact, entails responsibility on their behalf. The "lovely uselessness" is self-defeating, and therefore can never be anything but an illusion. This is made clear by the discrepancy between this idealised identity and the realities of life for everyday women, as Craik depicts them within her texts. The dependence of Josephine in *A Brave Lady* illustrates the stark contrast between the usually hidden laws of nature, what it is that women actually do, and the perception of women's identities which helps form the

debates in public, male forums. Craik opens a window into these private lives within the context of the public debates to help shape and form them, contrasting the law of nature with the law of the land in order to help shape the latter in a feminine, culturally appropriate, way.

The Married Woman's Property Act drew a distinction between 'real property' (houses and land, as in *real* estate) and 'personal property' (such as jewellery, household goods, stocks and bonds), which we would now call commodities. In a world where women were often commoditised themselves ("enlisted as a form of estate that replaced insecure marketplace property" and offering the illusion of security, in Jeff Nunokawa's words), the focus on female possessions does not constitute a fixation on 'consumer culture' (Nunokawa 98). Instead it was a relationship, a way of fixing and creating an identity in a female-centric domestic space, a "complex relationship between humans and the material world" (Wynne 1). The commoditisation of women was integral to the patriarchal capitalist system in Victorian England. As Gayle Rubin argues, the idea that women are men's property, exchangeable between men to reinforce family bonds and business networks, is crucial to the patriarchy at this time (Rubin 44). They form part of the capitalist structure, not as benefactors but as objects and though they form part of this marketplace, they have no agency and thus no legal identity of their own.

But for Craik, this commoditisation is not only found in women, it is detrimentally expanded throughout society. Craik's commoditisation of people has close parallels to Marxism in that regard for, as Karl Marx notes, "the personification of objects and the reification of people" is a key aspect of the capitalist system (Marx 390). This reification links women of all classes with working-class men: both are oppressed by the system they are a part of, in which they have no say. Working class men are oppressed by capitalism and women by the patriarchy. At this time, the ability to identify yourself as a property owner was intimately connected to your ability to vote. Property was therefore not only a marker of wealth and status, but a marker of enfranchisement in a very restricted political system, and thus gave a voice in what was a largely disenfranchised society. This connection between property ownership and social power is displayed in Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (unfinished upon his death in 1870). The two orphaned twins, Neville and Helena, are Landless by both name and nature, being badly educated and socially disadvantaged with no prospects. Neville is set up as the main suspect for Drood's mysterious disappearance, though as the work is unfinished we cannot say definitively

what happened to Edwin Drood. Lack of property translates to a lack of power, and the use of the figurative naming as shorthand for powerlessness in Dickens' work suggests that this was widely known in Victorian society.

But, both for Marx and Craik, it is not only the inability to own property that disenfranchises people, it is the system which forces them to *become* property: the st terms. This reification is demonstrated through the metonymic imagery Craik uses in her texts, the reduction, for example, of Ursula Halifax to a silk gown, as we shall see in more detail later. This is not unique to Craik: Gaskell in *North and South* (1854) constantly references "hands" too, underscoring the fact that these workers are only as valued as the objects they can make, decreasing their humanity and ironically disembodimenting them through this focus on body parts. It is an idea Gaskell directly challenges, with Thornton reflecting that he "had a head as well as hands while [the workers] had only hands" (Gaskell, 172). Gaskell also has her protagonist reject the idea of the workers being reduced to this state, something Thornton recognises when he says "Miss Hale, I know, does not like to hear men called 'hands'" (Gaskell, 140). But although Gaskell examines the commoditisation of the working class, the complicated critique Craik presents of class and gender, specifically through the lens of legal inequalities and injustices, sets Craik's work apart from her peers. Craik's focus is on *humanising* both women and the lower classes. Although she prescribes each to "her station" by "Providence fixed", she would see "the common womanhood in which all share" lift working-class women from a life of "wretched lodging house 'slavery'," where they seem "to be less a woman than a mere working animal" (*A Woman's Thoughts* 92, 105). Craik displays the reification and objectification of people in society within her texts to highlight the inequality and injustice of this commoditisation, one which is largely taken for granted within Victorian culture.

Class and the Married Woman's Property Act

As Mary Beth Combs, an economic historian, notes, there was a deliberate shift after the passing of the first Married Woman's Property Act toward investment in personal property rather than real property. Whereas previously, parents who wished to safeguard their daughters' futures, and could afford to do so, invested in real property (which, although the rents went to their daughter's husbands, could not be sold or willed away and would revert back to their daughter upon her widowhood), after the Act there was a growing

trend of personal property investment (Combs 1028-1057). There were different investments for different purposes; provision for your own old age was considered a life-cycle investment, whereas provision for your off-spring upon your death was a bequest investment. Combs points out that those who wished to provide an inheritance invested in personal property, which was more easily divided between two or more children, whilst those who wished to provide for their own old age invested in real-estate, a home their daughters could live in, and which they could live in too, and be cared for when they were no longer able to work. Of course, as Combs herself notes, these laws were only applicable for those who had something to invest in the first place. It is in this irony that we see the crux of the matter, for many of the MPs who opposed the Married Woman's Property Act were also drawing up expensive marriage settlements to protect their own female relations – providing some (limited) rights for those wealthy enough to afford it, whilst strenuously denying it to those under the common-law.⁶ Thus, the private lives of the male law-makers do not align with their public debates, and yet there is no recognition of this discrepancy, nor the extension of the idea that this might apply to female strangers' lives too.

But many contemporary defenders of the bill argued that it was those under the common-law who needed this protection most. There was even talk of amending the law to apply to working-class women only. As Wynne argues, there was a deep-seated belief that middle and upper-class ladies did not *need* protection from their husbands because they were “gentlemen’ and thus unlikely to be violent and abusive” (Wynne 24). Wynne argues that “issues of class dominated what feminists hoped would be a debate about gender inequality” (Wynne 24).

But, for Craik, the issues of women's legal identity and property ownership were more widely applicable. *A Brave Lady* is framed through two female voices, primarily Winifred Weston's, the narrator's, but also Josephine De Bougainville's whose story the novel tells. The novel thus makes visible the private domestic lives of women who would be affected by this bill – specifically the lives of the middle-class and rising De Bougainvilles, demonstrating that the vulnerability of women's legal positions transcended issues of class identity. By aligning women of all classes with lower class men, Craik's work combines the nature of class and gendered identity, using the latter to override the former. Whilst

⁶ This protection was still rooted in the patriarchy however as the terms of these legal investments make it clear they were designed to protect the family properties of the *father* from the son-in-law, rather than offering protection for the daughter/wife.

women from the upper classes might have more social privileges than working-class women, Craik demonstrates that all are alike under the subjugation of the law prior to the Married Woman's Property Act. Thus, gender here becomes the equaliser, the laws of nature are contrasted with societal laws, and the very artificial nature of the latter undermines their legitimacy.

In *A Woman's Thoughts*, Craik claims that she has a shared experience and humanity with her maid and cook, despite their appropriate social differences. This is contrasted to the male experience, the more straight-forward equality John Halifax asserts with his wealthier neighbours regardless of the social status they have. Halifax makes this claim first to Ursula (157) and later to Mr Brithwood, (175) debunking the fictitious construction of class through innate inner qualities. In *A Brave Lady*, Edward Scanlan also becomes accustomed to their new-found wealth more easily than Josephine or the children do, whom he begins to fear he "shall never succeed in raising ... up to the level of [their] present position" (117). Therefore, within Craik's novels, men find it easier to move through the social ranks. Whilst women can share experiences despite class distinctions, men can move between classes, something which, despite claiming that gender is the social equaliser, Craik's female characters have a hard time doing. Women have more clearly defined class roles than their male counterparts because of their inter-relational identities, the fact that their class is linked to the people around them and not to anything innate within themselves. Because they are not dependent on themselves for their own class, they do not have the agency to change that class independently in the same way that men do. Craik's opinions on class are as complicated as her opinions on gender; both are always coloured by the ideology and social expectations of acceptable female behaviour in which she was writing. Ultimately, Craik's underlying message is the humanity of women from all classes, and the need to separate them from the commoditisation of capitalism.

This message is not only found in *A Brave Lady*. In *King Arthur*, Craik illustrates that the need for the Married Woman's Property Act spans all classes by the apparent 'aristocracy' of Hal Trevena, the protagonist's brother-in-law. Hal defines himself as a "gentleman" (87) (who is therefore unable to work) and is displayed in the novel as an "aristocratic son-in-law" who drained his father-in-law's inheritance dry (132). This characterisation demonstrates that, far from the assumptions of the gentlemen in parliament, "brutal, drunken husbands" were not confined to the working class, and that women of all classes required protection against them (Griffin 62). Men's public perceptions of the debates did

not align with women's domestic experiences of them, and it is these, more accurate, domestic experiences that Craik is attempting to portray.

The aristocratic Hal is depicted as not only being violent to his daughter, Nanny (137), and the indirect cause of his own wife's death, (132) but also irresponsible with money in a way in which his daughter and wife are not. The repeated identification of his wife as "Mrs Hal Trevena" or "Halbert Trevena's wife" (132), as opposed to the use of her Christian name (which characterises Susannah, her sister-in-law, the other Mrs Trevena) underpins not only the relational identity implicit in female identification at this time, but more specifically the legal identity of the woman, as opposed to her personhood. Without a name, she does not have an identity, and without an identity she cannot have agency to become self-dependent. The name, to which "as the eldest son's wife, she [had] the first right" (84), and her status as that wife is what not only defines her as a character within the narrative but dictates her financial situation and ultimately leads to her death.

Mrs Hal Trevena has to decide between breaking the law or allowing her daughter to face the same deprivations as she did. Thus, Mrs Trevena, her daughter Nanny, and the protagonist Susannah conspire to hide a valuable heirloom ring between them as some provision for Nanny's future. It is legally Hal's possession, as the husband and father, but it was destined as Nanny's inheritance and the women conspire together to keep it so, rather than allowing the feckless father to sell it and waste the money. In fact, Susannah and Hal argue about the ring just pages before Hal is found to have drowned and can no longer claim the ring anyway (158). This scene underlines Craik's message, defending the Married Woman's Property Act, and the natural, if not legal, right of women to own their own personal property.

The illegal, and yet morally justifiable, 'theft' of the ring contrasts to Dickens' portrayal of a similar incident in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, a novel written at the same time as *A Brave Lady*, in the year of the first Married Woman's Property Act. The mother's ring, bequeathed upon her death to her daughter, is never given to Rosa who, unlike Nanny in *King Arthur*, never even knows of its existence. Her father takes it from his dead wife's hand (123) and entrusts it to Mr Grewgious, the guardian. Thereon it is passed between men, never reaching Rosa and, with Rosa's defiance of the betrothal her father wanted, she forfeits the right to own it at all. This provides a direct contrast to *King Arthur* where the women conspire to provide a future for themselves despite all their husbands or fathers could do to stop them. This defiance is shown in several ways in *King Arthur*. Mrs

Hal Trevena finds an escape in death, but for Nanny the only protection is by breaking the law, something which Susannah, her aunt, undertakes with “no conscience-stings [or] scruples about parental rights” (150). This is done not from love, for it is repeatedly underlined that though she “had always liked Nanny, and been very kind to her (...) kindness and liking are not necessarily love” (254). Nanny is continually described as a “plain little thing” (248) and “ordinary little creature” (244). Thus, Susannah’s intervention in Nanny’s inheritance is not a heroic, desperate act of passion, rather it is shown to be an act of duty – because it is *right* to disobey these laws in order to protect women, even if it is a woman you do not, or cannot, love. Thus duty is comparable to the law in that it is passionless. Duty between women is displayed as the natural law in contrast to the legalities of Victorian society which dictates women’s helplessness – and this natural duty trumps the man-made (and *male*-made) laws of the land.

Personal Property and the person as property

A Brave Lady was written specifically to campaign for the Married Woman’s Property Act, and published serially from 1869 to 1870, just before the first Married Woman’s Property Act was passed. It makes no attempts to hide its purpose. Written on the title page of the collected book is an epigraph by Burns, “Perhaps it may turn out a sang/Perhaps turn out a sermon”. She does not present the novel as anything other than interventionist literature and uses not only the tropes of sentimental fiction, but the very props of the characters to make these arguments for her. Craik uses personal property – and people as property – to further her arguments in the cause of the Married Woman’s Property Act.

The objects within the texts are important because they function both on a personal level and as financial security. Within these texts, objects function in a relationship between themselves and the subject using them and this relationship enlarges their value beyond their physical selves. They become shorthand for both the people using them and, in a broader sense, the political debate at large. They retain value as long as they are interacting with a human subject in either a useful function or for a sentimental reason. This is specifically true in “a world where the services of pawnbrokers and the ability to raise cash on possessions were vital aspects of the economy” (Wynne 2). As Peter Stallybrass notes, the poor in particular stored the little wealth they had “not as *money* in *banks*, but as *things* in the *house*” – and this is arguably true for women too, who did not

have the same legal protections or financial stabilities as men (Stallybrass 202 emphasis in original).

However, this is not as simple as it initially seems, because although the items represent *potential* monetary value in a pawn-broker world, close examination of the novels of this period shows that “the exchange of objects for money often constituted failure” (Wynne 6). The economic failure of pawning is evidenced by the exchange of Josephine’s bridal jewellery in *A Brave Lady*. At first, Edward Scanlan finds the suggestion of selling these jewels “[i]ntolerable!” fearing that “some neighbour may parade them before [her] very face and proclaim to all the world how poor [they were]” (49). It is only later, when he has become security for a large amount of money for Mr Summerhayes, a man who has no intention of paying, leaving Scanlan to foot the bill, that Edward does not argue at all, only imploring Josephine “to conduct the transaction with the utmost care and let nobody know” (78). It is social appearance and reputation that is most important to him, underscoring once more, that in many ways possession is a performative act, representing the status and social position of the owner.

Commodities have a financial, a personal and a social value, and these three separate and distinct values are also found within the inter-relational identities of women, underscoring their commoditisation. Both objects and women have a monetary value (what they have been bought or can be sold for) which, in terms of women, includes the assets they bring to or earn within the marriage. They also have a personal value (which imbues them with more emotional value than their financial worth) and a social value which dictates their position within society, as Josephine's family "the late Vicomte de Bougainville" does (120). Although her family had fallen upon hard times, the "De Bougainville" name is of more social value than "Scanlan", and so they revert to it upon their wealth. Like women’s inter-relational identities, these values are all linked and the visibility of these values expands the value themselves. If an object (or wife) is seen to be socially valued, this can be skilfully exchanged into financial value, and, in the case of Edward Scanlan at least, added financial or social value increases Josephine’s personal value, he “admired [her] more than ever because other people admired her so much” (28). Skills are less able to be monetised if they are less visible, and thus skills which are less visible are less valued. Women are not only not allowed to monetise themselves or have agency over their own value, they are idealised when their value is visible for their husband's benefit (in terms of social class, assets, affection) and not for their own, by the skills and labour they personally possess.

Clothes and Jewellery

The pearl necklace Josephine eventually sells was “the bridegroom’s present [to her] on her wedding day”, and the significance is clear. The pearls, which were gifted to her, still belong to her husband. Although he gave them to her on her wedding day, as he assumed control of all her personal property, it was actually, in one sense, a gift to himself. She did not come to the marriage already owning these assets, nor could she keep them. Josephine does not legally own her property and therefore is required to sacrifice it to Edward’s debts. Her lack of ownership is corroborated by the fact that it is Edward who wishes her to wear them. He gave them to her because he wanted to see her in them, and he requires her to sell them when they need the money. It is significant that it is the pearls she sells, and the “emeralds and diamonds” (49) which remain. The symbolic purity of pearls has to be lost to maintain her husband’s reputation, whilst the emeralds, reminiscent of the ‘Emerald Isle’ her husband comes from, stay with her hauntingly throughout her marriage.⁷

Craik uses the ownership of clothes to display the ludicrousness of the Married Woman’s Property Act. A woman's clothes actually belonged to her husband, despite the fact that, as Wynne points out, few husbands were likely to sue their wives for their dresses and wives acted de facto as though the clothes were their own. Therefore, women's possession of their clothes (despite male ownership) demonstrates the fallacy of believing that women were unable to properly manage and therefore legitimately own their own property.

Craik uses clothing imagery repeatedly in her narratives, not only to demonstrate the injustice of the law prior to the Married Woman’s Property Act, but also to highlight the connection between objectified people and the objects which personify them. In *A Brave Lady*, for example, Craik uses clothes to typify the descent, not only of the family finances but also of the health of the marriage as a whole. There is a stark contrast between the clothes of the Scanlans in their poverty and the clothes of their wealth. Josephine at first wears out her “good clothes ... long after her good days ... were done” (37). The turn of their marriage is reflected in her clothes becoming “hopeless of replacement” (37). Edward Scanlan, obsessed as usual with the outward appearance and the effect it will have upon their neighbours, is typified as being “still dressed with his accustomed taste – a little

⁷ Craik had a complicated relationship with her half-Irish heritage and it is a recurrent theme throughout her novels and in *A Brave Lady* especially. She often alludes to Edward Scanlan’s “Irishness” – another autobiographical note as her own spendthrift father was Irish.

florid, perhaps, but not in bad taste” even after they lose all their money (28). Whilst Josephine is at “an end” of the “purple and fine linen” (37), Edward is still wearing “florid” clothes. In fact, it is Edward who is constantly fussing over their appearance. He does not allow Josephine to attend Oldham’s funeral because she dresses too “shabbily” and “it is a reflection upon [him]” (111). As the ‘owner’ of both her clothes and, indeed, herself, there is some measure of truth in this statement. Edward Scanlan could be accused of not maintaining the quality of his possessions with due diligence and care.

Craik also uses the clothes of her characters within her novels to draw attention to both their class and their class identity: that is, the class they are perceived as by others and the class they perceive themselves as. In *King Arthur*, Craik references the clothes of Mrs Trevena and Nanny to underline their destitution, saying that “(s)ave for the clothes they had on, mother and child seemed to have possessed scarcely a rag in the world” (148). Clothes are signifiers of class, having the innate quality within them that separates everyday clothes from upper-class clothes. If you only have lower-class clothes as a woman, you become a lower-class woman. As Rosy Aindow argues in *Dress and Identity in British Literary Culture*, “(r)ather than serving a thematic function, or simply reflecting a personal approach on the part of the author, dress is transposed into an entirely different realm, allowing the reader to place details about dress in the context of a debate about class identity” (Aindow 2). As the appearance presented within society predicates a character’s place in society it is no wonder that, though “it may seem ridiculously small, (...) the subject of clothes was now growing one of the burdens of Mrs Scanlan’s life” (*ABL* 37). The very visibility of clothes as a social signifier highlights the invisible nature of women’s domestic lives. Their skills, which are not valued because they are not visible, do not add to their identity, but the clothes which can be publically seen denote their value in a class-based society. The clothes are metonymic, representing women in their passive, ornamental function.

In *John Halifax, Gentleman*, the “gray silk gown” (105) hanging up in Mrs Tod’s kitchen is the first sign John and Phineas have of Ursula since their childhood encounter, and it becomes so inextricably linked to her identity in their minds that Phineas, the narrator, even calls her, “your friend, Gray-gown” (112). John references the garment many decades later when he and Ursula have been happily married for years (235). Ursula’s identity has become that of a passive silk gown, hanging up for display, not in use, something emphasised by Ursula’s interactions with Mrs Tod’s children, implying her own future identity as “the mother”. John and Phineas watch as Ursula plays with the baby and

think that “truly, [it] made a pleasant picture” (113). Ursula and the infant are framed as a static image, part of the “Arcadian” delights which John is looking for in his country retreat. (This static image is emphasised, incidentally, by the inclusion of an ink illustration of this very scene within the text (see appendix).) John and Phineas voyeuristically take pleasure in the scene which, like the well-trained “pleasance” garden Phineas is proud of, is created just for the pleasure of the picture it presents to the male eye (21). Women are therefore reduced to images as well as objects, having their agency and identity removed. The connection of clothes as a visual object, and more importantly a passive visual object underscores the dependency of women within the eyes of the law. This passivity is something Craik challenges in *A Woman’s Thoughts*, where she advocates for women to work, rather than being trained from childhood to be “helpless (which) is feminine and beautiful” (73).

But the laws about female property ownership prior to the Married Woman’s Property Act extended beyond just assets to earnings and the potential to earn as well. The ability to earn is a crucial part of the image of the self-made man Craik promotes. This ownership links with what John Locke called the property that “every man has ... in his own person ... the labour of his body, and the work of his hands, [which] we may say, are properly his” (Locke 274). Rather than being personal property, this is the property of the person themselves. The concept of the person *as* property is found most explicitly in *John Halifax, Gentleman*, as John, the idealised gentleman, is described as a “person of independent property, which consists of [his] head and [his] two hands, out of which [he] hopes to realize a large capital some day” (17). If it is admirable for John to be a ‘self-made man’, working his way into prosperity with no inheritance but his character, wits and body, it ought to be equally admirable for women to own this same “independent property” too, Craik implies.

Men, then, are also commoditised. The difference is that they are commoditised for themselves and can turn themselves into a profit, whereas women are commoditised for other people and cannot own the profit they make. It is a question of agency and self-ownership. As Mascarenhas argues, “through John, Craik champions the idea that being a gentleman has less to do with what the man in question owns ... than it has to do with where he is going and how he conducts himself” and this demonstrates the inequality between men and women in her texts (Mascarenhas 258). Men’s ownership of themselves is seen as key to their identity and their destination, whilst women’s inability to own themselves, following the same logic, leaves them without an identity or destination at all.

Initially, John's "capital" is his "youth, health, courage, honour [and] honesty", though none of these he can "coin into money" (145). The ability to turn commodities into coins was a vital part of the capitalist system at this time. Therefore, whilst John has "capital" in himself, becoming his own "property", he cannot be commoditised in the same way as women who when commoditised have no legal right to the capital they have become. Like the lace Josephine makes in *A Brave Lady*, it is a commodity designed for others to own. Identity then, and the ability to own one's own identity, pivots on agency - whether one is acting or being acted upon. Once again, Craik contrasts the ideals of self-dependence and "delicious helplessness" and demonstrates that a lack of agency ultimately leads to a lack of identity, which is harmful for women.

The fact that Josephine makes lace underlines the class aspects of female employment in *A Brave Lady*. It is deemed by her husband Edward as a "very lady-like employment", never thinking how her "eyes were straining themselves many hours a day" over it (71). This language (both the violent verb "straining" and the emphasis on time) resonates with the debates heard surrounding the Ten Hours Act, which limited the amount of time women and children could work in the factories. Therefore, though Edward perceives it as a "lady-like employment", the vocabulary Craik uses actually connects it more with working class occupations. This irony underscores the point that men do not know the effect their public decrees are having on women's private and domestic lives and serves to suggest that women should have more influence over their own lives, foregrounding the need for more agency and independent identities. The "delicate fabric" of lace is made through trade, and Priscilla Nunn, her employer, is of a lower social order than Josephine.⁸ There is a conflict of status here. Josephine at first wished to be a school mistress, but Edward forbids it. He retorts that "[a]s [his] widow, she may; as [his] wife, never!" (69). Whilst he lives, he controls her, it is only on his death that she can be free. She becomes, to some extent, a lifecycle investment – not something which cannot be willed away after his death, but something to own and control within his lifetime.

⁸ The figure of Priscilla Nunn is noteworthy herself. She is a single, independent woman, and, as the owner of a business, employs other women such as Josephine – enabling them also to become more independent. Her very name (Nunn) emphasises the 'sisterhood' of femininity and underscores the female relationships, the "common womanhood in which we all share" (*AWTAW* 105). This is reflected in Nunn's later return, which not only furnish[es] the means by which the De Bourgainvilles entered into Parisian society" (22) reflecting the ability of shared womanhood to transcend class, but also by Josephine's purchasing an annuity for Priscilla, to protect her livelihood after Josephine's own death. The relationship between these two women emblematises the ability to protect and benefit each other across class boundaries.

In *John Halifax, Gentleman* Ursula is also described as having working hands, although her hands “work” upon John’s heart, rather than in any physical labour. In *A Woman’s Thoughts*, Craik claims that women’s “character is of their own making, and [their] lot lies in their own hands” (214). This idea of creation and control, intractably linked, is given to women equally as much as to men in Craik’s opinion, underlining the legally created and artificial injustice which takes control away from creators because they are female. Taken symbolically, we can see that in Craik’s texts, “hands” are often used as a metonym for work as a whole. Craik’s female characters are demonstrated as being an active part of the body of the labour market, these “hands”, just as John Halifax’s were, form part of their “capital” – a capital which, because of the law before the Married Woman’s Property Act, they cannot claim.

There is again, a similarity here between the work of Josephine and Ursula in Craik’s novels, and the work of the “hands” in *Hard Times* by Dickens. The metonymic reduction of people to their hands, that is, the part of themselves which makes the profit, draws both a connection and an important underlying distinction between the sexes in these novels. The difference between Craik’s and Dickens’ perception of female and male “hands”, and thus the work they do, is very telling. For Craik, the work of their hands, the unique skills set, was something women could not own, something to be taken away from them. But Dickens frames this loss in different terms. For Dickens it is not something to be taken, it is something to be *shared*. As Wynne argues, for Dickens, “the sharing of skills between members also emphasizes the notion of labour as an important form of portable property for women” (Wynne 62). By having a skill set as portable property and by sharing those skills in female communities rather than keeping them themselves, they cannot buy into the capitalist system which requires a unique selling point in order to thrive. Because their skills are shared in the marketplace, there is no opportunity for women to rise socially as John Halifax, and other men, could – not only because it tainted them by association with trade, but also because it forced them into a shared conformity which does not provide opportunities for capitalist success. Thus, the notion of skills as property to be shared, rather than kept, again identifies the gap between male and female property ownership at this time. Women were not allowed to keep their own property – if it did not go to men, it must be shared amongst themselves.

Moreover, the concept of the person as property is underscored by the connection between names and identity within both *A Brave Lady* and *John Halifax, Gentleman*. As we have previously examined, names are a key aspect of visible identity within invisible

worlds. Like clothes, it is a public signifier of social status and thus, within women's inter-relational identities, identity itself. But within Craik's texts, it is also a signifier of agency. Though both are married, "Mrs Hal Trevena" has no agency, but "Susannah" does. Susannah, although still tied to her husband, has an identity for the reader outside of him – a natural identity if not a legally recognised one, for this change of name denotes the change in legal rights and contrasts the natural law against legal constructs. Thus, the importance of names becomes a recurrent theme in Craik's work. Josephine, when the money comes in, is no longer a "Scanlan": the family reverts back to the more 'genteel' name of "De Bougainville". There is a rejection of the Scanlan heritage, a desire to preserve the matriarchal line, to reassert female identification amongst the influx of commodities and properties now available to them.

Furthermore, it is significant that both Josephine and Winifred's husbands are called Edward, as Edward Donnelly (Winifred's husband) is drawn as a stark contrast to Edward Scanlan. Both are Irish, both named Edward, and yet Donnelly is the antithesis of Scanlan. Donnelly is frugal, responsible and community-minded, whereas Scanlan is "thoughtless" (28), so much so that his own mother exhorts Josephine to "look after the money yourself, my dear, or it'll burn a hole in his pocket" (29). Donnelly reclaims not only the name Edward (which literally means "rich guard" or the guard of wealth) but the concept of marriage. Winifred, overwhelmed with her "very harmless phase of passion" for the older lady (1) initially rejects Donnelly's proposal, but later changes her mind and accepts him at Josephine's urging. Winifred and Edward's marriage is set up as ideal, much like John and Ursula Halifax's, preventing Craik's message from being seen as too revolutionary, maintaining the conservative feeling of her work despite the progressive agenda. Craik does not attempt to destroy the institution of marriage (though one does wonder if, like Bridget the loyal but ugly housemaid, she thinks "all the men [should be] married and all the women remain single" (109)). Rather, she is attempting to provide security for women whose marriages are not what they ought to be. Josephine, the "Brave Lady" of the title, is not shown to be brave by leaving her husband. Although she contemplates this action, Edward is revealed to have a life-threatening illness as she prepares to depart and the family lawyer insinuates that any sudden shock – such as their separation – might kill him, effectively making her his murderer. Instead, her bravery is depicted through enduring the laws of the land and facing an unequal and unhappy marriage, without legal recourse or any attempt at escape, again underlining Craik's desire to distance herself from controversy.

Slavery

The ownership of women is shown to be a legal but unnatural law by the rarely explicit, but nonetheless pervasive theme of slavery and the abolitionist movement in *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Mr March, Ursula's father, was Governor of the West Indies and therefore involved in the slave-trade, something Ursula tries to hide (125). Later, John is described as having done a "great work" for the abolitionist movement (314) demonstrating where he and his wife stand on this matter. But John does not seem to recognise the irony in fighting to allow people to own themselves, whilst he owns his wife. For, repeatedly throughout the text, Ursula does not seem to own her own body. Even before they were married, her actions were dictated by John. On the death of her father, John commands her that "she must cry", and even demands that she be taken upstairs to view her father's corpse to create such an effect (139). She lacks the ability to dictate her own actions, emphasising the fact that her body is able to be owned – but not necessarily by her. The fact that their marriage is held up as idealised highlights a conflict between what Craik overtly says and what her texts imply. Craik repeatedly reinforces the idea that John and Ursula were blessed in their "perfect union", (311) and yet it is only "perfect" within the constraints of the society in which they are living. Like Josephine, Ursula cannot escape the constraints of this marriage, however ideally it is portrayed.

Although Craik often links marriage to slavery within her texts (perhaps most prominently underlined by the death of Mrs Hal Trevena who was "relieved at dying without that badge of slavery" her wedding ring (134)) the linking of slavery to the Married Woman's Property Act was not unique to Craik. F.W. Robinson published "Slaves of the Ring" (1868) which grew out of an article on the Married Woman's Property Act bill which Dickens commissioned for *All The Year Round*. Nicholas Thirsk's emotional abuse of Agatha Freemantle, whom he "loves" because "she was an heiress" (302), and the lower class Ricksworths, whose drunken husband is the bane of the family, and who "won't be any better until [his wife] tuck[s] him up in his coffin" underlines this "slavery" (274). Robinson demonstrates that the wives' position as property is underscored by an emotional disregard of them as people. When the Thirsk's lose their money when the Tramlingford bank fails, for example, Nicholas Thirsk is utterly unsympathetic to his wife, the heiress, and exclaims "What's her loss to mine, do you think?" (Volume IV, 21). Agatha Thirsk is reduced to "living on hope now," but it is, in the narrator's words, "a spare diet, on which

she had become thin" (Volume V, 52). Robinson drives home this message with a polemic by the narrator:

They were more slaves than wives ...There are degrees of slavery, but the slavery that binds, from life unto death, the true to the false and lets the false conquer – the firm to the weak and yet gives the weak no power to grow strong – is the worst and the harshest of bondage. Slaves to the false ideas that had led their steps awry – slaves to the ring!"
(Volume 5, 108-109)

The imagery of slavery as part of the law prior to the Married Woman's Property Act was therefore a part of the existing social dialogue around this issue and not unique to Craik. It had a long history with women's rights, leading back to Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). However, it is a vital part of Craik's discussion of this theme because, although slavery was abolished in 1807, it did not end in the colonies (where Mr March was the "Governor") until the 1st of August 1834 – and that is the precise date when Ursula Halifax escapes her "slavery" too, by the death of both her and her husband at the conclusion of the novel, meaning that she is no longer under her husband's ownership. Therefore, by setting her work in a historical context, Craik draws the implications of slavery and marriage more closely together.

In fact, this ownership is emphasised by Craik in the inextricable linking of the woman to the man, so much so that it seems women cannot survive without them. This socially accepted idea of dependence, which she rails so fiercely against in *A Woman's Thoughts* (72-73), is carried through to its logical extreme to emphasise not only the need for women to own themselves but also in that ownership, the ability for women to *depend* upon themselves. There is a slight but important distinction between ownership and dependence as Craik depicts it here. Ownership is defined by freedom of thought and expression, or, as Newton defines it, "autonomy, the power of being one's own person...[which] may mean having one's private opinions...or it may take the shape of self-defending actions" (Newton 6). In other words, it is the ability to identify what you desire, a self-identification which is cauterised by the male dominance in marriage and the wife's lack of legal personhood. Dependence is defined as having the means available to fulfil these desires, usually financially, but also through the available commodity of time or ability. Craik connects these two ideas, ownership and independence. If under the Married Woman's Property Act

she was promoting, women were allowed to keep their own earnings, they would have their own independence which would prompt their own ownership. If women are forced into dependence then it is far harder for them to identify the desires that they can never fulfil. In the end, though it may be “a servant’s and not a daughter’s arm” the unmarried woman leans upon, that unmarried woman who has learned self-dependence instead of “delicious helplessness”, “is not to be pitied, for [her’s] is a completed life” (*A Woman’s Thoughts* 216). It is a life completed in a way that even the dependent wife or mother’s, though they have socially achieved more, cannot be.

This connection between ownership and dependence is clearly highlighted by the deaths of the women in her novels. In *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Ursula dies within hours of John, and Jael, the devoted Fletcher family servant, dies when Abel Fletcher does. In *King Arthur*, Susannah Trevena dies after her son’s engagement is announced, and though this engagement is not a death, it represents the same withdrawal and parting. Only Josephine De Bougainville in *A Brave Lady* outlives, not only her husband but all of her children too because she is seen as providing for herself (through her lace-making) and because of her emotional distance from her husband. Having learnt not to depend upon her husband, she learns self-dependence instead and can survive without the man to whom she is legally bound. For Craik then, just as married women do not own their own property, nor do they own their own lives. They are tied to their husbands, masters and sons, and cannot survive without them without the self-dependence that Josephine had to learn *within* her marriage. It is this female dependence that the Married Woman’s Property Act actively encourages and which Craik highlights throughout her interventionist novels. She opens up a window into women’s domestic lives to see the effect of the public male discourse on everyday lives – and to seek to open this discussion to a wider audience.

This theme of the ownership of people is extended to the children in the texts too. Considering the person as property, Craik highlights the inability of women to own their *children* as well as themselves. Josephine, in *A Brave Lady*, loses all of her children and Susannah Trevena metaphorically loses Arthur when he marries Nanny. However, it is the death of the eldest child Muriel, in *John Halifax, Gentleman*, which demonstrates this inability of women to own their children the most clearly. Ursula and John’s grief is shown very differently. The mother’s grief must be subsumed by others – first by the need to care for her other children, and then by Lord Ravenel who “left in such an anguish of grief that the mother rose and followed him” (310), whilst John “impatiently” locks the door on the

unwelcome intruder and "stood by his darling, alone" (310). The father's right to grieve is given precedence over the mother's because he owns the grief as he owns the children. Whilst Ursula's role as "mother" – even to men like Lord Ravenel – means that her grief must be transmuted, John's is allowed free and unfettered reign. Therefore, although women's identities are bound up in their relations to other people, as wives and mothers, they cannot *own* their children in the same way as their husbands can – despite their children being seen as property. As Caroline Norton's campaigns effectively showed decades earlier, children were owned by their fathers, just as much as wives were owned by their husbands.

Rejection and resistance

Despite her rejection of the female suffrage movement, Craik's female characters are politicised and active. Some, like Susannah in *King Arthur*, actively break the law, whilst others, like Josephine, resist within their legal constraints. The 'Married Woman' of the Married Woman's Property Act, has her own "head and (...) two hands" too, which demonstrates the discrepancy between natural and legal laws: to obey the natural laws, she must defy the artificial ones. She can act secretly or illegally, and, to some extent, reject the control which her husband legally exerts. Josephine's resistance rather than rebellion is reminiscent of Craik's own position as an author, displayed both in the content of her writing and her continued writing despite her husband's wishes. Despite rejecting any connection with the women's movement and staying within the normative boundaries of what was appropriate for women to write, Craik stretches those boundaries by subversive imagery. Josephine, who serves as a mentor figure for the infatuated Winifred, teaches the younger woman how to resist the strictures of patriarchal society and its unjust laws, even if she cannot openly rebel against them. This textual resistance is a key aspect of many female-authored texts at this time and one that is "shared covertly with the female reader", in Newton's opinion (Newton 169). The author, here Craik, writes her stories to construct power, rather than creating an "ideological reconstruction of past powerlessness" through this resistance and rebellion (Newton 169). Thus, Craik, by using the typically male language of the law, subsumes male discourse into a female, domestic narrative, forging her own agency and setting out these public debates in her own, private terms.

In *A Brave Lady*, this rebellion is often highlighted by the rejection of personal property. As Wynne argues, "given the fluidity of the law in practice (rather than the rigidity of the law

in theory), it was in wives' interests to display and use those objects they liked as much as possible in public for they could subsequently base a claim for ownership on their displays" (Wynne 30). If women publically and regularly used their small commodities, such as jewellery and clothes, they could make a legal appeal to ownership on the grounds that they were the user. However, in *A Brave Lady*, we often find Josephine specifically choosing to *not* use her commodities. She chooses not to wear her costly jewellery, nor the silk dress she is gifted in their poverty (42). She is rejecting ownership claims in the present, and possible claims in the future. Rather than claiming the jewels she is linked to, she sells them for her husband, or hides them away, appearing "almost exclusively in cotton print of a morning, in white dimity of an afternoon (...) and they look so pretty, so very pretty!" (38). The simplicity of their poverty seems to suit her better than the "costly but no longer fresh silks and satins" that were "remodelled and altered to the last extremity of even French ingenuity" (37-8). This is true of her other items as well; when they finally become wealthy again the clothes which now match their affluence are rejected both by the children and Josephine. The "splendid new shoes", symbolic of their new wealth and status, were actually "rather troublesome" "gilded chains" as opposed to the "glorious freedom of poverty" (115). Therefore, Josephine and her children perform an act of resistance by rejecting the commoditization of wealth and the rise of social value such material possessions suggest. By preferring the "glorious freedom of poverty", Josephine resists the ability to claim ownership of property she does not legally own – performing a passive resistance, rather than an active rebellion, and a more subtle rejection of the law. This is again seen explicitly when, upon their wealth, Edward affixed the arms of De Bougainville "upon every available article within and without the house" and yet "his wife did not interfere: these were, after all, only outside things" (120.) By rejecting commodities, she is rejecting her identity *as* a commodity and subversively asserting her own agency and self-formed identity. By refusing to perform ownership upon commodities she also refuses her own identity as an object within this system.

For Craik, there are some things that should be equally owned by men and women through the laws of nature, and she uses this to display the injustice of man-made restrictions. In *A Woman's Thoughts*, Craik argues that time is a "commodity" and that it is "equally" women's and men's, "the only mortal gift bestowed equally on every living soul" (67). For men, it means work and "money", for women it means work and "life in its highest form and noblest uses" (68). However, although Craik argues for this interpretation, it was not the received wisdom of her day. Maria Damkjær argues in *Time, Domesticity and Print*

Culture in Nineteenth Century Britain, that if time is a commodity, it is not one to which men and women have equal access. For women, time is fractured with interruptions and it never entirely at their disposal, something that is demonstrated within Craik's texts. Contemporary critics of *A Brave Lady* in *The Saturday Review* abhorred the "perpetual recurrence of domestic details" (qtd Mitchell) and the contemporary critic R. H. Hutton observed that her heroines' hands "'work spasmodically' at least once in every two or three chapters" (qtd Showalter 11). Though Hutton was, of course, being hyperbolic, it is a frequent narrative pattern for Craik's heroines to be disturbed at work, and the repetition of this spasmodic working reflects the very interruptions they represent, littered through the narrative this motif emblematically fragments the story itself. Domesticity is made to be interrupted, and this fragmentary nature demonstrates the undervaluing of women's time by society. Thus, the domestic realism of her work demonstrates the constraints of domestic time. It also demonstrates how time is valued differently by society, with "the time of women [being] considered worth nothing at all" as an article in the *Edinburgh Review* said in 1810 (Anon. 1810). Craik tries to make women's time more valued by making it more visible within her domestic novels, combining the invisible domestic with the public debates to make an interventionist text which has a foothold in each world and thus can effectively campaign for invisible women in public debates, but it actually had the opposite effect. Undervalued as women's time was, its perpetual display within Craik's domestic novels served to lessen the value of these texts in a broader spectrum.

Craik uses *A Brave Lady* and several of her other novels, including *John Halifax, Gentleman*, to demonstrate the natural ownership of women as opposed to the legal restrictions placed on them by the law prior to the Married Woman's Property Act. By contrasting women's natural rights and innate capacity to manage affairs as well as, or better than, the men in her texts, she highlights not only the injustice but also the illogical nature of man-made laws and celebrates the lessening of restrictions which the Married Woman's Property Act creates. However, despite the lessening of these restrictions, the new law could only protect women so far. As Elizabeth Gaskell noted, despite all the law demanded, "a husband can coax, wheedle, beat or tyrannise his wife out of something and no law whatever will help this that I see" (qtd Gerin 262).⁹ The limitations of the law are demonstrated by the fact that two further amendments were necessary to the Married Woman's Property Act.

⁹ However, despite her scepticism, Gaskell did sign the petition for the MWPA.

However, despite the limitations of, and women's lack of property ownership prior to, the Married Woman's Property Act, Victorian women behaved as though they de-facto owned things. They created wills which left many personal bequests of small or sentimental items and acted as though these wills were legally binding. R.J. Morris notes a clear distinction between female and male wills. Whilst men tended to make simple wills, usually bequeathing anything to their widow and children, women were what Morris defines as "things" people (Morris 128). They more often left a long and complicated will that gave away specific items with emotional significance to enhance relationships and reward servants or kindnesses shown in their lifetime. The personal property of women then is used not only as a metonymic reduction of women themselves – women as ornamental jewellery, or as class defining clothes – but comes to stand in for their emotional relationships too. The ability to will away things they do not legally own provides a stark contrast to the position of adopted children in the Victorian era. Whilst married women were giving away things they did not own, adopted children could not inherit their family possessions. This paradox is something we will be exploring further in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Adoption

“Blood is *not* thicker than water – unless love goes with it, and respect, and honour”

(*King Arthur*, 93).

The first adoption laws in England were not passed until 1926. Despite the lack of legal framework to solidify these relationships however, there were many different kinds of de-facto adoptions throughout the Victorian era, including guardianships and wards. The eponymous Dr Thorne, in Anthony Trollope’s book (1858), “legalises” his adoption of his brother’s illegitimate daughter by swearing on a Bible – but in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) the Earnshaw family adopt Heathcliff merely by bringing him home as a foundling.

Adoption was a complex topic within the Victorian era as it encompassed issues of class, bloodlines and money. Paradoxically, this meant that it was presented as something controversial for the middle classes and upper classes to do, yet was not really seen as an issue for society in general - certainly not enough of an issue to generate wide-spread debate or campaigns for changes in the law. It was, however, generally frowned upon. The adopted child was often seen as an imposter in the family usurping the position of the natural heir, particularly in terms of inheritance. Adoption also brought into play issues of genetic inheritance and the morality of charity.

This chapter explores how Craik uses conservative arguments (such as the language of genetics and the polemics of religion) to forward a progressive ideal, adoption. This contrast between conservative methods and progressive ideals gives her work the conflicted appearance examined in Chapter One, as Craik uses rhetoric that clashes with the primary purpose of her text. We will examine how Craik aligns adoption with nature as opposed to the artificial laws of man-made society which oppress women and adopted children alike. We shall also see how she twists the idea of charity and ‘bad blood’, usually used to oppose adoption, to promote her position.

Craik was passionate about adoption. Not only did she adopt a foundling child herself, but she wrote several key texts featuring adoption, two of which explicitly make it their primary theme (Mitchell). The last novel that Craik wrote, *King Arthur, not a love story* (1886) was a text which sought to promote adoption, and prior to this, she had written a

short story called *The Italian's Daughter, a true story of the English Poor* (1847). Despite these texts, adoption rights did not share the same public interest that the Married Woman's Property Acts or the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act did, probably because adoption affected fewer people. Thus Craik was trying to create a public debate about adoption, rather than influence an existing one. However, *King Arthur* can still be categorised as an interventionist text as Craik was still seeking to intervene in social laws, albeit to create laws and public interest, rather than to change or repeal them. Craik places *King Arthur* on the side of the laws of *nature* against the laws of society.

Adoption, as with so much in Victorian Britain, was split across class boundaries. In *The Italian's Daughter*, no one questions the adoption of Jenny into the working-class Sutton household. As the narrator notes, "the child grew up as a younger sister in the family and no one seemed to look at her in any other light" (*The Italian's Daughter*). Even before the death of her father, she had transferred to the Suttons' care, she called her biological father Peter along with the rest of the Sutton children, and he did not mind "the abolition of these parental ties" (*The Italian's Daughter*). She is thoroughly anglicised, "in all respects an English child", Ginevra, her "baptismal name [becomes] void", and "Jenny she was called evermore by the household" (*The Italian's Daughter*). This subsuming of the child into the poor English family is never questioned in the text but is presented as not only natural but self-perpetuating. Jenny, who never marries, ends up adopting her adopted sister's orphaned child in the last line of the text. It is a way for the continuation of the family line even for unmarried women and demonstrates the absorption of Jenny into the family. Jenny's adopted child is a Sutton by blood in a way that her own biological child would not be: by perpetuating this adoption, Jenny is solidifying her own role within the Sutton family beyond biological means. In *King Arthur*, the villagers of the Cornish parish where the Trevenas live, who represent the lower classes, also see adoption favourably, "agree[ing] that "the parson's wife" had done right and best, not only for herself, but most likely for "the parson also" (68). Thus, Craik presents adoption as something not unusual for the "poor people" who, as she patronisingly says in *King Arthur*, "are often so kind, [and] sometimes so romantically generous about other people's children" (69).

But this positive presentation of adoption is not universal through the classes. Adoption is presented as controversial for the middle-classes, lowering the quality of the family with a degraded addition, or an extra burden. Hal Trevena calls Arthur "some beggar's brat...like a stray dog or half-starved cat" (88) and even Dr Franklin, the American advocate of adoption, calls the infant "this little encumbrance" (61). The contrast of the working-class

position with the middle-class position draws a distinction between natural laws and socially fabricated laws as, if adoption was naturally wrong, it would be seen to be so universally.

Religion

The Trevenas are middle-class, but also, as clergy, present the religious voice. The moral conflict between the two positions makes their adoption of Arthur distasteful to those of their own class. The opposing religious view is demonstrated by one of Austin Trevena's fellow clergymen, a "gentleman...of fortune and family" (69). The "reverend brother" takes issue with the "nameless child, possibly the offspring of sin and shame" and the fact that they bring him into a "respectable and above all a clergyman's household", saying that "the sins of the father shall be visited on the children" and "the seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned" to emphasise his point (69). Adoption has become more than a social issue it has become a moral one and the Trevenas' roles as part of the clergy deliberately straddle the social and religious elements. Religion in the Victorian era, and specifically within the Church of England, had a role in both the social and moral realms of society, and Craik places the adoptive parents in this role in order to add weight to the moral credence of her characters. As with Bernard Rivers in *Hannah*, another member of the clergy acting against public conventions, the Trevenas' role as members of the church underlines that adoption is not morally wrong, although it is socially frowned upon.

In fact, Craik turns the assumption that adoption is immoral upon its head. When Dr Franklin asserts that Arthur is "nobody's child" she corrects him saying, "[e]xcept God's – and mine" (65). Despite being thought to be of no name or reputation, he is still "God's child". Craik implies that religious duties trump other considerations. This idea was corroborated by Craik's own life. When she adopted her own foundling child in 1869 she called her Dorothy, meaning "Gift of God". The suggestion that adopted children are a direct gift from God makes this a sanctioned and holy act instead of an immoral one. As Patricia Howe notes, within Victorian literature successful adoptions are often not at the hands of people who seek them, but are made when they stumble upon a child in need who has come to them "through a higher agency, through God, fate, or Providence" (Howe 121). Susannah says that "God has sent that child, whom its mother does not care for, to me – to us" (39). The fact that this child is "sent" by God underlines the sanctity of the relationship, that although the child is a "poor creature [the Trevenas] know nothing on earth about", who could "possibly [be] the offspring of sin and shame", "God does [know]"

about the child – and therefore that is acceptable (40).¹⁰ Furthermore, Dr Franklin says that being adopted, Arthur has been “born again – if one may say it without irreverence” (64). In this comparison to conversion, adoption is presented as a religious experience, something underscored by the fact that Susannah places herself in the situation of Hannah who “prayed, and God sent her her little Samuel” (43). By taking the role of a biblical mother, Susannah is almost making this experience a scriptural one.

Genetic Inheritance and Charity

Craik’s simple presentation of providence in adoption is complicated, however, by a problem highlighted by the “reverend brother”: the idea of bad blood. Much more than an issue of religion, the problems of adoption arise from the wide-spread Victorian belief in genetic inheritance. Following Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), much of the discourse around scientific discovery, political movements and discussions of morality and ethics centred on genetic inheritance, taking no account of upbringing or circumstances in developing character. Some contemporary critics and “professional philanthropists” used genetic inheritance as an argument against “indiscriminate charity” (London 83). Thus, Angelique Richardson argues in her book, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century* (2008) that over-population was mostly seen as a class problem, with the middle class viewing “London’s casual poor” as “reckless in reproduction, but idle in production” (Richardson 13). There was a belief that these reproduction rights should be limited through a woman’s careful selection of a husband and a lack of charity so that the undeserving poor would die out naturally.¹¹

The concept of the deserving and undeserving poor was entrenched in the Victorian psyche and the question of social reform, as is demonstrated by the new poor laws and the Chadwickian ideals of less eligibility. That is, those who were hampered by circumstances outside their control deserved help, but that those who were too lazy, feckless or alcoholic and had thus brought their poverty on themselves, were not “deserving” of charity, and the aid given had to be made as unpleasant as possible so that it would be “less eligible” than even the most menial of jobs. Many people believed that giving charity was

¹⁰ This is a passive acceptance of God’s will rather than an active seeking of a child. It removes a woman’s agency, and thus removes her responsibility for such actions.

¹¹ Though, undoubtedly, class was a key facet of the genetic inheritance discourse, Richardson’s remarks overlooks the conflicts of race, specifically in regards to adoption. Heathcliff is a key example of this, as he is often described as “as dark almost as if it came from the devil” (Brontë, 43) and comes from Liverpool, a notorious port with links to Spain and Spanish migrants, and transatlantic links too. This formed a key part of the slave trade.

exacerbating the problem of the undeserving poor and allowing them to be “reckless in procreation”, perpetuating the problem for future generations. The deserving poor, who had the drive to improve themselves, would be able to do so through self-help, whilst the undeserving poor should be left to fend for themselves and inevitably die out. As Richardson notes, “the ethos of self-help and self-improvement that dominated mid-Victorian Britain provided a hothouse for the flourishing resistance to charity” (Richardson 61). This resistance is demonstrated by William Guy who, in 1868, argued that the unnatural extension of poor people’s lives by “the indiscriminate almsgiver” had “inevitable consequences” in the decline of the nation (qtd Richardson 60). The idea that poverty was biological rather than social “received widespread middle-class support”, and this spawned the idea that “empathy and charity would result in long-term suffering” (Richardson 64, 62). This is the Darwinian theory of natural selection in moralistic clothing, propounding the idea that the morally weak will die out if they are not supported.

As there was no legal debate around adoption at the time, Craik instead capitalised on the popularity of genetic inheritance to create discussion around adoption and engage her readers. She plays on some of the same issues, specifically the idea of charity working against society by helping the morally deficient to survive and procreate, and this idea of charity as a negative force resounds through *King Arthur* and many of her other texts. When Craik wrote the children’s book, *Cola Monti* (1849), included on the title page was the inscription “God Helps Those Who Help Themselves”. This rejection of charity is also acted out in the unstoppable rise of the heroically self-made John Halifax, an idealised protagonist who always refuses charity despite all external circumstances. Even as a teenager, John won’t take Abel Fletcher’s money “till [he’s] earned it, sir” (11) and when he rescues Mr March and Mr Brithwood from the river he refuses the money entirely (46). Despite refusing money, John is the paradigm of the self-made man, and by the time the novel closes, he and his family are rich because of John’s strong work ethic and moral code. Thus, charity is presented, not as a socially kind act, but one which is stigmatised as it allows people with no work ethic or ‘bad blood’ to pull down society at large.

This opinion of charity colours the social opinion of adoption, as adopting foundling children is seen as a charitable act. Thus in order to gain support from conservative middle-class readers, Craik must distance adoption from charity. She does this by first underlining this social assumption, talking of children “brought up for charity”, with the villagers hoping Mrs Trevena would be rewarded for her “charity” (70). In fact, Craik uses the word three times in four sentences. Hal Trevena, a character with whom the reader is not

supposed to empathise, uses the notion of charity against Susannah when he argues that he has the greater claim on Austin's resources by sardonically exclaiming, "[w]hat noble Charity!" (88). Having highlighted this assumption, Craik then argues against this definition, saying "charity had nothing at all to do with it" (70). Craik thus appears to challenge the idea that these children are undeserving of aid because of their heritage, but this challenge is undercut by her insistence that adoption is not charity at all, blurring the issue as to whether it is morally permissible to "charitably" adopt these genetically 'tainted' children.

Instead of using the concept of charity, therefore, Craik uses the conservative ideal of the natural maternity of women which is rooted in biological essentialism. As one anonymous author wrote, "whatever may be said of the *rights* of woman, it is her allotted *duty* to marry and bear children ... the order of nature is, that the woman shall be devoted to the cares of maternity and the domestic duties" (qtd Richardson 35, emphasis in original). This duty was not possible for the surplus of women found in the 1851 census, the surfeit of "odd" women who "shall have no husband, and therefore, legitimately, no children" (qtd Richardson 35). The natural maternity of women is at war with their inability to produce children and thus, adoption would seem to be the logical answer.¹² The fact that it is *Susannah* and not Arthur who is the protagonist of this novel, accentuates the idea that adoption primarily benefits women, as an outworking of their natural and instinctive motherhood, rather than the child, again undermining the concept of charity and overwriting it with instinctive and natural maternity.

However, the biological essentialism which accentuates the maternity of women also makes adoption problematic. Foundling children cannot have their heritage sufficiently verified and may be, indeed, probably were, illegitimate, which, according to contemporary theorists, carried with it a natural badness inherited in the child. As Sally Mitchell argues in her article on *The Victorian Web*, "we have trouble realizing how unconventional [adoption] was in an age that believed strongly in eugenics, bad blood, and hereditary taints of character" (Mitchell). Many Victorian stories, including Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* follow the presumption that, to use Susannah Trevena's words, "what

¹² Whilst it might seem erroneous to assume unmarried women could adopt (their single state being the cause of their motherlessness) the unlegalised state of adoption meant that several de facto adoptions could exist between single women and children. This is demonstrated through the literature of this time. Miss Havisham adopts Ester in Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), and Mary Brotherton adopts the children in Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong, Factory boy* (1840). However, these adoptions are nearly always seen as problematic in the end, perhaps because of the way in which they underscore a woman's independence and agency without men.

is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh” (164). This is an idea that works both ways, that “bad blood will out”, but also that despite the circumstances they find themselves in, people of noble birth are innately noble, as is seen in the figure of Halifax himself.

The idea of innate nobility is promulgated by Abel Fletcher who, despite being a tanner and “pertinaciously jealous of the dignity of trade, yet held strongly the commonsense doctrine of the advantages of good descent” (13). This “commonsense doctrine” decrees “the qualities of the ancestors should be transmitted to the race” meaning “a gentleman’s son has more chances of growing up a gentleman than the son of a working man” (13).¹³ These advantages are also corroborated by John’s looks, often described as “classical” with a “Saxon” nose, lips that were “well-shaped” and a “square...resolute chin of that type which gives character and determination to the whole physiognomy” (9). Mascarenhas picks up on this theme, arguing that “John’s straight nose and noble attitude to work establish, not that a peasant is not easily recognisable, but that John is no peasant – the Victorian investment in physiognomy is reinforced rather than contradicted” (Mascarenhas 258). With Craik’s repeated emphasis on natural law rather than socially constructed law, perhaps it is not surprising that she focuses on innate, natural qualities.

Of course, this traditionalist view of class values sits uneasily with the other great myth of the Victorian era, the self-made man that John supposedly represents. If one is given the advantage of “good descent” in the narrator of *John Halifax, Gentleman*’s words, then he is not entirely “self-made”. Many of Craik’s critics took umbrage with her portrayal of John Halifax for this very reason. The *British Quarterly Review* argued that the true parentage of John Halifax as the son of “Guy Halifax, Gentleman” is an “artistic and intellectual blunder” that negates the democratic message she is purporting to convey (qtd Mitchell). Phineas Fletcher is keen to point out that John was a “gentleman”, and even John himself says “we always were [gentlemen]”, once he has achieved the social status to which he aspires (320).

Thus the idea of gentlemen being gentlemen because of their actions rather than their birth, as John Halifax vocally insists, is undermined by Craik by John’s parentage, written in the front of “the little Greek Testament” (207). This book is highly symbolic, not just

¹³ This is starkly highlighted by their difference of surnames. Abel and Phineas are “Fletchers” – a name derived from a trade, whilst John is a Halifax, tied to the land as many noble titles are. Thus John’s surname evokes gentlemanly descent whilst Abel and Phineas’s “ancestors” are “working [men]”.

because of the names written within it. The fact that it is a Bible underscores the moral qualities of the family and the fact that it is written in Greek emphasises the level of education, and therefore status, that the Halifax family had. It becomes impossible then, to insist that John's 'gentlemanly' status is down to his behaviour alone. As Sally Mitchell argues, John's heritage has "the unfortunate effect of virtually destroying the story's point by making it seem that legitimate birth and inherited rank do matter a great deal after all" (Mitchell 77-78). The conflict between the progressive agenda and conservative ideals they use to achieve it is visible through many of Craik's texts, and in *King Arthur* in particular in the issue of adoption.

For, despite her support, Craik clearly struggles with the problem of nature versus nurture within her texts.¹⁴ This conflict is demonstrated not only in the adopted Arthur Trevena but also in the figure of the orphaned John Halifax. At the end, when Arthur's true heritage comes to light, not only is he the heir to a great estate and a gentleman, but he was legitimately born in wedlock. His legitimacy not only allows him to inherit Tawton Abbas but removes the taint of immorality that an illegitimate birth would give. As with John's true heritage, Craik negates her own message that people should be judged by their actions and not by their bloodline, by reflecting the Victorian belief in the idea that blood (and thus, class) determines or contributes to one's morality. In fact, there are a lot of similarities between John Halifax and Arthur Trevena. Both first appear as vulnerable impoverished boys who must work hard for all they get, from Arthur's scholarship to John's apprenticeship, both are actually born in wedlock to gentlemen's families and both are Cornish. This comparison between the protagonist of her most popular book and the eponymous hero of her last book emphasises the connection between them, combining the ideas of the self-made man and deserving poor and adoption, rather than aligning the "noble charity" of adoption with the undeserving poor and all the concomitant concerns which that would raise.

Gendered Reactions

However, it is not just through her male protagonists that the conflict between Craik's support of adoption and the complications of the society she lived within is seen. As with so much, adoption is not just an issue of class, but one of gender too. Nanny Trevena, orphaned halfway through the book, is nonetheless never fully able to escape the weight

¹⁴ A term that was coined by Francis Galton in 1869, who propounded early theories of eugenics inspired by his cousin, Charles Darwin's, work.

of her father's name. Despite adopting Arthur regardless of his heritage, Susannah says she could “certainly not [love] Halbert Trevena’s child” (135). There is a conflict in the text between the idea of the self-made man, being judged on his own merits, and the apparent inevitability of one’s heritage, a gendered conflict that relates back to the inter-relational identities of women, versus the self-made identities of men. As Trollope argues in *Dr Thorne*, “A man raises a woman to his own standard, but a woman must take that of the man she marries” (Trollope 91). In some respects this makes adoption easier for girls. Because women can change status depending on their relationships to men, they can “marry up” and improve their identities in a way that men cannot, through social, rather than biological, change. Impoverished or morally deficient women can be saved by men because they do not have the same impact within society (restrained, as we have already seen, to influence rather than power), and are affected by the status of their husband, so their adoption is not seen as problematic in the same way.

The gendering of adoption is demonstrated by Nanny Trevena who has to walk a tight line between her various inter-related identities. In order for Nanny to be accepted into the Trevena family, she must combine the qualities of both being a blood-born daughter, the “last of the Trevenas” in Austin’s words, (165) and yet also “not a bit of a Trevena” – [as] her father said, apologetically” (134). Austin looks after her well-being not for her own sake, for there was “nothing at all attractive about her” (146), but solely because she is “the last of the Trevenas”. Her identity reflects Arthur's own, in being both Trevena and not-Trevena simultaneously, and this allows her to be accepted into the Trevena family and yet still marry Arthur. This marriage is important as it ties Arthur formally into the family in a way which could not be legally recognised before – and such marriages are a trope of adoption plot-lines. However, this legally recognised and tried-and-tested method of the traditional happy endings in adoption narratives undermines the message of adoption as a legitimate form of family. Although Susannah is always careful to call him “My son” in public (118), his inability to be a real Trevena until he has married one negates this ownership. As in *The Italian’s Daughter*, when Jenny Sutton carries on the family line by adopting another Sutton child, Arthur becomes a lawful Trevena by marrying “the last of the Trevenas”: the adopted child’s position has to be solidified by a genuine blood connection in order to count. Thus, despite all Craik says, adoption is not enough to ratify a true place amongst the family. Although Craik presents adoption as not only morally justifiable but also natural, her presentation of adoption both reflects and resists the ideology of her times.

But adoption raises issues which surpass that of the child in question. The gendering of this issue is not only seen through the child, it is also assumed that the effect on the adoptive parents will be gendered too. As O'Toole argues, "Arthur's adopted status is assumed to make a difference to the adoptive father that it does not make to the adoptive mother" (O'Toole 67). Austin takes very little interest in the child, neither "investigat[ing] or interfer[ing]" in the child's upbringing (75). He "often forgot the existence of the baby" (76), and he refers to Arthur as "your boy" (76). The child, who is an emotional comfort to his mother, is merely a "rather expensive luxury" to the father (88). From the beginning of the novel, Susannah is preoccupied with the child on an emotional, moral and spiritual level, whilst Austin only thinks of the expense because their "income is so small – too small to bring up and provide for a child" (42).

Thus, it is implied that adoption affects men socially more than women because of the laws regarding property and inheritance, some of which we have examined in Chapter One under the Married Woman's Property Act. The man, as the head of the household and the inheritor of the possessions, has the right to give property to his lawful heir or to receive it from a blood-relation without an 'imposter' intervening. As women could not legally own these possessions anyway but received a large emotional reward for their motherhood, adoption is seen as primarily a positive thing for women. Men, who are depicted like Austin Trevena as uninterested in the emotional side of parenthood, but are greatly affected by the public and financial issues surrounding adoption, therefore see it as a negative issue. Thus, the 'natural' right of adoption, and of women to fulfil their essential femininity through motherhood, is oppressed through man-made and male-focused social constructs that, as with the Married Woman's Property Act, artificially remove women's natural rights.

The naturalness of adoption is placed in opposition and contrast to socially constructed laws. Craik presents the natural law as preferable and morally superior, but also demonstrates how the implicit rights and agency this natural law brings women are suppressed by the man-made, artificial laws of society. Craik uses the language of essential femininity, a traditionally conservative tactic, in the service of a more progressive agenda, normalising adoption. Thus the recurrent conflict of social acceptance versus progressive ideals reappears in Craik's work, just as it did in the Married Woman's Property Act.

This conflict between inheritance and adoption is solved by Craik by having Arthur marry Nanny at the end of the text. This marriage becomes a legitimate way for Arthur to inherit

the Trevena possessions, for even when the Adoption Act was passed in 1926, the adopted child's rights, including his inheritance rights, stayed with his natal family rather than his adopted ones.¹⁵ As "the last of the Trevenas", Nanny is more morally entitled to the inheritance than Arthur, but, as a woman, this inheritance is problematic, whereas Arthur, though a son, cannot be an heir because of his adoption. This problem is neatly rectified by combining these two separate elements and negating both issues they bring. Nanny enables Arthur's inheritance of the Trevena property, which is foreshadowed when they were children when Nanny says "I'll marry you, Cousin Arthur – and then you will get the diamond ring" (153).

As with the Married Woman's Property Act, Craik propounds the laws of nature and common sense over the dictates of man-made laws. Although she worked hard to get the Married Woman's Property Act passed, Craik nonetheless portrayed women, such as Susannah, contravening the law prior to the passage of the act rather than suffering in silence. Adoption, or the right to have a family even without blood-ties, is therefore closely related to the ideas of the Married Woman's Property Act, the right to own one's property and indeed, oneself. It therefore becomes an issue of agency and of what society allows contrasted to what is morally allowable.

Women's Natural Maternity

However, paradoxically perhaps, although adoption is seen to have a bigger impact on men (because of the financial implications) it is still seen primarily as a woman's issue, as it brings into question women's natural maternal instincts and identities as mothers. A woman's 'natural' maternity is an issue connected with genetics and the notion of essential femininity. Women who are not maternal are therefore seen as "unnatural", something Craik underlines throughout her text when she refers to Arthur's "natural unnatural mother" (61). This play on words emphasises both Lady Damerel's biological motherhood and her social non-maternity. This emphasis is contrasted with the way that Susannah is described throughout the text. Rather than the "natural unnatural" mother (61), who is a "queer" woman (50) and a "perfectly abnormal specimen of her sex" (52), Susannah is constantly referred to as someone who "liked to "mother" everybody" (77)

¹⁵ These laws follow on from a long line of adoption traditions. One of the earliest laws on adoption is found in Roman society, and again these laws were codified to protect inheritance and control heirship rather than to promote child welfare. The two ideas of adoption and inheritance have always been closely linked throughout history.

and as being “everything that a mother ought to be” (75). The contrast between Susannah and Lady Damerel is made sharper by a direct comparison when Arthur says that “[his] little mammy is worth a hundred of [Lady Damerel]” (169). Though the truth has not yet been revealed at this point in the story, Craik has laid down enough hints to allow the reader to guess at Lady Damerel’s identity as Arthur’s birth mother and appreciate this dramatic irony. In contrast to the woman who refuses to care for her sick husband and newborn child, who “if [she] is not a murderess, she is next door to one” (57), Susannah even cares for inanimate objects, such as Sweet William flowers “trodden underfoot and nearly dead” (40).

Sweet William was a homely flower in contrast to the exotic imports which were flooding the market, a point emphasised by Matthew Arnold, who refers in *Thyrsis* to “Sweet-William with its homely cottage-smell” (qtd Waters 40). It was a flower which defied fashion and export to become emblematic of home. The reader might reasonably expect one of the fashionable imported flowers to represent adoption in this novel, one which is taken from its homeland and instead takes root in a new, different climate. However, the very homeliness of Sweet William underlines Craik’s point about adoption. It is a natural, native flower. Its presence in the garden is expected and not controversial, and adoption, Craik implies, is also natural. The Sweet William belongs in her garden as much as the other plants which were found growing there already and it does not seem out of place there. Susannah’s ability to save and ‘mother’ even trampled flowers, and her direct comparison between flowers and children connects these two ideas as something natural. Transplanting children into a new social environment and allowing them to grow is as natural as transplanting flowers, and, as Craik demonstrates in *King Arthur*, can have just as much success. Howe argues that adoption is often presented as a “process of domestication, running parallel to activities such as building and gardening. Successful adoptions become associated with civilized places, landscapes subtly ordered by man, whether they be great parks and houses ... or tiny cottages and gardens” (Howe 124).

Gardens were a focus of Victorian literature in both poetry and prose, as Michael Waters suggests, with idyllic cottage gardens nostalgically presenting an Elysium that never existed (Waters 3). This attempt to civilise, control and re-create according to a pre-determined narrative, which dominated gardening vogues during the mid-Victorian era, reflects the strict picture of social order and the way that it is pre-determined by one’s heritage. Domestication, the act of the other taming the wild innate self, has clear links to agency and the ability for children (and women) to be controlled by the men around them. This

lack of women's agency is reflected in men's shaping of public discourse surrounding eugenic science, charity and inheritance laws and the effect it has on women's private domestic lives which Craik seeks to expose. For adoption to be successful, it has to reflect the ability of the garden to take something unruly and regulate it. Just as Susannah saved the Sweet Williams by transplanting them to a more suitable environment, adoption is presented as successful within literature if it is done by "domesticating" it, in Howe's term. Instead of saving flowers by transplanting them to a more suitable environment, the Trevenas have "saved a soul alive" (278) by raising it in a more suitable home than Arthur's "natural, unnatural" mother could (or wanted to) provide.

Furthermore, adoption is still primarily a female issue because of the unspoken, and perhaps even unrecognised, connection between adopted children and women. This connection is based on both the women and adopted children being identified as lesser, and not legally recognised, members of the family, recognised only through their relationships to others. Women's identities were inter-relational in that they were formed by connection to their husbands, parents and children, whilst adopted children's identities are inter-relational in that they are always connected to their natural, biological parents, and the innate badness they may have unwittingly bestowed upon their offspring. This connection between inter-related identities is underscored not merely by their presence in the family, but in particular within the way they were subsumed into that family – as Howe notes when she draws the comparison between marriage and adoption as "a relationship willed by one party and imposed on the other" (Howe 128). This imposition of women into and, in fact, even out of marriage is something that appears repeatedly in Craik's texts. Ursula is emotionally blackmailed into marrying John by Phineas as the only person who can save him from death, and Josephine is coerced into staying with her husband against her will for a similar reason. If Josephine escaped as she longed to do, she is told that the shock might kill Edward Scanlan.¹⁶ Susannah's marriage is equally not controlled by her, though she is kept from it rather than forced into it. The situation of Austin's poverty and family responsibilities which kept the two promised lovers apart for so long, were clearly not her idea. She would have "married as early as prudence would allow, [and] spent the flower of their days together" even without money (252). The fact that she is kept from

¹⁶ The comparison between the Halifax marriage and the Scanlan one is significant, given the fact that John and Ursula's relationship was, apparently, ideal, whereas Josephine and Edward's was an unhappy one. The connection between these two, supposedly diametrically opposed marriages perhaps betrays Craik's true feelings on marriage, whatever she claims.

this marriage by Austin's responsibilities to Hal and the financial strain this provides again underlines the relationship between women and adopted children. In both cases, the ties of blood are represented as stronger, and the issue of money between blood relations undercuts the emotional relationship between non-biological members. This is also something that underpins the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act, as we shall see in the next chapter. The biological relationship between Hannah and Rose, and between Bernard and his responsibilities to the Rivers family, creates friction and complications in the love-story of Hannah and Bernard. The necessity of non-biological connections in marriage contrasts to the subservient position this non-biological interloper takes. The creation of family without blood, and the lack of legal rights this new family member experiences, emphasises the comparison of wife and adopted child. Both are identified by the relationship to other people and in both circumstances, the relationships are "imposed" upon them, not necessarily negatively but without their autonomy. It is also a relationship that, once imposed, has a lack of legal rights which keeps the wife/child under control, with a lack of legal identity and right of inheritance/ownership. Therefore, the lack of legal protections that these "lesser" family members receive, demonstrates the need for Craik's primary message – the fact that the issues men debate in public shape and affect the domestic lives of women and their children. These relationships, without legal protections, are open to abuse, but the need for protection is not clear because the narrative surrounding them has been shaped by men, who do not have the same reference to the domestic issues they are shaping.

Despite all the difficulties of her own ideology which complicates Craik's depiction of adoption, there is nonetheless a clear message in this interventionist text. The adoption of Arthur Trevena is shown as a positive thing for all the characters. Not only has Susannah "saved a soul alive", but Arthur has rescued the last line of the Damerels, and together Nanny and Arthur rescue the town. As O'Toole notes, "the adoption of Arthur has benefited not only the Damerel family but society at large" (O'Toole 65). O'Toole also argues that by naming him after King Arthur, and by setting the story in Cornwall, allegedly King Arthur's home, the Damerel estate which Arthur saves "is to serve as a metonym for the nation. The nation will be healthier, Craik suggests, if adoption is institutionalized" (O'Toole 65). This is demonstrated by Arthur's comparison to not only his blood-relatives, specifically the previous Damerel heir - a "poor half-witted boy" (78), but also to Hal Trevena, Austin's brother. The comparison between the blood relation, Hal, and the adopted Arthur is brought up time and again. Hal makes the comparison explicit when he

positions himself as a victim of Arthur's existence. Because of the adoption of the boy, Austin is too poor to help his "own flesh and blood" though Hal thought "that charity began at home; and that blood was thicker than water" (89). Hal had an "external family likeness" to his brother, their shared external traits draw a connection between their bloodlines, something Arthur cannot compete with as an adopted child. But despite Hal's position as a legitimate Trevena (underscored by his family likeness), it is Arthur who comes off best in the comparison. Whilst Arthur is described as "an exceedingly "good" child - who gave little trouble to anyone" (75), Hal is a man "who had never made any human being aught but miserable in all his days" (91). They are positioned as diametrically opposite to each other, Craik comparing not only the rights of blood-relatives to adopted children but also the moral outcomes. Although Arthur is "Nobody's child", and could therefore possibly have inherited a biological taint, it is Hal, the eldest Trevena, and a legitimate member of the bloodline, who is presented negatively.

This contrast between adopted and biological family members is emphasised by the motif of twenty pounds, the same amount of money they paid for Arthur and which Austin gives Hal. The twenty pounds which are paid for Arthur is Susannah's responsibility, whereas the twenty pounds for Hal comes from their money without Susannah being present or knowing anything about it. This money draws the comparisons between natural and social bonds. The money that Arthur is bought with is invested in him and brings long-term benefits, whilst Hal's is seen as a bad investment that brings no profitable gain to either Hal himself or the family at large. Arthur extends Susannah's family and is their "perpetual hope" (63), but when Hal marries and perpetuates his family line, it is considered "the maddest if not the wickedest thing he ever did in his life – which is saying a good deal" (48). Hal's comparison to Arthur is also accentuated by his reaction to Arthur. When he first meets him and calls him "some beggar's brat" the reader is intended to understand the underlying motives of Hal's reaction, that he is, in fact, being replaced by the adopted child. This replacement does not generate any sympathy though, because Hal squanders the money he repeatedly and unrepentantly takes from Austin. Hal's reaction is in some part predicated by his level of interest in the case, that he stands to lose money because of it. Thus, Craik demonstrates that those who are against adoption are against it for selfish,

worldly reasons, as opposed to the polemic of spiritual and moral imagery she uses to defend her case.¹⁷

By comparing Arthur with two negative examples of blood-related bonds, Craik demonstrates that "blood is *not* thicker than water – unless love goes with it, and respect, and honour" (93). Thus, although this is not an interventionist text in a traditional sense, it intertwines with many of the same issues from other domestic debates to highlight the concerns Craik faced with this matter, such as natural versus socially constructed laws, the effect men's public debates have on women's private lives, questions of agency and inter-relational identities. Her final message comes through clearly, despite the complicated social perceptions she was writing into, that adoption is the way to "save a soul alive". This phrase, repeated throughout the novel, forms the very last words of the whole text – an emphatic conclusion by Craik to her interventionist text, hammering home the message for her readers, that far from being immoral, adoption is actually similar to the work of salvation, "being born again," as Dr Franklin says, a Christian tenet and not an immoral act.

¹⁷ There is, however, an argument to be made that Craik also is an interested party. Although she presents Hal's opinions as unreliable and biased because of the financial interest he has in the case, as she herself adopted a foundling child, she has an interest in normalising adoption socially too. This self-interest is never highlighted or examined with any level of self-awareness within the text.

Chapter Three: Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act

"We are *not* brother and sister, and we lie – we lie to our own souls - in calling ourselves so" (Hannah, 174)

As we have seen in connection with adoption, what constituted a family was open to debate, and it was this debate that formed the primary problem of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act. The Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act was a highly controversial act of 1835 that was hotly contested both in the law courts and in the court of public opinion. Before 1835, marriages to one's brother- or sister-in-law were not considered illegal but could be voided if challenged, even many years after the wedding. The Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act sought to clarify this anomaly by making all such marriages prior to 1835 no longer voidable but outlawing them thereafter. It did not seem like a controversial bill at the time, and nobody had any idea how long and contentious an issue it would become, until its eventual repeal in 1907.¹⁸

In brief, the law argued that for a man to marry the sister of his deceased wife was incest, as they had already legally become family when he married his first wife. Thus, the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act was, in the words of Elisabeth Gruner "ostensibly an anti-incest bill" (Gruner 424). Although it was portrayed as an issue of morality and sexual ethics, it was also exposed deeper underlying issues of inheritance and class. The middle and upper classes, especially those who were more affluent, could afford to travel abroad to marry. Craik herself accompanied Edith Waugh as a chaperone to Switzerland in November 1875, where such marriages were still legal. The working class could not afford to do this, and so, as with the law prior to the Married Woman's Property Act, the rich were circumventing the laws they were helping to create, penalising the working class. It became a conflicted and controversial bill however, because "although it was supposedly a tool for regulating male sexuality, the bill exposed and raised anxieties about female sexuality and subjectivity as well" (Gruner 424). Thus, it raised issues of female agency and

¹⁸ Interestingly, the Act did not forbid first-cousin marriage, which was literally consanguineous, though it made in-law marriages illegal through the presumption of consanguinity. This contradiction is highlighted in *Hannah* through Hannah's first engagement to her cousin, who died before she could marry him.

desire, as well as their inter-related identities as it brought into the foreground the idea that a woman might desire or wish to marry an already married man, and underscored their previous relationship to him. In fact, the discrepancy between legal and biological families visible in these debates demonstrated the way in which women's identities were controlled by their interactions with others, and were in some way, therefore, performed socially. That is, who they were and how they identified could be shaped by what people saw or said.

Many people intervened in this debate on each side of the question, and Craik was not alone in writing interventionist texts on this issue. Felicia Skene wrote *The Inheritance of Evil* (1849), an anti-repeal text, William Clark Russell wrote *The Deceased Wife's Sister* (1874), and Mary Alice Dale wrote *With Feet of Clay* (1895) both arguing for repeal. William Clark Russell, in particular, who serialised his novel shortly after *Hannah* had been released, was self-consciously writing into an existing space within the debate. He chose to publish his novel serially in the magazine *Temple Bar*, which also published Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* (1863), a sensation novel about bigamy. *Temple Bar* had a reputation for exploring issues of marriage and was therefore well suited to Russell's controversial exploration of these issues. Despite this, however, as Andrew Nash argues in *William Clark Russell and the Victorian Nautical Novel*, "*The Deceased Wife's Sister* [was] destined to become the most controversial and condemned of Russell's early productions" (Nash 44). Issues of sibling, pseudo-sibling and marital relationships became recurrent themes in interventionist and domestic literature of this time. What sets Craik apart though is the way that her novels demonstrate how female oppression transcends class. This is unique to Craik and elevates her novels from mere didactic pieces into a higher level of interventionist literature.

The arbitrary and artificial nature of these laws which criminalised the working classes whilst providing loopholes for the middle and upper classes, contrasts sharply to Craik's portrayal of the natural rights of women, and specifically the natural right of motherhood. Again, Craik uses conservative ideals to forward a progressive agenda to defend vulnerable women the law did not protect. The conservative ideal of essential femininity which she used to defend adoption in *King Arthur*, is also used to argue for the repeal of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act. The artificiality of man-made laws is thus contrasted negatively to natural laws, and Craik portrays a woman's duty first and foremost as belonging to the latter. As Craik has Lord Dunsmore, the repeal advocate, say in *Hannah*; "I consider all restrictions upon marriage made by neither God nor nature a mistake and a

wrong. And any law which creates a false and unnatural position between man and woman is an equal wrong” (216). Craik thus aligns the law of nature with the law of God, making it a moral and religious duty to obey these laws over man-made artificial ones, which are “a mistake and a wrong”.

Craik argued for the repeal of the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Act using many of the same techniques and arguments that she used to intervene in other political debates. This chapter specifically looks at the way women are constricted by their inter-related identities and how Craik attempts, not to discredit the idea that women are knowable through their relationship to others, but to place these relationships in a hierarchy in order to use this conservative ideal for the progressive argument for repeal. A brief examination of Craik’s demonstration of how the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Act affected all classes of society will be followed by an investigation of how the religious debate surrounding this issue creates conflict for this argument and how Craik navigated her way around this by contrasting “true” religion (spirituality, which is characterised as feminine) with religiosity, (man-made and masculine religion, focused on canonical law and not God’s law).

Inter-related Identities:

A woman was defined, not only by her own relationship to her husband (and potential husbands), but also through her relationship to her sister, and *her* relationship to her own husband. The layers of inter-related identities become both conflicted and confusing. Craik had first to navigate the issue of the inter-connected identities of women if she was to successfully argue for repeal. Even the very title of the bill highlights women’s identities as being inter-related. The woman is identified not by what she does, but who she is related to, the “Deceased Wife’s sister”. This designation is doubly important, as Gruner points out. First of all, it is very specific: it is not “sister-in-law”, which could apply to a brother’s wife too. The convoluted terminology highlights the female connection, the fact that it is the man’s wife’s sister, that it is the identity of women at stake here. Moreover, whilst the term “sister-in-law” would stress the legal construction of this bond, the “Deceased Wife’s sister” “obscures the constructed nature” of this relationship and instead “stress[es] her biological relation to her sister rather than the legally significant relation to her sister’s husband” (Gruner 424-425).

The way in which proponents of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act term the debate through biological connections forced the question to be framed in terms of the constructed family. This debate brought into play the very notion of constructed versus natural families that Craik used when she advocated for adoption to be legalised as we saw in the previous chapter. The idea of brother/sister relationships through law is therefore closely linked to adoption because it is the creation of artificial family bonds where biologically they do not exist.

Many stories, not only at this time, but in earlier in the 19th century and 18th century too, include the trope of artificial family bonds being created through pseudo-adoptions, where biologically unrelated boys and girls grew up together, and eventually fell in love. It is a theme in Austen's novel, *Mansfield Park* (1814), where Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram fall in love. Fanny first falls in love with Edmund because he is kind to the biological brother she idolises, William, but also because their own relationship bears many sibling resemblances. These resemblances are raised by Mrs Norris at the beginning of the novel as a point in favour of adopting Fanny, a protection against Fanny and Edmund falling in love. As Mrs Norris argues, if the Bertrams "breed [Fanny] up with [their children] from this time, and suppose her even to have the beauty of an angel, and she will never be more to either than a sister" (Austen 7). Ironically then, it is this sibling-like closeness that forms the basis of Edmund and Fanny's relationship. Edmund's aversion to outside forces invading the privacy of the home (emblematised by his refusal to allow their neighbours to be in the play *Lover's Vow*) eventually leads to his marrying a pseudo-sibling from his own family.

Agnes and David in *David Copperfield* (1850) also have a pseudo-sibling relationship. As with *Mansfield Park*, the positioning of Agnes as sister both enables the romance and stands as a barrier to it which must be overcome by the end of the novel. David says he has "to guard [the] sister affection [she showed him] with religious care" (Dickens 714), tying together the two most common images associated with Agnes, the sister and the angel. It is only in chapter 62, that David Copperfield at last crosses his own boundaries and asks whether he might call Agnes "something more than Sister, widely different from Sister!" (Dickens 732).¹⁹ This pseudo-sibling relationship enables the transference from an

¹⁹ The relationship between Dora-David-Agnes also shares another similarity with texts arguing for the repeal of the DWSMA, in that Dora sanctions and approves of the marriage before she passes, "willing" David to Agnes. The tacit approval of the deceased sister (such as is demonstrated by Rosa in *Hannah*) plays an important trope in repeal narratives.

emotionally close relationship to a physically intimate one. The idea of being emotionally similar to brothers and sisters and yet biologically distinct was an accepted trope of romance fiction at this time and links back to the idealisation of home and family. The same trope that sees Arthur marry Nanny in *King Arthur*, creates these love stories through pseudo-sibling relationships here.

But it is not just romantic pseudo-sibling relationships that are idealised in domestic literature at this time. In many works of fiction, the biological brother/sister relationship was idealised as the perfect male/female relationship, which is why the pseudo-siblings were seen as the best romantic partnerships. In George Eliot's sonnet sequence, *Brother and Sister* (1869) she argues that the childhood days with her brother where their lives grew "as two buds that kiss", were "seed to all [her] after good" and "[her] root of piety". The relationship between them teaches her how to relate to the world around her. This idealised sibling relationship is also explicit in her novel, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). The relationship between Tom and Maggie Tulliver is the epitome of the fantasy/nightmare relationship of brothers and sisters. Maggie is seen to betray Tom when she almost elopes with Stephen, and also when she runs away to "go to the gypsies and Tom should never see her any more" (Eliot 92). Her socially stigmatising actions are primarily punished by her separation from her brother and their death at the end, where they had "gone down in an embrace never to be parted: living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisied fields together" (Eliot, 512) is an act of reconciliation for them both. As an anonymous reviewer said in *Macmillan Magazine* 1861, this left the reader "undecided whether this death was a translation or escape" (*Macmillan magazine* 1861). The presentation of the sibling relationship then is somewhat conflicted by its various qualities, but ultimately, Eliot calls it "the highest form of friendship" (qtd Gruner 424). This is not only a recurrent theme through Eliot's work but also something that is presented as standard throughout Victorian culture.

However, at its heart, the fact that brother and sister relationships were idealised as the perfect male/female relationships is problematic for those arguing for repeal because, as Charlotte Frew argues, "the nineteenth-century "sibling" encompassed blood and in-law siblings, and both were idolized as the ultimate intimate relationships...pure, safe and untainted by sexual lust" (Frew 266). The idea that this closeness could become sexual threatened the purity of this relationship, and it demonstrated how artificial the in-law as sibling narrative was, as it highlighted the role of female desire in a way that natural sibling relationships did not. By aligning non-biological "sisters" with biological sisters, instead of

de-sexualising sister-in-laws, it ironically created a suggestion of incest for all sisters, which pervaded the debate around the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act.

Frew suggests that the "deceased wife's sister unions ... position[ed] one woman as "sister," "wife," and "mother" simultaneously" (Frew 266). Instead of having singular inter-connected relationships, women found they could have multiple relationships to the same person, transgressing strict social narratives to form their own identities. The way that women's identities were created and reflected by their relationship to others is a recurrent theme throughout *Hannah*. The Rivers family is primarily concerned with how Bernard and Hannah's relationship will affect their own social standing because "a scandal like this affects everyone connected with it" (63). The identity of Hannah and the way she has been elevated socially by her connection to Bernard from "for so many years a poor governess" (75) to the "mistress of an elegant, well-ordered house" (78) also affects Bernard's biological sisters through their inter-related identities. They have been tied to Hannah, and Hannah's actions and relationships therefore reflect upon them. This inter-connectedness is demonstrated, not only through their reaction to Hannah's actions, but through Hannah's relationship to Lady Dunsmore, and the reflection that has upon them.

However, threaded through the text is the knowledge that this elevation cannot be ratified or made permanent through marriage. It is something that the Rivers seek to exploit by trying to find Hannah and Bernard more suitable marriage partners, and emotionally punishing the offenders when they refuse to participate in these schemes by "never [admitting Hannah] again into [their house]...tonight is the last time [she] will be received at the Moat House" (176). This uncertainty is also something that is a source of anxiety for Hannah who is constantly aware that she will have to leave the house, Rosie and Bernard himself when the new mistress arrives. The inter-related identities of these women push the plot along, forming part of the social vulnerabilities of deceased wives' sisters, women whom Craik is campaigning to protect.

Mothers not Lovers

Thus Craik, writing to a middle-class audience, had to reconcile the idea of inter-related relationships with the repeal for which she was campaigning. She does not deny women's multi-layered inter-related identities but instead positions them within a hierarchy. Craik placed a woman's relationship as a mother as of higher importance than her relationship as a wife. By focusing on women's innate maternity, Craik, and other proponents of repeal were able to detach the idea of marriage from that of sexual desire. Hannah, for example,

had “one great want in her nature – the need to be a mother to somebody or something” (13). The fact that Hannah is intended by nature to be a mother and has been restrained from motherhood, first by her circumstances, and later from her role of adopted mother by the laws of the land, is similar to Susannah’s position within *King Arthur*. Susannah uses adoption to create an ‘artificial’ family despite the lack of laws protecting her child, whereas Hannah’s family is seen to be artificial *because* of the law. However, this apparent social artificiality is contrasted to the way that Craik presents these families – and the way her protagonists perceive them. Susannah calls Arthur “my son” repeatedly, and this is echoed in *Hannah*, where Hannah calls Rosie “my child” (172).²⁰ Both Susannah and Hannah reframe their identities through their children, placing their role as mother as the foremost part of their identity. Hannah says to Lady Dunsmore, “You were right in once saying that a woman is only half a woman till she has a child....I have almost forgotten I am not Rosie’s mother” (213).

This parallel is underscored by the names of both protagonists: Susannah/Hannah. Craik often uses the names of her characters symbolically, as we have seen previously. Hannah, both the protagonist and the name of the book itself, is named after a biblical mother who “prayed, and God sent her her little Samuel” (*King Arthur* 43). As is evident from this remark, Craik knew the Bible story, explicitly referencing it in a later novel, thus the resonance is clear. Both Hannah herself and the novel as a whole are focused on motherhood, despite the issue at stake being marriage. When Hannah goes to the Rivers household, she becomes a mother for “her little motherless niece” (11). Her main reason for accepting the position in the household was for Rosie’s sake, and the child is a recurrent theme through their relationship. Even when Hannah fears Bernard’s second marriage and her concomitant eviction, her primary fear is of Rosie, not Bernard, being taken away from her.

Therefore, Craik positions the identity of mother above the identity of lover. As she says in *Hannah*, “there are women in whom mother-love is less an instinct or an affection than an actual passion - as strong as, sometimes even stronger than – the passion of love itself” (30). Love versus passion is something that resounds through the novel, love representing duty, the “burden of ... care” (11), and both “the honours and some few of the bondages

²⁰ The contrast between Arthur as “son” and Rosie as “child” instead of “daughter” emphasises the inheritance rights which were problematic in adoption in *King Arthur* and the legal battles of *Hannah*. The non-specific use of “child” removes the possibility of legally weighted gendered issues, making it about Rosie as a person rather than as a legal entity.

of that relationship" (14) whilst passion is represented as "criminal" and "society must legislate" for it (182). Mother-love is presented as more important than romantic passion, and it is this maternal instinct that forms the primary basis of the arguments for repeal. The campaigners argued "that the union ought to be legal because the most suitable replacement mother for children after their mother's death was an aunt" and this theme is seen throughout many interventionist texts on this issue, *Hannah* included (Frew 272).

Furthermore, it is through the love of the child that the love between the parent and surrogate parent grows. As Frew argues, "the love between Hannah and Bernard is subordinate to and a product of their shared love for the child of Bernard's first marriage" (Frew 274). This is something that Hannah herself recognises when she says "So for the father's sake the child was dear/and dearer was the father for the child" (qtd Craik 182). This is a paraphrase of a Coleridge poem written upon the birth of his firstborn son Hartley in 1796. It is an interesting choice, not least because Craik positions Hannah as the narrator, and thus, father of the poem (the original lines say for the "mother's sake"). Originally, it was a poem about loving the child through the experience of loving the spouse, moving from an initial unexpected emotional distance to an acceptance of the family unit through the mother. Craik turns this concept on its head here; the emotions that are brought by the child are immediate and expected, felt before she even saw the child, as "it seemed to open and warm her heart even to think of that little baby" (13). It is the emotions for the father that are detached from how she is expecting to feel. It was "difficult" to summon appropriate sisterly feeling for him, "for she was a reserved woman, who took a long time to know anybody" (15). Craik suggests throughout *Hannah* that this difficulty arises because the sibling relationship is *not* natural to them because they are not biological siblings. Therefore, how she was expecting (and how society expected her) to feel did not come immediately to her. She has to learn to love Bernard through Rosie, just as Coleridge has to learn to love his baby through the child's relationship to his wife. The fact that Craik quotes this poem unattributed suggests it was well known to her readers, indicating that the notion of loving people through others was culturally accepted and was tied to the idea of inter-related identities. Just as their identities are tied together, so too the effect they have upon one another is also interconnected. Thus, in *Hannah*, Rosie connects the surrogate mother to the father first, instead of the father connecting the second mother to the child through his second marriage in an archetypal "evil step-mother" trope.

The ability for Hannah to transform her relationship from sister to wife is enabled by the fact that they never followed the social constructions of the sibling-relationship anyway. Before Bernard's first wife died, "the elder sister had seen almost nothing of them beyond a formal three-days' visit" (10). Craik does this deliberately to further separate the love story from a suggestion of incest or impropriety. Thus, although they legally share the bond of sibling, their relationship is never truly one of a brother and sister; it is a connection that is socially created and not biological. From the very beginning, Craik demonstrates the artificial nature of this connection, saying "it was strange to write to him- "my dear brother," she who never had a brother" and that "nothing would have provided what did not really exist" (15).

But the figure of the child in the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act also acts as a connection between the two sisters, the first wife and the second. As is demonstrated by Grace Dixon, who is convinced to marry Jim "for them poor children's sake" (83) at the suggestion of her sister, maternal aunts were viewed as being best placed to be the surrogate mother for the motherless children. The children became, not a barrier to the second marriage or an unwelcome reminder of the first, but rather a reminder that is cherished because both the husband and the sister loved the departed and could share their grief together. Bernard "seemed to prize [Hannah] all the more for belonging to the departed one" (119), and when they speak of Rosa, it is as "*our Rosa*" (emphasis mine 180).

This sense of belonging is emblematised by the child, who has a blood connection to every member of the triangle, and specifically by the naming of the baby in *Hannah*. Rosie is named after her mother, Rosa. Therefore, the baby stands as a substitute for the first wife; just as Rosa was loved both by Bernard and Hannah, so Rosie, the child, is loved by both. Hannah is not trying to replace Rosa, or erase her memory, as she says, "I am not stepping into your place and stealing away your joys! I have only tried to fulfill your duties toward this little one and toward him" (sic 160). This combination of love and grief binds them together and it is only together that they can share that experience. "Every memory of poor Rosa was sacred to [Hannah's] heart too" (31), just as much as it was to Bernard's. The shared love they have for Rosie represents the shared love they had for Rosa. When Rosie demands Bernard and Hannah "both together" (260) it is understood implicitly that this is representative of the departed Rosa's wishes too.

This implied approval moves from a generic approval of second marriages to a specific approval of sister-in-law marriages as the narrative, and Hannah and Bernard's feelings, progress. At the beginning, Hannah believes that Bernard should marry again, and thinks that "Rosa would have wished it - even Rosa...could she see him as I see him now" (38). Bernard also tells her that Rosa explicitly tells him to marry again after she dies (103), but he implies, it is not until he finds someone he can accurately share his grief with that he can comply. This transformation is something that binds the idea of Hannah and Rosa together. Their opinions are seen to be the same, and thus their position is seen to be aligned too. Moreover, Hannah is first found by Bernard through her letters to Rosa. When he first writes to Hannah he says, "I have been reading over again the letters you used to send weekly to my poor Rosa...It is these which have induced me to make this request" (11-12). It is through Hannah's connection to Rosa that her relationship with Bernard first develops. Later on, Bernard even states that "[he] sometimes think[s] *she* must have sent [Hannah] to [him]" (103). Not only does Rosa approve of this relationship, it is implied that she enabled it. This narrative, then, does not argue against inter-relational identities, it uses them to forward its own progressive ideals, but unusually it seeks to replace male identifications with female-to-female relationships, placing the sisters' relationship to each other as paramount. As Frew argues, "the desire for both sisters to be connected to one another eliminates and controls potential male desire for the unmarried sister" (Frew 279).

Not only do Bernard and Hannah grow to love each other through Rosie, as a surrogate parent couple, but this maternal love is given preference over romantic love through Bernard's own characterisation as a child. Hannah's innate maternal instincts turn to love for him through this character flaw, taking away any suggestion of sexualisation from their relationship. Hannah's inherent motherhood and maternal instincts are focused, not only towards Rosie, whom she can only "keep" permanently if she marries Bernard, but to Bernard himself. For, as Hannah muses, "the man [was] almost as helpless and dependent upon her as the child" (171). It is this helplessness which first solidified her love for him, as "most women - especially those who have the motherly instinct strongly developed" will love a man whom she can "help...better than any one else" (171). Repeatedly, she describes him as a child, saying "a child's anguish could not have been more appealing" and he "wept - also like a child" (36). She felt herself "almost old enough and experienced enough to be his mother" (41) and she looks after him "as a nurse does to a sickly naughty child" (50). The lack of sexualisation in their relationship in these passages creates a safe way for Craik to raise the issues in the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act.

Furthermore, Hannah's description as "maternal" is something that extends beyond her personality, to her appearance as well. Hannah constantly perceives herself as an "old" woman and an "old maid", though she does not perceive other characters her age, such as Bernard and Lady Dunsmore, as old. This provides a sharp contrast to Bernard's other prospective suitor, Ellen Melville, who is described as "very young, very pretty, very rich" (172). Ellen, who can only be offered "not [Bernard's] love, understand; only [his] marriage" (172) therefore comes to represent shallow attraction and worldly marriages as opposed to the emotional, spiritual union Hannah and Bernard share. Hannah cannot be beautiful because that might suggest that their relationship is sexualised and based on physical attraction. As Frew argues, "in pro-reform narratives, the sister-in-law character is inevitably less attractive than the first wife, and her sexuality is suppressed" (Frew 277). In *Hannah*, it is not only Rosa who is more beautiful than Hannah. In order for her sexuality to be sufficiently suppressed, Hannah must be perceived as old and plain in comparison to any possible competitors, to once again remove the opportunities for jealousy which the detractors claimed would ruin the concept of family. In fact, Craik underlines the fact that Hannah was "utterly unlike her sister Rosa" (15) and that "no sisters could be more unlike than she and Rosa" (118-119).

Moreover, jealousy is a recurrent theme throughout this novel and throughout this debate. Craik defends against the concept of sibling jealousy through Hannah, by making her older, less vivacious and less beautiful than Rosa, but Craik does not completely abandon the concept of sibling rivalry or jealousies. Far from claiming that such jealousies could never exist, Craik uses them to advance her own cause, as is clear through the relationship between Adeline and Herbert Melville. Craik shows that it is actually because the law creates loopholes for these flirtatious behaviours that jealousy is created. As Adeline plaintively cries,

"they will all laugh at me, and say it is ridiculous nonsense; as perhaps it is. You see...he couldn't marry her, not if I were dead twenty times over. Sometimes I wish he could, and then they dared not go on as they do. I could turn her out of the house, like any other strange woman who was stealing my husband's heart from me.

(226)

Although, when she married him, Adeline thought she "could not possibly be jealous again" (227) even though she knew Herbert liked Bertha, she discovers that she is wrong. Whilst the law forbids them from marrying and makes any romantic dalliance incestuous, "there's a great deal short of doing wrong that breaks a wife's heart" (227).

Herbert, who himself came from a deceased wife's sister's marriage and who, but for "the mere chance of a marriage happening before instead of after the year 1835 ... [would have been] in the same position as poor Grace's son – a "base-born" child" (100), emblematises everything that Craik suggests is wrong with the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act as it then stood. First of all, he represents the difference in reactions to children of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act based on social appearances. Though both he and Grace's son are children of deceased wife's sister's marriages, he is widely accepted by the Rivers family as a good match, whilst Grace is seen to be disgraced because of her dalliance and illegitimate child and Hannah is advised to get rid of her.

Moreover, this wide spread acceptance of Herbert Melville highlights the legal loophole which made marriages before 1835 valid, accentuating the fact that the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act is an issue of technicalities and not morality. This point is underlined explicitly when Hannah says "[t]hen what was right one year was wrong the next? That is, to my weak womanly notions, a very extraordinary sense of justice" (93). (What these "weak womanly notions" are and represent, we will explore in more detail as we examine the religious context of the issue).

Finally, his behaviour, as well as his social standing and age, illustrate the unjustness and impracticality of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act. His flirtations with Bertha which, as we have already seen, are only permissible because of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act, are seen to kill Adeline, driving her into a "sickly ghastliness" with a "nervous, fretful look, which might be either mental or physical, probably a combination of both" (224). The Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act ends up, ironically, killing the first wife whilst making no allowances for the second wife's marriage. Contrast this to Grace's son, who, when he dies "it is best. [He] might have grown up to blame his mother for his existence" because of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act (264). This unjust law doesn't treat everyone equally; it does not balance class inequalities, it allows those before 1835 to be morally justified whilst penalising those born after, and kills innocents on both sides of the question, innocent and wronged wives, and innocent children held at fault for their parents' sins. Herbert Melville, though he is not presented as malicious in

the same way that the Rivers family is, represents the unthinking cruelty of the law, and the way it neither sees nor values the injustices in women's invisible, private lives.

Adeline and Melville's relationship is presented as a sharp contrast to the relationship of Hannah and Bernard who were not only first drawn together by Rosa but keep her memory alive through their relationship. When Hannah begins to pull Bernard out of his depression and into useful occupation around the parish once more, she invokes Rosa's name, telling him to do it "if only for Rosa's sake" (51). When Bernard wants to fire Grace, it is Hannah's assertion that Rosa would "have said exactly as I do" and kept her that sways the day (97). When they first declare their love, it is prefaced by the reference to Rosa "looking out of Paradise" at them and, it is implied, approving (174). Bernard and Hannah metaphorically bring her back to life through their relationship, in defiance of the law, whereas those who follow the strict letter of the law (Herbert and Bertha) kill Adeline. Thus, the spirit of the law, which seeks to protect the sanctity of marriage, is seen to be better fulfilled by those defying the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act than those which follow that law to the letter. This idea recurs in the next section we will look at: the disparity between true religion, which is spirituality, and canonical law.

Religion:

Elisabeth Gruner argues in 'Born and Made: Sisters, Brothers, and the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill' that the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act was only created to "placate the bishops in the House of Lords and was widely expected to be revoked the following year" (Gruner, 426). The bill was controversial, not only because of the way it brought the law of the land into line with canonical law but because interpretations of the scripture this canonical law was based on varied widely, specifically through different denominations of the Christian faith. Methodists and other Dissenters argued that prohibiting marriage with one's sister-in-law during the first wife's lifetime assumed that they would be free to marry after her death. Traditional Anglicans thought it was a lasting prohibition.

But the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act was only one of the many religious issues raised in the Victorian era. The different perceptions and interpretations of Christianity were complicated throughout this time. *On the Origin of Species* (1859) heralded a new time of theological questioning and many authors were publically engaging with controversial theological issues in their work, albeit often in less direct ways than Craik's interventionist texts. Carolyn Oulton argues in *Literature and Religion in Mid-Victorian England*, that both Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins were engaging in complex

discussions and representations of the Christian faith, particularly in regard to Evangelicalism, within their novels (Oulton 2). Martin Svaglic argues that George Eliot, though a humanist, also had a complicated relationship with religion and “though in her letters and essays, her strictures on the failures of Christianity are often keen, the treatment in her novels of all forms of religion is usually respectful ... she owed her own ethics to Christianity and she knew that she did” (Svaglic 150). These questions were echoing through society and the 1851 census exposed the fact that fewer people were going to church than ever before (Oulton, 3).

Craik also presents a complicated picture of Christianity through her novels, both explicitly by her characters’ speeches and in their characterisation. Rather than focusing on any one denomination, Craik presents both Quakers, such as the Fletchers in *John Halifax, Gentleman* Methodists, such as Grace Dixon in *Hannah*, and even Catholics in essays such as *On Sisterhoods* (1883) and her private correspondence (16th September 1878) as equally living by faith “all Christians,” sharing one hope “if believers, in the life everlasting” (Craik, 1878).²¹ But this faith is separated into various different dichotomies: not just Catholic and Protestant or Orthodox and Dissenting, but also internal and external, female and male. Male Christianity is depicted as both active and public. John’s Christianity, for example, is linked to his characterisation as an innate, true and natural gentleman, whatever his social status is. As Ursula says, it is “a Christian only [who] can be a true gentleman” (*John Halifax, Gentleman* 177). This is because the things which qualify John as a “true gentleman” (his striving, his goodness, his honesty) are also symptomatic of his Christianity.

John’s reputation precedes him when he quells the riot, and it was only because “evidently he was pretty well known” by the rioters for the things that he had done around the Tanner’s yard and town, that they stop to listen to him (89). Later, John measures the success of his life by how much influence he has had, with the “improvements at Enderley and [his] Catholic Emancipation – [his] Abolition of Slavery and [his] Parliamentary Reform – why, there is hardly any scheme for good, public or private, to which [he does] not lend a helping hand” (*John Halifax, Gentleman* 314). John must continually be active in his goodness because male Christianity must be demonstrable and public. The way that John’s

²¹ In this same letter in the Bromley Archives to an unidentified man written upon the 16th of September, 1878, Craik writes defending her own position of faith. She also writes that she would “grieve to have wounded” any Catholics “by ignorant actions or words”.

religion can be measured and is in some sense weighed by its public performance, demonstrates it as an external as well as internal presence.

The public nature of religion is not presented as positively for Craik's female characters though. Josephine in *A Brave Lady*, for instance, is characterised as "not as religious a woman as she ought to have been" (38) (especially "for a clergyman's wife") and yet Winifred Weston, the narrator, is "sure to see her in church, the only place where she ever was seen in public" (*ABL* 7). In fact Josephine's external display of religion is tied to her French identity and the Catholic undertones this repeatedly brings throughout the novel. The description of her house, Brierley Hall, is described in Catholic terms, with the stained glass windows "forming shapes not unlike crosses, one [of which was in] scarlet and blue, the sacred colours, such as old painters always gave to their Madonnas" (12) and the way Josephine cloisters herself in the hall, admitting no company until she "was as good as dead, socially speaking" (8). This comparison is made explicit when Winifred describes Josephine as "a tall figure in a dressing gown of grey flannel, not unlike a monk or a nun" who makes her "scream ... with superstitious terror" when she sees her (22).

Although the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed in 1829, the lasting fears about the 'Romanism' of the Anglican Church echoed throughout the century and were still raging when *A Brave Lady* and *Hannah* were published. Indeed, in her short piece *On Sisterhoods*, Craik writes that "British ire" is "rouse[d]...at the very name of 'nun'" (55). Although Craik is careful not to appear too approving of Catholicism, "report[ing] on the faulty practices of Catholicism" for *Good Works* in her travel writings her work often betrays an underlying sympathy with the earnestness she sees in Catholic countries and traditions which complicates her socially acceptable rhetoric (Ledbetter). This sympathy is exposed in *A Brave Lady* when Josephine returns with her family to France and makes a direct comparison between the Protestants and Catholics she finds there. Though Josephine ultimately sides with the Protestants who worship God "open-eyed and fearless hearted" she "envied those poor kneeling women praying even to a Saint or a Holy Virgin in whom they could believe" (133). Catholicism is presented as an emotional religion and therefore much more suitable to women, far from the preacher at the Protestant church who could not teach Josephine anything because her "sharp experience of life mocks all dogmatizing as mere idle words" (133).

This sympathy is also seen by the way the narrator Winifred interacts with Catholicism, though she is neither French nor Catholic. It is in predominantly Catholic terms that

Winifred's devotion to Josephine is described, compared to "a poor little nun who suddenly sees the Virgin Mary or St. Catherine step down from her niche" (14) highlighting both the vehemence and the moral purity of her love for Josephine. Ultimately, this almost idolatrous love is diverted back into conventional paths; Winifred marries at Josephine's advice and Josephine herself dies, reasserting the natural order of conventional relationships. Thus, though Craik betrays sympathy for Catholicism in her work and the driving force of emotion it allows for women, its performative aspect ultimately undermines it as a mark of true spirituality or religion. Even displays of religion that are not overtly Catholic, such as Winifred quoting Bible texts, are seen as "the "priggishness" of youth, being conceited over [her] knowledge of [her] Bible" (ABL 18). For women, religion should be implicit in their lives and not explicit through their words.

There comes a conflict here then, where the female characters must be characterised by true religion, and yet cannot display this religion in measurable ways, as these are categorised for women as "priggish" or worse, papal. Craik covers this distance by creating, in effect, two true religions, one for men and one for women, which is essentially covered by traditional female traits and can be displayed through these instead. Instead of performing Christianity traditionally, women need to be seen to be 'spiritual', which equates to feminine, instead of 'religious'.

As the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act is predominantly a female issue, with two women in the title and questions of female desire inherently raised within it, it follows that a feminine religion rather than the male orthodoxy is the more appropriate vehicle with which to approach it. Thus, Craik aligns the moral truth of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act with natural, female Christianity and not man-made, male religion. In doing so, she draws a line of comparison between women's 'natural' religion and their natural rights. Both, she implies within these texts, are subjugated by secular and canonical laws, which are artificial and leave no room for the female perception of these issues.

Female Christianity is characterised by innate feminine virtues which are translated into spirituality: beauty, sacrifice and motherhood. In *On Sisterhoods*, Craik argues that the "ardent pursuit of the Good" is most powerful when "it is allied to the Beautiful" (OS, 57). This reflects Ruskin's views that "lovely art ... is didactic in its own nature...it is didactic chiefly by being beautiful" (Ruskin, 125). In Craik's texts, this beauty is specifically the natural beauty of creation and is often tied to moral righteousness (distancing it from sexual suggestions of physical, bodily beauty). In her defence of adoption in *King Arthur*,

Susannah is seen to be spiritually right despite her defiance of social expectations because of the landscapes around her and how she reacts to them. It is no coincidence that the story opens on the “great fields of snow...like the robes of the Righteous described in Revelations [which, with] ...silence, grandeur and dazzling whiteness, was liker heaven than earth” (27). The grandeur of the scene has explicit ties to religion and sets the expectations that the novel is going to be morally upright, despite its contentious agenda. But though the ties to religion and beauty are explicit in the description of the mountains, it is just as clearly played out in their gardens of home, with Susannah having an appreciation of nature, having a “speaking acquaintance with almost every flower that grows”, whose “separate faces” are compared to the babies of the parish (21). Susannah’s love and maternal nature, through which her spirituality is most clearly seen, are tied to the natural world surrounding her.

The link between religion and nature is equally clear in *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Ursula Halifax wants to stay in Longfield where she “loved every flower in the garden, every nook and stone in the walls” (318) of their happy little cottage, and which is blessed by the remembrance of their deceased eldest daughter Muriel who acts as a picture of spiritual faith in the Halifax household. Muriel is repeatedly described in spiritual language, as a “child of peace” (291), who appears from the first to be “touched by the finger of God” (219), their “good angel” (224) who is constantly called their “blessing” (223), and who was “treated...less like the other children than like some stray spirit of another world” (264). The house and gardens where she resides are therefore doubly sacred. Muriel, amongst the other children, is pictured around these gardens “feeding their chickens and petting their doves – calling every minute on father or mother to investigate and listen to some small wonder in farmyard or garden... standing among the flower-beds, out in the sunny morning” (264). This connection with nature is reinforced time and again with the “stray spirit” child. “[Spring] was the season she enjoyed most – the time of the singing of birds, and the delicate-scented flowers. [Even Phineas] never loved the beech wood better than did our Muriel” (282). Muriel, who appreciates nature despite being blind, wishes to “sit all day and hear the birds sing” (223) when they first go to Longfield. Despite being unable to see the beauty of nature Muriel is often connected to it, placed into tableaux for the reader’s and, indeed, for her parents’, Phineas’ and Lord Ravenel’s pleasure. Muriel is seen through nature and it is through this connection to nature that her parents are connected to her after her death. Therefore, it is through nature that they are also connected back to a spiritual life, and their moral position is once again underlined for the reader.

This beauty of creation emphasises the rightness of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act in *Hannah* by a direct contrast between the landscapes. In European countries, marriages between men and their deceased wives' sisters were legal, and the comparison between France and the United Kingdom within *Hannah* highlights this. The language which is used to describe France, where such marriages were legal, is full of natural garden descriptions which underscore the natural motherhood Craik is trying to portray. The "refuge" Hannah runs to is "a pleasant place to lie in", a "Green, shady, shut-in nook...full of long, low espaliers, heavy with Normandy pears. There were masses of brilliant autumn flowers, French and African marigolds, zinnias and so on" (265). This harvest time scene is contrasted with the English garden, with the "breath of spring" which "stirred through the half-budded lilac-tree", through which Hannah and Bernard walked with a "gentle reticence of manner to one another" (187). Hannah and Bernard's feelings were still developing, reflected in the half-opened buds, but by autumn they had bloomed into "masses of brilliant autumn flowers". Craik here deliberately focuses on the abundance of autumn, the harvesting of fruit trees and late-blooming flowers. This is a clear allusion to Hannah, who refers to herself as a "born old maid" (12). Hannah's second chance at life, her late-blooming flower, comes from her marriage to her deceased sister's husband and through it, her chance at mothering Rosie, her niece. Gardens are used figuratively to represent the natural maternity of women within Craik's work to fight for progressive ideals whilst maintaining a non-controversial demeanour. The beauty of the garden is seen as a comparison to the beauty of natural law.

It should be noted that appreciating beauty is a largely passive act, both for the watcher and the watched. As opposed to Craik's depictions of male Christianity, where John Halifax and Arthur Trevena both strive to have an outward effect on the wider world, female Christianity is presented as much more passive. Women react to the landscapes they are put in, not act upon them. Rather than actively pursuing faith, female Christianity is rooted in a passive subservience, such as Ursula Halifax shows. Ultimately, Ursula's spiritual connection to the nature around her and her deceased eldest daughter is pushed into subservience to John's wishes. John's religion must enact itself in social service and outward shows so his opinion is prioritised, as he can "widen [their] circle of usefulness" (318) and do "something of use in the world" (314) in the larger estate.

Passivity is also a key part of the second tenement of female Christianity: sacrifice. Whilst Ursula's true religion is demonstrated through her love of natural beauty and the way it links her back to her children, it is also demonstrated in self-sacrifice. The constant

subversion of her will to John's, her children's and even strangers in her home, is seen as a mark of her spirituality. Even Josephine who is "not as religious a woman as she ought to have been" is seen to have spiritual qualities through her continual sacrifice to her husband and children. Josephine too is called to sacrifice the house she loves, Oldham Court, "to slip the dear, safe anchor of home, and go drifting about upon the wide world" for her husband and children (130).²² By placing herself under the authority of one who is seen as inferior morally, intellectually and emotionally to her, Josephine's own spirituality grows. By sacrificing, not only herself but the whole family to his selfishness, Josephine is presented as spiritually stronger than if she had defied him, and when she goes into poverty to shield Edward from it, it makes her look "like an angel just dropped from the sky" (38). The contrast between Edward's selfishness and Josephine's sacrifice is seen repeatedly throughout the text, when Edward Scanlan has lavender kid gloves that would have "bought Master César two pairs of boots, or the mistress a new bonnet" (35) and when Josephine sells a pearl brooch so that Edward can go to London, even though they cannot afford César's education (66). By enabling Edward's selfish disregard, Josephine is growing her own spirituality, and this is presented positively throughout this text because sacrifice, for women, is essentially denial, and therefore spirituality can only grow through lacking things they need or want. Although self-sacrifice was also perceived as a male outworking of Christianity, for men it is seen as "self-discipline" which is characterised as "aggressive self-mastery" and therefore still an active striving, as compared to the "feminine self-denial" which is an "essentially static surrender of the will to external authority" (qtd Oulton 52).

It comes as no surprise then that Hannah is also called to make these sacrifices in the line of her Christian duty throughout the novel. The pinnacle of these sacrifices comes when she offers Rosie back to Bernard, and thus, having given away her last reason for living, is ready to lay down and die (301). This ultimate sacrifice is repaid at last by Bernard, who, in also sacrificing the things he loves for Rosie's sake, creates a kind of equality within their relationship at last. These sacrifices are explicitly declared to be equal in value as Bernard's sacrifice of "giv[ing] up England forever [and h]is profession likewise" was "as hard for him

²² Again, the parallels between the idealised "perfect" marriage of Ursula and John and the unhappy marriage of Josephine and Edward are startling and seem suggestive, although I do not have room to make a full analysis of it in this chapter.

as Hannah's renunciation of Rosie had been for her" (302).²³ Through the example of true feminine Christianity in sacrifice, Hannah is able to lead Bernard to sacrifice too, and thus is rewarded with a happy and more equal relationship.

Most of all, however, the true nature of female Christianity is demonstrated in the picture of motherhood, which is constantly characterised in Victorian society as being both beautiful and sacrificial, and therefore exemplifies both of the other key aspects of female Christianity. Motherhood was not just an expected part of a woman's life; it was seen both as her ultimate purpose and as her most desired wish. Craik has already used the expectation that women are natural mothers to defend adoption. Here she presents it as a part of their innate spirituality and the out-working of their female Christianity. Their faith is perfected in motherhood, and their motherhood is perfected through their faith.²⁴ The idea of motherhood being synonymous with female religion is not just found in Craik's work. In Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) upon learning that she is about to become a mother, the eponymous heroine cries out "Oh, my God, I thank thee! Oh, I will be so good!" (117). The child is depicted as "God's messenger to lead her back to Him" (118) and signals the turning point in Ruth's life. Children, depicted as innocent babes, are used as God's messengers, whilst the motherhood they bring is seen to fulfil a woman's true purpose and therefore give her a deeper spiritual meaning which brings her back to God. Nina Auerbach writes that "motherhood was not merely a biological fact, but a spiritual essence inseparable from pure womanhood" (Auerbach, 174). This "spiritual essence" is inseparable from their femininity and must form a core part of their female Christianity then.²⁵

Ironically, the maternal nature of female Christianity is rooted in the same ideals as "Mariolatry" a pejorative term coined by Protestants in the 17th century to describe the

²³ Self sacrifice can actually be depicted as a resistance; the refusal of a socially weaker person to distance themselves from their perceived duties despite the outcome is a show of moral strength and gives them the moral high-ground and victory in an otherwise un-winnable situation.

²⁴ It is for this reason, perhaps, that so often mothers are missing from novels. Perfect motherhood allows no space for error or crises which move the plot along. Motherhood, idealised as it is, cannot be pictured as anything other than perfect.

²⁵ It is perhaps ironic then, given that motherhood was seen as not only essential to a woman's innate femininity but also her spirituality and Christian faith, that by law her children were in her husband's custody by right. Even after Caroline Norton successfully campaigned for the Infant Custody Bill, she only won the right for women to petition the court for custody in extreme circumstances. The norm would still be for fathers' to have custody of their children even after this bill was passed. This is something that is obliquely hinted at in *A Brave Lady*, when the narrator says that "though [she] was motherless, [her] mother was not dead" (9). Josephine's "unmistakable motherly air" (9) means that she must do what is best for children and not for herself.

Catholic veneration of the Virgin Mary. In Catholic traditions, the Virgin Mary is seen as a merciful substitute and intercessor to God to plead on people's behalf, and her maternal nature is, of course, a key part of her character. The fact that the female half of Protestant Christianity was so closely tied to motherhood has uncomfortable overtones for a society which is "roused to ire" at the very mention of Catholicism. Therefore, Craik had to present this female religion as distinct both from Catholicism and from rigid, orthodox Protestantism. By focusing on fluid emotions rather than rigid strictures of organised religion, Craik was able to forge out a new space for female Christianity in the religious debates.

This religious motherhood is consistently seen in *Hannah*. Whilst Hannah daydreams during Bernard's sermons (because they are not very good) she is still thinking spiritual thoughts, thinking about Rosie who is "*her* living Bible, her visible revelation of Him who was once, like Rosie, a Christmas child" (171). Her motherhood is the vehicle through which her faith can be seen. The comparison of Christ to Rosie as a "Christmas child" is also important. Christ, the central figure of Christianity is depicted as a child, and not as an adult saviour. This enables women to relate to Christianity through their innate role of mothers, creating a narrative which already fits their essential feminine traits already.

The characters of Hannah and Bernard form a direct contrast to each other, embodying not only the difference between male and female Christianity but between strong and weak religion. Ironically, perhaps, it is Hannah's feminine spirituality that is presented as strong whilst Bernard, who does not conform to typical gender roles and is often characterised as a child, is seen to be a weak representative of male Christianity, for all that he is a clergyman. Bernard's spiritual weakness is significant within the novel as Craik uses it to demonstrate that following the rigours of canonical law does not make one's Christianity stronger. As "he had said himself ... that he felt not the slightest interest in his sermons, and only did them mechanically, not believing them at all" (57). Although Bernard strictly upholds canonical law, refusing to marry Jim and Grace Dixon who go to London to wed instead, and maintains the expectations of a clergyman (preaching sermons and attending the parish at Hannah's insistence) his role is not active. By the end of the book, however, Hannah has converted him to a less acceptable but truer religious framework.

It is only as Bernard strays further from passive acceptance of canonical law, and into an active defiance of it, that his male Christianity becomes evident. The zenith of his spiritual

enlightenment is found when he has at last left the symbolic fatherland and the patriarchal ties of family to start a new life on the continent, achieving a new level of masculinity, as is demonstrated by his new found energy and zeal. Whilst his old life had been full of “absorbing and pitifully absorbed grief” (37) with an “aimless, useless life” (50) neglecting the parish, when he moves to France he “open[s] up new paths for himself and carr[ies] them out nobly” in hope “to live in content and die in honour” (303). As he actively defies the church law, Bernard also becomes more active in other areas of his life too, and this purposeful action is more in line with male Christianity than his passive role of clergyman. Furthermore, the comparison between the national country and the familial home is made explicit by Lady Dunsmore, when she says “To break your country’s law...and then expect its protection, is like disobeying one’s father. We must do it - if compelled by his unjust exactions - but we ought to quit his house first” (302). Bernard becomes a man as he leaves his fatherland, the symbolic father’s house, leaving behind his child-like nature and growing into responsibilities. He embodies “manly Christianity” as he changes, through defiance not acceptance. His action, even if that action is an act of defiance, is seen to be more positive than a passive acceptance of canonical law.

He has had to be “excommunicated- that is, suspended” (248) from formalised religion because of his marriage and moral beliefs, but he becomes a more Christian man through it. The fact that Bernard first uses the Catholic term “excommunicated” starkly draws the comparison between the rigidity of the Anglican church and the Roman Church. His relationship to the church is defined not through faith but through tradition. Thus, ultimately, Bernard Rivers is seen not only as the clergyman but also as the parabolic life, the “house on the hill” for all to see and learn from, as Craik repeatedly underlines in the text.

In contrast to Bernard’s growing Christianity, Hannah is a paradigm of female Christianity from the start. Her female faith is continually made explicit throughout the text through displays of spirituality and not through traditional expressions of organised religion. Hannah’s female Christianity is seen to preach “better than the clergyman” (203). She is set apart by Craik as a truly spiritual character, one who embodies all the essential feminine traits that are equitable to female Christianity, juxtaposed as a contrast to the rigours of strict canonical law. Hannah is described as having “a certain spiritual charm” (306) and as being “a combination of the angel and the child” (307), an image emphasised by her physical descriptions. Although Hannah is never described as beautiful (for this might stray dangerously into suggestions of desire) her innate female Christianity has seeped through

to her whole appearance. She is described as having a “pure face...because no wear and tear of human passion troubled its ecclesiastical peace” (121). Her spirituality is not only a part of her character, it is a part of her attraction too. Bernard is drawn to her not through desire, but because of her spirituality.

Hannah has an innate and natural spiritual truth, which is connected to the naturalness of femininity, as opposed to the artifice of man, and forms judgements instinctively based on what is right and wrong. Hannah’s truth, though she is not a clergyman, is the same as “God’s truth” whose “right and wrong are much simpler than man’s” (202). Though she is rejected by society, she is confident that she will not be rejected by God because she has the moral high ground. “If I sit in the free seats or in the aisle, I must go to church. It is God’s house; He will not drive me from it; He knows I have done nothing wrong” (193). Hannah’s spiritual moral judgements become particularly clear through the issue of Grace Dixon. When investigating the logic and fallacies of the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Act, Hannah has already formed her opinions before she uses her Bible to discover what it actually says. She says “Who made it so, God or man?” (143) before getting down a Concordance and “search[ing] out all the texts which bore upon the subject, but found none except that prohibition adduced once by Mrs Dixon...of which the straightforward, natural interpretation was that, consequently [marrying one's sister-in-law] might be done after her [sister's] death” (144). The fact that she is posing the question at all implies she is questioning the orthodox interpretation of the law, supposing the canonical law to be man-made and therefore fallible. She has an innate spirituality which shows her the right way instinctively before she looks up the law. The same freedom is not available to the male religion with its rigid structure and laws. As Bernard says, “Oh, we care quite as much for the law as the gospel, we clergymen” (248).

The issue of innate maternity is also a key argument in the defence of the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Act. Thus, Craik uses the perception of female Christianity as maternal in order to defend the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Act. Once again, Craik takes conservative ideals and translates them into a progressive agenda, maintaining respectability whilst defying canonical law and the establishment. Craik was, once again, not forging new ground here, but she was using current arguments in society to help forward progressive ideals in a subtle and careful way. Craik uses the characterisation of beauty, sacrifice and motherhood as true female Christianity as a weapon against the rigid orthodoxy of the church against the Deceased Wife’s Sister’s Marriage Act in *Hannah*. She used the same recurrent themes as she used in previous interventionist texts, contrasting

socially constructed laws (in this case, canonical laws) with natural laws, demonstrating how the artificial rigors of society oppress women's private lives and their innate spirituality. By linking the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act with the natural, spiritual law of women, Craik defends this controversial argument in a respectable way without lingering on the issues of incest and female desire that made it so contentious.

Conclusion:

Craik's turn towards interventionist literature was reflected in her contemporary reception as an author, as well as in the backlash against "Victorian values" in the early twentieth century, when she was rejected as "exemplify(ing) the worst elements of Victorian stereotype(s)" and fell from the canon (Mitchell *The Victorian Web*). Craik's exemplification of these Victorian stereotypes, especially those surrounding respectable femininity, were not as simple as they appeared however, but were used to transport a subversive message more widely throughout respectable society. In fact, Craik knowingly places the femininity of her work in direct juxtaposition to other contemporary female authors, characterising it as a moral tool rather than a literary endeavour, as is demonstrated by her review of Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, entitled 'To Novelists – and a novelist' in Macmillan's Magazine (1861). Craik appeals to Eliot after praising the quality of her work, asking but "what good will it do? ... and what is the answer. Silence". Craik believed that a novel ought to instruct and improve its readers by appealing to their "heart, reason, and fancy". She set up her novels as feminine tools, designed to appeal to women from female perspectives, in order to intervene in female centred legislation. Craik sought to make public the hidden, private lives of women and to influence the laws to change these private lives. This is a very appropriate weapon, for, as Judith Lowder Newton argues, women were persuaded to trade power for influence to maintain their femininity. Here, Craik uses that influence as strongly as she can, wielding women's private weapons in a public arena to intervene in these legal issues which affected women's private lives. But this use of her literature as a tool for virtue and social change devalued Craik's work amongst its peers. Though Mitchell argues that Craik was at first regarded on a par with Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, often mentioned in the same contemporary critical reviews, she was later re-evaluated as belonging "to the second rank of women novelists, and in that rank to a place slightly below Charlotte Yonge or Margaret Oliphant" (Mitchell). In fact, George Eliot was famously indignant about a comparison between them, claiming that Craik was "a writer who is only read by novel-readers" and who "belong(ed) to an entirely different order of writers" than Eliot herself (qtd Haight 302). This undervaluing of her work is a consistent theme throughout Craik's legacy, and even during her lifetime, and has led to her being overlooked as an important example for later female writers.

Part of the reason for Craik's undervaluing is her consistent presentation of her ideals, works and indeed herself, as traditional and conservative, despite the sometimes controversial content of her work. We have already examined in depth how Craik used

conservative ideals, such as biological essentialism and women's natural maternity, as weapons against other conservative standpoints (such as the Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act and anti-adoption stances). The conservatism which protected Craik's reputation as a woman and an author, ultimately worked against her lasting legacy. As with the use of domesticity and time, instead of making women's work more valued in its visibility, its very presence in Craik's texts devalued her writing as 'woman's' writing. This same reciprocal relationship is evident through her use of conservatism - instead of forwarding progressive ideals in her own society, she is labelled as illiberal after her death. Nor is this issue unique to Craik. As Showalter argues, "Misled by the public anti-feminism of many female novelists, scholars have ignored the deeper context of the books, and the devices by which sentimental narratives articulated female conflict about achievement and affiliation" (Showalter 5).

Therefore Craik has, in some ways, done her work too well. Instead of using conservative arguments to augment a liberal agenda in fresh ways, it has become her identity as an author. The backlash which followed her work after her death, which consigned her to the limited scope of "Victorian Values", especially focusing on her vocal disavowal of women's suffrage, over-simplifies the work which she was doing for women's rights. Her complication of these social issues and the way in which she intermingles them with political language, using her novels as political weapons as well as reflecting their political values, is overlooked because of her traditional and respectable demeanour within them. This means that, for later authors, she was over-looked as a template for feminist authors. As Virginia Woolf argues in *A Room of One's Own*, "masterpieces are not single and solitary births", they are built on the back of previous female writers (Woolf 64). But Woolf believed that female authors "had no tradition behind them, or one so short and partial that it was of little help" (Woolf 74). And yet, despite this longing for clear female role models in literature, writers like Craik are disregarded because they do not seem to fit the mould of acceptable female role model.

But it is not always as simple as Showalter would make it. Although there does seem to be a complicated dichotomy between what Craik outwardly avows and the message her stories actually portray, the distinction is not always clear cut. Rather than a secret code for her female readers masterfully manipulated, Craik does not always accurately or insightfully examine her own biases or tensions, presenting the status quo without too much critical analysis. It therefore becomes difficult for the modern critic to distinguish between what Craik must avow to keep up her respectable reputation and what she has

unwittingly absorbed from the ideology of the society she is living in. There is a textual unconscious which betrays a dissonance between the ideals she is utilising and the ideals she believes, but where this line is actually drawn is impossible to retroactively decide.

Craik is not merely the embodiment of an ideal. Like all authors, she doesn't fit neatly into any one category. Her ability to straddle different issues, distancing herself from the suffragette movement whilst also arguing for individual women's rights on legal and domestic debates, complicates her as a female author. Nonetheless, for Craik, a novel's primary purpose was to do good, and examining her texts within the light of the debates they intervened in, regardless of whether or not she can be held to be a feminist role-model, Craik's texts would not answer "silence" to that famous question; "What good do they do?"

Appendix



Truly they made a pleasn picture.

Figure 1: original illustration included in *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Reproduced unattributed in the Nonsuch Classics edition, 2005.

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