

Representations of Women in Harriet Martineau's Political Activism for the
Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 19th Century Britain

Nea Ristimäki

Maisterintutkielma

Historian maisteriohjelma

Humanistinen tiedekunta

Helsingin yliopisto

Huhtikuu 2022

Tiivistelmä

Tiedekunta: Humanistinen tiedekunta

Koulutusohjelma: Historian maisteriohjelma

Opintosuunta: Historia, suomenkielinen opintosuunta

Tekijä: Nea Ristimäki

Työn nimi: Representations of Women in Harriet Martineau's Political Activism for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 19th-Century Britain

Työn laji: Maisterintutkielma

Kuukausi ja vuosi: Huhtikuu 2022

Sivumäärä: 69

Avainsanat: The Contagious Diseases Acts, prostitution, women's movement, gender, representation, Harriet Martineau, Britain, 19th century

Ohjaaja tai ohjaajat: Anu Lahtinen, Soile Ylivuori

Säilytyspaikka: Helsingin yliopiston kirjasto

Muita tietoja:

Tiivistelmä:

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the representations of women in the activism of 19th-century freethinking feminists and the underlying motives thereof. I analyse the representations offered by Harriet Martineau in her writings on the Contagious Diseases Acts – legislation regulating prostitution – consisting of the four letters to the *London Daily News* in 1869, electoral placards and personal letters written c. 1871. In examining the different representations of women, I use content analysis to categorise Martineau's rhetoric in her writings on the middle-class activists and lower-class sex workers.

The three key concepts for this thesis are freethought, gender, and representation. By freethought I refer to the ideology of the organized 19th-century secularist movement that lobbied for the separation of political, cultural, and moral life from religion. I use the term gender as theorized by Joan Scott, conceptualising it as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences and as a way of signifying relationships of power. In utilizing the term representation, I use Stuart Hall's definition of representation as "the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning".

The representations of women in Martineau's writings on the Acts are varied and conflicting. I identify three representations of middle-class women: self-sacrificing patriots, moral guardians, and intellectual educators. Each is used to justify women's move into politics. The emphasis on self-sacrifice and moral guardianship employs the dominant ideology of femininity in which women were passive but at the centre of the morality of the nation. However, at the same time Martineau challenges the dominant idea of femininity in presenting the female activists as active agents and intelligent educators.

I identify three representations of lower-class sex workers: passive victims, sinners, and fellow English women. In the victimizing rhetoric, Martineau utilizes the common idea of the sex worker's fallenness to evoke sympathy. However, she never differentiates between the sex workers by virtue, presenting all as victims of society. Most radically she portrays them as English women, equal subjects of the British law. This egalitarian representation challenges the hierarchical structure underpinning the victimizing rhetoric.

I suggest Martineau's representations draw from two distinct aspects: her middle-class background and her freethinking mission of bettering society through education. Her moral background explains the more traditional depictions of women. However, I argue that her belief in necessarianism motivates her egalitarian view of sex workers as fellow Englishwomen. I suggest that Martineau's over-arching agenda was to educate the public. This is apparent in her appeals to the duty of citizens to learn and enlighten others.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. Secularist ideals in Martineau’s writings	10
1.1 Martineau’s secularism in previous research.....	10
1.2 Secularist ideals in Martineau’s activism.....	13
2. Representations of middle-class women	17
2.1. “True-hearted Englishwomen”: Women as patriots	18
2.2 Mothers & Matrons: Women as moral guardians.	25
2.3 “The most distinguished for intelligence and culture”.....	29
3. Representations of working-class sex workers	33
3.1 “Victims of the vice of men”: Sex workers as the sufferers	34
3.2. “The real sinners”: Defining the prostitute	39
3.3. “Our countrywomen”: Sex workers as equals.....	43
4. Martineau’s political aims and motives	48
4.1 The moral reformist signs in Martineau’s writings.....	49
4.2 Bettering society through eradication of ignorance	57
Conclusion	61
Sources and literature	65
Primary sources	65
Research literature	66

Introduction

The Victorian period (c. 1837–1901) was an age of great reform in Britain, with people aspiring to improve the existing social conditions. Especially women rallied one another to partake in the discourse on the inequalities between the sexes – such as unequal education opportunities and marriage laws.¹ By doing so women ultimately contested the existing gender constructs – to a certain amount – and redefined female roles.² The women’s rights movement was one of the century’s greatest movements in Britain and an international phenomenon by the turn of the century.

Religion often served as the driving force for social and political activism.³ However, religion itself was not exempt from increasing calls for reform. By the mid-century, many new denominations had emerged alongside the state’s Anglican religion. Renouncing one’s faith became another phenomenon of the time, and the secularist movement was a small but prominent part of Victorian society.⁴

The connections between early feminism and religion have been widely researched and it has been proven that religion offered women a platform for political activism.⁵ In recent feminist studies, the activism of freethinking women has remained relatively unexplored. However, the feminism of the 19th- and early 20th-century, though predominantly Christian, nevertheless relied on religious controversy and contestation. Women’s rights discourses developed in the extensive debate between secularist and Christian feminists, which reveals the importance of anti-religious culture to the feminism of the time.⁶

Due to the little attention paid to secular women’s activism, the construction of female gender in 19th century women’s activism has been exclusively viewed through the lens of Christian women.⁷ Thus, the primary focus of this thesis is to study how secularly grounded women’s rights activists constructed the female subjects of their politics. My main research questions are:

¹ Vicinus 1972, xiv-xv.

² For example, Ichikawa 2015, 108.

³ Melnyk 2008, 103.

⁴ Melnyk 2008, 4-6.

⁵ Walkowitz 1980, 122.

⁶ Schwartz 2013, 2.

⁷ For example, representation of sex workers and lower-class women has been researched in Josephine Butler’s writings.

1. What kind of representations of female gender can be detected in the political activism of freethinking women? Do they differ from that of Christian women's activism?
2. What is the political purpose of these representations, what are the motives behind them?

THESIS FOCUS

The focal point of this study lies on the representations of women in secularly grounded women's activism against the Contagious Diseases Acts (C.D. Acts), which was an important issue for the women's movement, and can be regarded as a starting point for feminist political organization.⁸

I will examine the different representations of women through the writings of a prominent freethinking Victorian writer and political activist Harriet Martineau (1802–1876). Her diverse work provides an excellent topic for research. For example, her writings on abolitionism, economics and disability have been covered in many different studies, in which her prominent presence in the American abolition movement, contributions to classical economy and sociological insight on disability have been thoroughly examined.⁹ However, the focus on the C.D. Acts is appropriately narrow in scope for a master's thesis.

The timeline of this thesis concerns the period between 1869 and -1880 – the years during which the C.D. Acts were implemented, expanded and the protest against them was at its height. In the 1860s, when Martineau wrote her letters on the Acts, she had already renounced her Christian faith over a decade before and converted to atheism¹⁰; this allows her writings to be analysed as secular activism and contrasted with its religious counterpart. My main point of comparison will be to the religiously motivated activism of Josephine Butler.

Similar legislation took place in many countries, but this thesis focuses on the representations of British women; after all, Martineau's letters are directed to the British audience, especially to English women.

⁸ Walkowitz 1980, 91.

⁹ These topics have been covered, for instance, by Anna Deborah Logan (2007), John Vint & Keiko Funaki (2017) and Mary Jo Deegan (2002).

¹⁰ Melnyk 2008, 151.

SOURCES AND METHODS

The primary sources used are the four letters on the Contagious Diseases Acts published in the *London Daily news* in December 1869, written by Harriet Martineau under the alias Englishwoman.¹¹ In addition to the letters of 1869, I will be using the excerpts – consisting of electoral placards and personal letters, originally collected in the only biography sanctioned by Martineau: *Memorials of Harriet Martineau* – reprinted in *Harriet Martineau on women* (1985) edited by Gayle Graham Yates. *Memorials* was written by Martineau’s American friend Maria Weston Chapman (1806–1885) and was published in 1876 after Martineau’s death.

Due to their political nature, Martineau’s letters are a problematic primary source. Their purpose was to advance the agenda of the Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (LNA) and, as such, they are liable to being misleading. Using excerpts from a biography as a primary source is not methodologically straightforward either, for there is always a chance that the biographer has – unconsciously or on purpose – fabricated the events of her subject’s life.

However, as Deborah Logan writes in the introduction of the 2015 publication of the *Memorials*, Chapman’s intention was to write the *Memorials* strictly in Martineau’s view. Chapman believed that a biographer’s duty was to “present the subject’s character simply and clearly, allowing it to speak for itself”.¹² In view of this, the justification of using material from the *Memorials* as a source for studying representations of women in Martineau’s writing is plainly established, as the objective of this study is to examine not how “things truly happened” but rather Martineau’s discursive representations and thought patterns; for this task the letters, and writings in *Memorials* are purposeful.

More importantly, *Memorials* is an important source because it includes many writings that were later destroyed. As Logan writes: “Memorials of Harriet Martineau is significant for-- it is based on materials not available elsewhere, the original journals, letters, and other papers having been

¹¹ Martineau had written on the topic of the C.D. Acts before in the beginning of the decade and her previous letters written in 1863 are often credited as the “first shots fired” in the repeal campaign. However, those letters are not purposeful for this study as they mostly centre the health of soldiers in the garrison towns where the Acts were first implemented. Weiner 2017, 165.

¹² Logan 2015, Introduction to the volume.

provided to Chapman by Martineau on the condition that they then be returned or destroyed".¹³ This makes Chapman's biography an invaluable asset to a Martineau scholar.

I have categorized the information found in the sources using the methodological tools of qualitative content analysis. As a form of text analysis, it is used to find the presence and meanings of and relationships between words, themes, or concepts.¹⁴ Content analysis is used to make the fragmented material into a clear and coherent totality that can provide information about the subject at hand. The qualitative treatment of the primary sources is based on logical deduction in which the material is first dismantled then conceptualized and reassembled into a logical entity.¹⁵ Using this method I have mapped groups of recurring themes adjacent to the construction of female gender found in Martineau's writings and examined the meanings which they give to them.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Women's secular activism has not been very widely researched. Laura Schwartz's *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation, England 1830-1914* (2013) is important in illuminating the work of freethinking women in the secularist movement. She demonstrates how significant role the freethinking feminist played in the women's movement, for example in the repeal effort, and argues that late 19th-century and early 20th-century feminism was built on religious controversy. Nonetheless, she leaves the freethinking feminists uncommitted to the secularist movement out of the scope of her research, leaving room for studying the freethought of feminist freethinkers outside the organized secularist movement and examining how they contributed to the formation of the wider women's movement.

Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (1980), Nina Attwood's *The Prostitutes Body: Rewriting Prostitution in Victorian Britain* (2011) as well as Lynda Nead's *Myths of Sexuality: Representation of Women in Victorian Britain* (1988) all shed light on the discourses around Victorian prostitution, sexuality and the 19th-century British culture.

Walkowitz is one of the first scholars to note the power dynamics of the middle-class repealers and the lower-class sex workers. She argues that many women moved into sex work voluntarily

¹³ Logan 2015, Introduction to the volume.

¹⁴ Columbia University, "Content Analysis".

¹⁵ Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2017, 90-91.

given their slim work opportunities, and demonstrates how the common rhetoric of victimhood, for example, was a tactic used by the repealers to gain political justification and power.

Attwood dives deeper into the repeal rhetoric of Josephine Butler specifically examining how she characterized prostitution and what she contributed to the discourse surrounding the Victorian prostitute. She observes the traditional tropes of motherhood and sisterhood in Butler's writings and notes the ambivalence of Butler's representations in which the prostitute is presented both as a passive victim and an active agent in her own destruction.

Nead's work offers an overall view on the broad discourses on prostitution in the Victorian period. She analyses how the Victorian middle-class culture in particular affected the composing of the images of prostitution and argues that it was the middle-class moral ideology which induced the two most prominent representations of prostitutes, those of sex workers as a powerful national threat and as fallen victims of upper-class men.

These studies are significant for the examination of representations of prostitutes, however, they mostly focus on the most distinct representations of sex workers and repealers presented by Christian activists and philanthropists, such as Josephine Butler. I attempt to add to their findings by focusing on the representations offered by a freethinking feminist and analysing the complex ways in which the dominant Victorian moral culture is both supported and challenged in these representations.

Furthermore, I attempt to offer another interpretation of Harriet Martineau's beliefs and how they affected her activism to add to the previous research on Martineau by, for example, Deborah Logan (2002), Caroline Roberts (2002), Meghan Hattaway (2012) and Valerie Sanders & Gaby Weiner (2017).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS.

The Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 were special legislation enacted to control the spread of venereal disease in Britain. The first statute was introduced exclusively in port and garrison towns in 1864 in the hope of preventing the spread of diseases among enlisted men. The

Acts also served a moral purpose: they were believed to reduce prostitution and venereal diseases, thus elevating the moral standing of society.¹⁶

Under the Acts, a woman could be identified as a “common prostitute” by a policeman and forced to undergo an internal examination by a doctor. If found suffering from a venereal disease, she would be placed in a certified lock hospital for treatment. If a woman resisted the arrest or the examination, she would be brought before the local magistrates and would face the possibility of a jail sentence, on top of having to prove her virtuousness.¹⁷

Organized public agitation against the acts rose as late as 1869 in response to efforts to extend the Acts. Two prominent organizations for the repeal of the Acts were formed quite close to each other. The National Association was born first and its exclusion of women led to the birth of a parallel but separate female association: The Ladies’ National Association.¹⁸

The LNA’s protests’ main points and goals were announced in the four letters by Martineau published in the Daily News. The last letter also listed the members of the organization. They were mostly middle-aged middle-class women who were unified by religious affiliations and strong social conscience. The organization is best remembered for its charismatic leader and the face of the battle against the C.D. Acts: Josephine Butler.¹⁹

In the 1870s, the publicity around the repeal movement grew and other organizations against the acts were formed. The movement tried to influence public opinion about the Acts by organizing public meetings, petition campaigns and electoral leagues. They also published a great deal of propaganda and statistical evidence against the Acts. The LNA’s women even included rescue work – in which missionaries visited streets and brothels in order to persuade sex workers to enter a refuge or a penitentiary²⁰ – in their repeal efforts and means of furthering their political goals.²¹

Due to the social pressure brought about by the campaigns, the Acts were eventually overturned in the 1880s. First, the internal examination of prostitutes was forbidden, and in 1886, the Contagious Diseases Acts were wholly repealed.²²

¹⁶ Walkowitz 1980, 1, 72.

¹⁷ Walkowitz 1980, 2.

¹⁸ Walkowitz 1980, 91-93.

¹⁹ Walkowitz 1980, 122.

²⁰ Nead 1988, 199.

²¹ Walkowitz 1980, 91, 94, 131.

²² Walkowitz 1980, 98-99.

CRUCIAL CONCEPTS AND STRUCTURE

Representation is a crucial concept for this thesis' research questions, and thus needs clarification. In this thesis I will apply the reduced form of the concept offered by Stuart Hall in his book *Representation* first published in 1997. According to Hall, the definition of representation in its simplest form is that "representation is the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning". This notion entails the important premise that meaning is not fixed but ever changing.²³ Thus, meaning can be – and often is – contested, which means that power is always present in meaning making.

I chose this simple definition from the plethora presented by Hall, for it is the most appropriate in the scope of this thesis, which focuses on rhetoric, meaning and meaning making, and not, for example, wider discourses.²⁴ However, historical context as well as power are considered as fundamental elements in this definition as well.

In studying the representation of women, gender is naturally one of the key concepts. In this thesis I turn to Joan W. Scott's theorization of gender which she constructed in her famous essay *Gender, a useful category for historical analysis* (1986).

In Scott's definition, gender is seen firstly as a "constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" and secondly as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power".²⁵

Scott's second proposition, gender as way to signify power relationships, is where she offers her theory of gender. Scott understands power in the terms of the historian and philosopher Michel Foucault as "dispersed constellations of unequal relationships, discursively constituted".²⁶ She theorizes that gender is the field within which – or by means of which– these relationships are articulated.²⁷ She argues that gender is a crucial part of the organization of equality or inequality and points out that "hierarchical structures rely on generalized understandings of the so-called

²³ Hall 2013, 45.

²⁴ For a more wider work on representations in discourses Foucault's discursive approach, which focuses on the distribution of power and knowledge as well as the importance of historical context in representation, would be applicable. Hall 2013, 30-32.

²⁵ Scott 2006, 141.

²⁶ Scott 2006, 133.

²⁷ Scott 2006, 142.

natural relationship between male and female”.²⁸ Thus in constructing gender, power is also constructed and consolidated.

Scott’s Foucauldian conception of gender as signifier of social hierarchies - and her description of the constructive process thereof – provides a compelling and effective analytical tool. Inspired by Scott’s theory of gender, I will attempt to map out the processes of constructing female gender in Martineau’s writings and extract the relationships of power in her activism.

One important concept in this work is secularism which in the 19th century was understood as the ideology of the secularists — also referred to as freethinkers. They were people, often apostates, who dedicated their life to ridding society of what they saw as a repressive belief-system.²⁹ Secularism was deeply rooted in anti-religiousness that lobbied for the separation of political, cultural and moral life from religion. Freethinkers did not, however, always consider themselves atheists – there were agnostics, unitarians and other dissenters in the movement as well. Nonetheless, they shared the tendency to question the religious assumptions of the ordering of the world and rejection of all forms of organized religion.³⁰ The concept of materialism, together with science (in opposition to religion), was a crucial aspect of secularist intellectual identity.³¹

Harriet Martineau did not distinctly define herself as an atheist or an agnostic, but her beliefs reveal her worldview to be that of an atheist, as will be demonstrated in chapter one. She never associated herself with the secularist movement, but her writings show that her thoughts were very similar to that of 19th-century secularism. For the secularists, Martineau was a “Great Heroine” of freethought, and they were eager to claim her as one of their own.³²

In this study I attempt to refer to Martineau as an atheist and a freethinker, not a secularist, for – as noted by Schwartz – it implies allegiance to organized freethought³³, which Martineau never professed. However, I refer to Martineau’s beliefs as similar to the secularist ideology. Generally, I refer to all women involved in the repealing of the Contagious Diseases Acts as repealers.

One influential aspect behind the C.D. Acts is the moral reform, or purity movement. Moral reform was a movement against prostitution and “vice” which followed the repeal of the C.D. Acts in the

²⁸ Scott 2006, 144.

²⁹ Schwartz 2013, 2.

³⁰ Schwartz 2010, 776-777.

³¹ Schwartz 2013, 4, 6, 12

³² Schwartz 2013, 60.

³³ Schwartz 2010, 777.

1880's. The purity movement emerged from within the repeal movement and many LNA members advocated the mission to raise the moral of the people.³⁴ In their efforts to raise society's morality the repealers' attitude towards prostitutes (which they claimed to aid) often became controlling and punitive.³⁵ Ultimately it was the moral reformists strong Christian faith that shaped their vision of a purified public³⁶; thus, when speaking of moral reformists, I mostly refer to the Christian repealers.

Another recurrent term in this thesis is "prostitute". Prostitute was and is used to describe someone working in the sex industry, but in her recent study Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen highlights its somewhat pejorative origin. The word comes from French, meaning "shameless" or "ill-mannered".³⁷ Due to its negative connotation, I use the word only in its historical context and refer to women in the sex industry as sex workers.

This thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter addresses Martineau's secularist beliefs; first I will offer an overview of the scholarly discussion on Martineau's religious beliefs and then attempt to demonstrate how her activism on the Contagious Diseases Acts can be seen stemming from a freethinking worldview. This is important, for her freethinking worldview is the underlying theme of this thesis.

In the second and third chapters I will categorize different representations of women in Martineau's writings on the Acts and compare them to the representations of the Christian repealers, especially Josephine Butler's. The second chapter focuses on the representations of middle-class women and the third on lower-class prostitutes.

In the last chapter, I will analyse Martineau's political purposes behind her different female representations. I will examine her possible moral reformist goals and demonstrate how her personal beliefs might have affected her depiction of women.

³⁴ Schwartz 2013, 164-166

³⁵ Walkowitz 1980, 132

³⁶ Schwartz 2013, 166.

³⁷ Vainio-Korhonen 2018, 10.

1. Secularist ideals in Martineau's writings

1.1 Martineau's secularism in previous research

As stated in the introduction, Martineau never publicly associated herself with the secularistic movement of 19th-century Britain.³⁸ Nonetheless, some of the most crucial aspects of secularist ideology – such as the principles of rationality and eradicating ignorance as the key to social improvement, evidence-based thinking as well as independent judgement³⁹ – can be detected both in her autobiography and letters. Her writings make apparent that even though she did not refer to herself as a secularist or a freethinker, she shared many of the core values and ideals of the secularist community. Therefore, her activism can be conceived as originating from a secularist or freethinking worldview.

Harriet Martineau's religious beliefs have been researched widely. For example, Deborah Logan (2002), Caroline Roberts (2004) and Odile Boucher-Rivalain (2012), amongst many others, all analyse Martineau's unitarianist past and her turn to atheism, or agnosticism in Boucher-Rivalain's opinion. Logan and Boucher-Rivalain emphasise Martineau's very religious past and the affect it had on her work in her later life as well. However, they leave her atheistic worldview largely unexplored. Roberts analyses Martineau's turn to atheism in more depth, arguing that Martineau's loss of faith is a long process which can be detected in her writing from the early 1840s onward.⁴⁰ She, together with Richard Webb (1960), for example, illustrates how Martineau maintained the unitarian doctrine of necessarianism even when she turned to atheism.

Necessarianism – also sometimes referred to necessitarianism – was a strongly deterministic doctrine of causation, which can be linked to John Locke's philosophy and was popularized by the unitarianist political theorist Joseph Priestley (1733–1804) in the 18th century. It was by reading his works that Martineau first learned of necessarianism, the principle which would become the centre of her philosophical thought. Priestley was a Christian rationalist whose intellectual theological worldview was composed of the concepts of determinism, necessity, causation, and materialism. In his view, the mind and the body were inseparable and the mind was result of a

³⁸ Schwartz 2013, 60.

³⁹ Schwartz 2013, 93, 171.

⁴⁰ Roberts 2002, 139-180.

“corporeal organization”. His materialist beliefs entailed a necessarian doctrine, in which humans had no free will but were governed by natural laws. Therefore, humans were creatures of circumstances, and these circumstances causally determined the outcome of their lives.⁴¹

Martineau was a decisive follower of Priestley’s necessarian doctrine, and while at an older age she was opposed to his religious thoughts, she continued to believe in the materialist as well as deterministic aspects of it for the rest of her life. Her reverence of natural laws is very present in her writing as demonstrated briefly in the following chapters. Although Martineau’s belief on necessarianism cannot be seen as explicit evidence of her freethought, many freethinkers – most often those who came from unitarianist background as well – did share her beliefs. The necessarian doctrine was very popular, for example, amongst the Owenite freethinkers of the early 1800s.⁴²

While Martineau’s religious beliefs have been studied extensively, she has rarely been associated with secularism or freethought. Laura Schwartz and Annie Laurie Gaylor are some of the few scholars who have connected Martineau to secularism and freethought, but neither have dived into Martineau’s beliefs very thoroughly.

Laura Schwartz mentions Martineau multiple times in her book *Infidel Feminism* (2013). She refers to Martineau as a “freethinking feminist” and explains Martineau’s lack of participation in the secularist movement by stating that Martineau – together with many other freethinking feminists – “chose to make the women’s movement rather than organized freethought, their primary political base.”⁴³ She also maps out the evolution of Martineau’s beliefs from unitarianism to atheism and freethought, suggesting that it was Martineau’s liberal unitarianist background which ultimately led to her apostasy.⁴⁴

Schwartz is the only scholar who has analysed Martineau’s beliefs in relation to secularism, but she only offers a scratch on the surface. Her book mainly showcases the 19th-century women who were active in the secularist movement, thus leaving Martineau’s freethinking worldview mostly on a level of reference.

⁴¹ McEvoy & McGuire, 1975, 325-329; Diniejko 2010.

⁴² Roberts 2002, 174, 187–188.

⁴³ Schwartz 2013, 60.

⁴⁴ Schwartz 2013, 82.

Annie Laurie Gaylor writes about Martineau's freethought in her anthology of freethinking women "*Women without Superstition*" (1997). In her collection Gaylor defines freethought as "the use of reason in forming opinions about religion, rather than basing belief on faith, authority or tradition"⁴⁵, offering a quite narrow definition of the concept. With this definition, Gaylor labels Martineau and the other women in her collection as freethinking women. She supports this with extracts of Martineau's Autobiography (written in 1855 and published posthumously in 1877) in which Martineau recollects her apostasy and posits a critique of Christianity. Nonetheless, in the absence of further analysis, the interpretation of these extracts is left up to the reader.

The extracts have clear secularist notions. Martineau attempts through reason to convince her reader of the shortcomings of the "remnants of old superstition" and offers evidence which prove the contradiction in the Bible and Christian teaching. For example, she argues that the Essence doctrine pervades the doctrine and morality of Christ⁴⁶ and points out the impossibility of the two-fold aspect of God.⁴⁷ Like many freethinkers, Martineau aims to show in her writing – through evidence-based thinking – that religion is a set of untrue beliefs founded on ignorance and superstition.⁴⁸ To Martineau, Christianity was simply a mythology which "fails to make good, fails to make wise, and has become a great obstacle in the way of progress"⁴⁹

Martineau, in the way of a true freethinker, emphasises throughout her writing rationality and science as saving graces to the problems of Christianity's "imperfect evidence" and "delusive" teachings. She many times refers to the authority of science and the natural laws of the universe, revealing her conviction of necessarianism. The "everlasting laws" of the universe offered her security, a new clearness and were "favourable to [her] moral nature as to [her] intellectual progress".⁵⁰ Martineau, like many other freethinking feminists, felt great relief in being "emancipated from the superstition"⁵¹ and aimed through her writing to spread this awakening to the public. She strongly believed that the reign of religion was to be over soon, won by philosophy

⁴⁵ Gaylor 1997, xv.

⁴⁶ Martineau, Autobiography I 1876, in Gaylor 1997, 50-52.

⁴⁷ Martineau, Autobiography I 1876, in Gaylor 1997, 52.

⁴⁸ Schwartz 2013, 75.

⁴⁹ Martineau Autobiography II 1876, in Gaylor 1997, 53.

⁵⁰ Martineau, Autobiography II 1876, in Gaylor 1997, 53-54.

⁵¹ Martineau, Autobiography II 1876, in Gaylor 1997, 53-54.

and science. She writes: “about this matter, of the extinction of theology by a true science of human nature, I cannot but say that my expectation amounts to absolute assurance.”⁵²

Martineau often adopted the role of a public educator – a role which many female secularists readily assumed - and believed that her best talent was that of a populariser of knowledge.⁵³ This is most clearly seen in her journalism, but even in her autobiography she attempts to encourage her readers to think critically of the doctrines of Christianity by offering alternative evidence. In her writing, the secularist concept of “self-responsible rational freedom” is quite clearly present. This notion emphasises that the individual has a duty to make up her own mind based on evidence.⁵⁴

With further analysis, the ideals of the secularist movement in Martineau’s writing are clear even in the short extracts offered by Gaylor, and Martineau’s extracts do fulfil Gaylor’s definition of freethought as well. Nonetheless, Gaylor’s definition seems far too narrow in scope of all the attributes of 19th-century secularism and lacks sound arguments for Martineau’s secularistic worldview. Both Schwartz and Gaylor leave room for a deeper analysis of Martineau’s secularistic worldview, how it was manifested in her activism and how it affected it. Next, I will briefly showcase how the secularist ideology can be seen in Martineau’s activism by analysing her rhetoric in the letters she wrote against the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1869.

1.2 Secularist ideals in Martineau’s activism

As Laura Schwartz observes, there are a lot of similarities between the freethinking repeal rhetoric and that of Christian repealers, thus complicating the attempt to characterize the secular aspect of the movement.⁵⁵ Martineau does use some of the same linguistic tactics as her Christian counterparts, but only to a certain extent. I will demonstrate that her strong emphasis on rationality and science as well as her use of patriotic rhetoric in unifying her readers are proof of her devotedness to her own secular beliefs.

⁵² Martineau, *Autobiography* II 1876 in Gaylor 1997, 54.

⁵³ Schwartz 2013, 101; Watts 2017, 43.

⁵⁴ Schwartz 2013, 12.

⁵⁵ Schwartz 2013, 164.

Secularists placed ignorance as the first cause of social “evils” and thus saw education as the prerequisite for attaining social improvement.⁵⁶ This secularist objective of eradicating ignorance is present throughout Martineau’s letters on the Contagious Diseases Acts. The letters demonstrate that Martineau’s crusade was, more than anything, waged against ignorance. This is revealed in her unyielding appeals to her readers’ senses and her reliance on rational argumentation as the means to discredit the C.D. Acts.

As her freethinking counterparts, Martineau undoubtedly saw the passing of the Acts as a result of poor reasoning and ignorance. Her statement that the laws are “weak in reason”⁵⁷ is present in all her letters. In her first letter she accentuates the ignorance of the legislators “whose duty it is to know better”⁵⁸ as well as that of the English citizens, who have not objected to the passing of the laws. However, she puts most of the blame on the men of the Parliament, highlighting that many of them were not aware of the true meaning of the Acts. By emphasising the ignorance of the advocates of the Acts in her critique, Martineau assumes the role of an educator who encourages her readers to think critically on the issue to arrive at an alternative conclusion.

Martineau’s conviction that reason would spark social reform is most apparent in her first letter (Tuesday 28.12.1869) where she urges those legislators who “know nothing of the matter”⁵⁹ to

study the question in the short time that remains, that they may be qualified to deal intelligently with the question of further extension, and to support the effort that will be made for the repeal of the Acts.⁶⁰

It is evident in her writing that she espouses the distinctly secularist conception of “self-responsible rational freedom” introduced earlier. Her words parallel her implicit faith in legislators, and their ability to rectify their past misgivings when given new evidence.

Continuing with a reference to the political awakening of women on the matter of the Contagious Diseases Acts, Martineau’s account of her countrywomen is resolutely hopeful. Though she concedes that ignorance on the subject is commonplace, she also writes that “[they are] awaking, day by day, to a sense of the realities about them”⁶¹, and goes on to say: “When the mind is awake

⁵⁶ Schwartz 2013, 158.

⁵⁷ For example, Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

⁵⁸ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

⁵⁹ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

⁶⁰ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

⁶¹ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

all the rest follows of course.”⁶² These statements clearly demonstrate Martineau’s faith in reason as the means to social progress – when individuals start to analyse their surroundings and think for themselves, social reform will naturally follow. In view of these ideas, it is quite clear that Martineau’s letters reflect the secularist ideals of the time.

Although Martineau emphasises the illogicality of the Acts throughout all her letters, she dives deeper to explain the main issues of the legislation in her second (Wednesday 29.12.1869) and third letters (Thursday 30.12.1869). She uses inductive reasoning and scientific argumentation in proving her points about the ineffectiveness of the laws. Through common sense and statistics on the spread of Venereal diseases and the incidence of prostitution, Martineau exposes the flawed reasoning underlying the laws.

She argues that the occurrence of prostitution will rise instead of declining due to the law which enables prostitutes to “pursue their trade under the sanction of Parliament”⁶³ and displays prostitution as “necessary”⁶⁴ to young men. Martineau explains that by “rendering vice safe from its worst penalty”⁶⁵ the Acts provide men an illusion of safety which will lead to rise in the demand for prostitution. With economic reasoning, Martineau thus invalidates the belief that the Acts would eventually lead to the decline of prostitution itself.⁶⁶

Having presented the likely outcome of the legislation, Martineau proceeds to provide corroborating evidence of their failure. Using epidemiological statistics gathered on military and naval clusters, she argues in her third letter that the incidence of hospital admission is larger in the areas in which the Acts are enforced. Moreover, she attempts to discredit alternative findings by stating that her figures, sourced from a “faithful study”⁶⁷, are of higher quality than untrustworthy competing accounts offered by advocates of the legal regime. Appealing to empirical observations, Martineau claims that

⁶² Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

⁶³ Martineau” The Contagious Disease Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

⁶⁴ Martineau” The Contagious Disease Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

⁶⁵ Martineau” The Contagious Disease Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

⁶⁶ Walkowitz 1980, 79.

⁶⁷ Martineau” The Contagious Diseases Acts III” LDN, 30.12.1869.

in some foreign stations where rigid supervision and regulation have existed for a course of years, the proportion to strength (the number of cases under the disease) of admissions to hospital per thousand is, to “unprotected” stations, as twelve to nine.⁶⁸

Science and, among other things, statistics were also used by Christian repealers, for it was believed that supporting their arguments with scientific documentation would have a greater effect on their audience.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, Martineau is set apart due to her unbroken appeals to her audience’s intellect instead of their sense of Christian morality – an imperative element in the rhetoric of the Christian repealers.⁷⁰ Martineau stands out in the early repeal movement in her effort to “convince through logic and reason, those who have proven themselves illogical and unreasonable”.⁷¹

Martineau’s secularist worldview can also be detected in her insistence on patriotism and gender in unifying her readers as well as justifying women’s political status - two important themes of the movement that were usually supported with Christian rhetoric of sister- and motherhood. These topics will be examined further in the following chapters.

⁶⁸ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts III” LDN, 30.12.1869.

⁶⁹ Walkowitz 1980, 124.

⁷⁰ McHugh 1980, 187.

⁷¹ Logan 2002, 162.

2. Representations of middle-class women

In the early days of the repeal movement, the most pressing undertaking was drawing attention to the cause and attracting middle-class women to join the Ladies' National Association in the fight against the Contagious Diseases Acts. Religion was often used to draw people in as the LNA believed that the familiar and reassuring ambiance of religious settings was the key in recruiting middle-class women.⁷² Therefore, the Association heavily relied on religious rhetoric and events, such as mass prayer meetings, in unifying a broader, mobilized, and concentrated protest against the Acts.⁷³ The notion of a Christian way of life was a crucial component of a common middle-class identity⁷⁴, so emphasising religion was quite an effective recruitment tactic when targeting middle-class women.

As mentioned earlier, religion also offered women a way to move into politics without risking their feminine respectability. The religious rhetoric was especially important for the women in the repeal movement because for a respectable 19th-century woman, the topics of prostitution and venereal diseases were inappropriate to even know of let alone to publicly lecture of. As Frank Mort notes, religious rhetoric "offered a set of concepts, a rhetoric of resistance and a strength of moral certainty powerful enough to take on the weight of the medical and political establishment"⁷⁵ and thus provided the women of the movement with "a cloak of respectability" to address the prohibited subjects publicly.⁷⁶ Furthermore, religion offered a means to transcend the class differences of the time and bring women from all classes together.⁷⁷

In the Christian repeal rhetoric, Josephine Butler and her fellow repealers often depicted middle-class women as good benevolent Christian women and God's agents in order to persuade middle-class women to join the "crusade".⁷⁸ In justifying women's involvement in the repeal cause, she used the rhetoric of pious motherhood and sisterhood, emphasising that women had a duty as mothers of sons to protect their morality and as sisters in Christ to reclaim their "fallen" sisters.⁷⁹ Some of the same images of dominant femininity can be seen in Martineau's representation of

⁷² Walkowitz 1980, 134-135.

⁷³ Webster 2019, 151-153.

⁷⁴ Nead 1988, 156.

⁷⁵ Mort 1987, 69.

⁷⁶ Schwartz 2013, 154.

⁷⁷ Webster 2019, 153.

⁷⁸ Ichikawa 2015, 110.

⁷⁹ Walkowitz 1982, 81.

middle-class women. Martineau similarly turns to the rhetoric of female sacrifice and moral authority of motherhood in unifying her readers and justifying their meddling in politics. Like Butler, she portrays women as active, powerful political agents.

However, she rejects the religious aspects of Butler's repeal rhetoric and is, ultimately, true to her beliefs on the nature of women. I will argue that her more secular emphasis on patriotism, different deployment of the notion of female moral superiority as well as her description of women as rational, intelligent actors is what sets her apart from Butler.

2.1. "True-hearted Englishwomen": Women as patriots

Although the campaign against the C.D. Acts relied heavily on religious aspects, many freethinking women joined the repeal movement and even welcomed its powerful Christian rhetoric.⁸⁰ However, in her writings on the Acts, Harriet Martineau abstains from using the crusading Christian language that her fellow repealers used in integrating their audiences. Instead, she endeavours to unify her readers via a more secular outlet by accentuating their national identity – their shared status as English citizens. Martineau's emphasis on a more secular point of view, patriotism, was in line with the rhetoric of the radicals of the time who, in attempting to create a mass platform for people who opposed oppression, often turned to the rhetoric of national identity and the nation.⁸¹

Martineau starts her first letter on the Contagious Diseases Acts by writing that the Acts have an effect on the whole nation. She states that the legislation is indeed a danger "in which we find our country and everybody in it involved."⁸² By addressing her words to every English citizen regardless of sex or social standing, she attempts to create an exhaustive sense of alarm in every reader in the country. The shocking nature of her letters as well as the fact they were published in

⁸⁰ Schwartz 2013, 155.

⁸¹ Rogers 2000, 6.

⁸² Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" *LDN*, 28.12.1869.

*the London Daily News*⁸³ guaranteed that her grim message was received by most, if not all, of her fellow countrymen and -women.

Although Martineau first and foremost emphasises the effect of the Acts on the whole country, she considers especially middle-class women to be her target audience. As Gayle Yates observes, in her letters on the Contagious Diseases Acts Martineau concentrates on arguing for women specifically from the point of view of women, although in her other writings she often argues against the Acts from a more masculine perspective.⁸⁴ This is manifest in her use of patriotic rhetoric relating to women by which, as I will demonstrate below, she attempts to create a sense of unity in her middle-class readers as well as justify women's participation in the repeal while at the same time challenging the dominant images of femininity of the time.

Martineau's attempt to attract specifically middle-class women to the repeal cause can be seen in her emphasis on the notion that the laws pose a threat to not only lower-class women but them as well:

The system is now, in fact, applied to the civil population; and next session is to bring forward the crowning measure—the extension of the power of the police and the outrage and degradation of the new law over the whole womanhood of England.⁸⁵

In her second letter she continues by explaining that “Any woman of whom a policeman swears that he has reason to believe that she is a prostitute is helpless in the hands of the administrators of the new law”.⁸⁶

Martineau's appeal to her middle-class readers is even more pronounced in her third letter in which she states that the venereal diseases, the spread of which the legislation will increase, “poison the lives of a large proportion of the middle and upper classes.”⁸⁷

⁸³ The London Daily News was founded by author Charles Dickens in 1846. Its purpose was to offer a liberal alternative to traditional conservative papers, especially The Times. By the late 1800s the Daily News had become one of the most popular daily papers with its circulation peaking at 93,000 copies. This made it an excellent platform for political discussion in the second half of the century. Martineau started working for the Daily News in 1852 as a political commentator and wrote over 1,600 editorials as regular contributor right until her retirement in 1866. The British Newspaper Archive, “London Daily News”. Yates 1985, 19.

⁸⁴ For example, in her letter to a member of Parliament Martineau writes about the “strong determination of the fathers, brothers and husbands of Englishwomen”. Yates 1985, 243–244.

⁸⁵ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

⁸⁶ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

⁸⁷ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts III” LDN, 30.12.1869.

Martineau's warning of the legislations' dangers to upper-class women can be seen as a clever tactic to get their attention through the most powerful and mobilizing factor in political rhetoric: fear. However, it was very unlikely that the upper-class women should face the horrors of regulation. In reality, the C.D. Acts were concerned with the regulation of sexual and moral habits of two specific groups: female sex workers and the lower ranks of the armed forces.⁸⁸ Usually it was only the lower-class sex workers – the visible and public prostitutes – who were likely to be detained under the Acts.⁸⁹ In this light, Martineau's rhetoric appears to be a ploy to raise panic among the middle-classes to get them to join the repeal effort.

Even though Martineau resorts to fearmongering, she also uses a gentler yet an effective patriotic narrative of loyal and self-sacrificing English women. Throughout her letters Martineau refers to the women in the movement as "loyal English Women" "our countrywomen" or "honourable women"⁹⁰. In my view, by addressing her words to English women and asking them to join the movement of their fellow countrywomen, she attempts to raise her readers sense of empathy and national identification with the women of the movement. In calling them honourable and honoured Martineau depicts them as brave and respectable – a courageous lot to join in.

A constant theme in her writing is English women's love for their nation. In a placard addressed to the electors of North Nottinghamshire *Old England! Purity and Freedom!*, she writes: "We, as Englishwomen, loving our country and our Old National Constitution."⁹¹ In her other electoral placard *To the Women of Colchester*, she asks the women to listen to the LNA's arguments "as Englishwomen loving your country, and proud of it".⁹² Martineau reminds her readers that if they love their country, they should act now to save it. She makes her message even more apparent in her references to France, the origin country of the regulation of prostitution.

Martineau displays France as corrupted by the "group of horrors" of the legislation and explains that the occurrence of prostitution has only risen due to them. She writes:

⁸⁸ Mort 1987, 58.

⁸⁹ Nead 1988, 116.

⁹⁰ For example, used in Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN, 28.12.1869.

⁹¹ Martineau, "Old England! Purity and Freedom!" c.1871, in Yates 1985, 248.

⁹² Martineau, "To the Women of Colchester" c.1871, in Yates 1985, 246.

the national vitality of France in particular is dwindling and sinking under a system of license of vice which breaks all its promises, and destroys the health and vigour which it engages to save.⁹³

In comparison, Martineau portrays England as country “supreme in its privilege of personal liberty”⁹⁴, a country where

youth and maidenhood [are] at once more free and pure, and womanhood more unrestrained, more honoured and safe beyond comparison, in person and repute [than in most other countries].⁹⁵

She argues that in order to maintain Britain’s supremacy and avoid similar destruction, the laws which are “contrary to all precedent, and to the whole spirit and method of British penal law”⁹⁶ should not be adopted in the empire.

Prostitution was seen as the greatest threat to the nation’s morals, a system which could destroy the whole nation.⁹⁷ Martineau shows her belief in this notion in crediting the regulation of prostitution – which she believes to increase it – responsible for France’s moral destruction. A year later, in her letter to her niece Mary Martineau, she writes:

I dare say you have observed how frequently & openly the disgrace & humiliation of the French is attributed to their being subject to the very system they are following us in endeavouring to the get rid of.⁹⁸

Martineau’s reference to France in her nationalistic rhetoric is within the zeitgeist, for France and the conception of its pervasive societal degradation with roots in the Revolution often stood as a contemporary paradigm for the English bourgeoisie.⁹⁹ I suggest that, in drawing on the example of the French – a disgraced, humiliated, and corrupted nation – Martineau draws on the sense of national supremacy of the British as well as their fear of a similar downfall. The focus on these sentiments further underscores the fact that her rhetoric is targeted at the bourgeoisie.

⁹³ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts III” LDN, 30.12.1869.

⁹⁴ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

⁹⁵ Martineau, “To the Women of Colchester” c.1871, in Yates 1985, 246.

⁹⁶ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

⁹⁷ Nead 1988, 93–94.

⁹⁸ Martineau in a letter to Mary Martineau Nvmb. 9. 1870.

⁹⁹ Nead 1988, 92–93.

Martineau's aspiration to unite and mobilize her female readers by emphasising national identity culminates in her choice of pen name: an Englishwoman. This is all the more important in the knowledge that usually Martineau left her leaders and other writings unsigned – a tactic used by many 19th-century women writers in order to create their own spaces and agency within a predominantly male publishing industry.¹⁰⁰ When she did not leave her writings unsigned, she usually used a masculine pen name – such as “us breadwinners” – in order to assume the more authoritative male voice.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the fact that she chose to accentuate her female gender in the letters makes apparent Martineau's strive to convince her middle-class readers that the issue at hand is of Englishwomen, for Englishwomen and most importantly is to be resolved by Englishwomen.

Martineau depicts the women in the repeal movements as proper English women, loyal to their country and brave in their effort to repeal “those un-English laws.”¹⁰² In presenting them as honourable English women who, out of love for their country, are only doing what every good citizen should – defending it – Martineau fights against the image of repeal women as un-feminine and unrespectable and illustrates joining the movement as a heroic act rather than loss of respectability. Her way of mobilizing middle-class women differs quite a lot from the Christian rhetoric, which emphasised their audience's sense of Christian morality, appealing to them as good Christians to fight for the repeal as agents of God.¹⁰³ Martineau instead appeals to her readers duty as English citizens.

In addition to patriotism, Martineau reflects on the prevailing differences in the sexual norms of the time in justifying women's political activism. Referring to the women of LNA, she writes:

All these are able and ready to undergo the sacrifice they incur by their position. It is the way of Englishwomen to give themselves to a good work, not without counting, but without heeding the cost.¹⁰⁴

She continues with a reference to Lady Godiva, the legendary English noblewoman who rode naked through the streets of Coventry in protest of her husband's treatment of the poor. She writes:

¹⁰⁰ Weiner 2017, 160.

¹⁰¹ Weiner 2017, 164.

¹⁰² Martineau, “Old England! Purity and Freedom! c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 248.

¹⁰³ Ichikawa 2015, 110.

¹⁰⁴ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN 28.12.1869.

That representative Englishwoman, Godiva of blessed memory could not but have counted the cost of her deed - So it assuredly is with these honourable women who are now putting away the most sensitive of personal feelings, to help us out of the peril we have incurred, and to destroy the risk for all future time.¹⁰⁵

With her allegory between Godiva and the women of the LNA, Martineau presents the repealers as the epitome of true English ladies, willing to sacrifice themselves for their country and its people. Her rhetoric of sacrifice is in line with the dominant definition of femininity of the time; women's domestic virtues included gentleness, patience, and self-sacrifice, and these were the attributes female repealers often referred to in defending their public role.¹⁰⁶ So it is with Martineau, for self-sacrifice is a constant theme in her representation of upper-class women. In her letters, she emphasises that women did not choose to get involved in the repeal movement, rather they were compelled to by the lack of existing opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts. She writes that the negligence of the press and Parliament "imposed upon women the painful task of agitation for the recovery of what they have lost and vindication of what remains."¹⁰⁷ A few years later she reiterates in her placard that

The subject [of the Contagious Diseases Acts] is painful, even hateful to every one of us; but this is not our fault, and our country is not to be sacrificed to our feelings as women. We are not fine ladies, but true-hearted Englishwomen; and there are thousands at this hour who have proved that in this cause they can sacrifice whatever is necessary to save our country.¹⁰⁸

By describing the repeal task as "painful" and "hateful" Martineau again highlights that women do not wish to talk about the subjects of prostitution and venereal diseases. However, the task is too important not to. With her patriotic rhetoric of self-sacrifice Martineau displays the women in the movement as true patriots and true women as well, for in the 19th-century feminine ideology, nothing was more pleasurable for a woman than self-sacrifice.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, I argue that even though Martineau somewhat stays within the definition of respectability, she at the same time challenges it by presenting English women as active citizens ready to fight and as opposed to

¹⁰⁵ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN 28.12.1869.

¹⁰⁶ Nead 1988, 156.

¹⁰⁷ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN 29.12.1869.

¹⁰⁸ Martineau, "To the Women of Colchester c.1871, in Yates 1985, 247-248.

¹⁰⁹ Nead 1988, 24-25.

passive, dependent and fragile femininity.¹¹⁰ In my interpretation, Martineau's emphasis on female self-sacrifice is a cunning rhetorical tactic in which women gain political agency while still retaining their seemingly passive femininity.

The motif of sacrifice is present in Martineau's personal writings as well. In her letter to Maria Weston Chapman, Martineau writes about her conflicting feelings toward the letters she wrote on the Contagious Diseases Acts. Martineau considered the work important yet "sickening".¹¹¹ Considering that taking part in the issue of regulation of prostitution could be injurious to a 19th-century woman's reputation, taking on the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was legitimately quite serious. It is no wonder, then, that Martineau felt ambivalent about it. However, she concludes: "but who should do it if not an old woman, dying and in seclusion."¹¹² Martineau's words show her reverence to sacrifice but also her rational nature. For Martineau, it is only sensible that a dying old woman should rouse the public and deal with the consequences, for it would be a lot lesser an attack towards her compared to a young single woman, unshielded by her marital status or old age.

Scholars have referred to Martineau's emphasis on self-sacrifice; for example, in his biography Richard Webb argues many times Martineau to be especially prone to martyrdom.¹¹³ However, in the case of the C.D. Acts, it is more reasonable to see Martineau's rhetoric of sacrifice as a linguistic device to justify women's work in politics by turning the notion of sexual differences to her advantage as argued before. This is reinforced by the fact that the notion of sacrifice was employed in the Christian repealers' political rhetoric as well. Nevertheless, they mostly referred to the altruism of true Christian women, not the patriotic sacrifice of true English women.¹¹⁴ Therefore, I argue that Martineau's emphasis on the material world sets her apart from her Christian contemporaries and reveals her underlying conviction that the repeal campaign could be promoted by more secular means.

¹¹⁰ Nead 1988, 28.

¹¹¹ Martineau in a letter to Maria Weston Chapman c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 251.

¹¹² Martineau in a letter to Maria Weston Chapman c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 251.

¹¹³ For example, Webb 1960, 200. Also referred to in Clagett 2010, 67-68.

¹¹⁴ Ichikawa 2015, 110-111.

2.2 Mothers & Matrons: Women as moral guardians.

In the 19th century, the most important occupation of a woman was that of a mother. Motherhood was regarded as the most natural and valuable component of the female role; it was “woman’s main reason of being and her chief source of purpose and pleasure”.¹¹⁵ Motherhood together with marriage and domesticity were seen as natural female inclinations and thus the private sphere of home became the woman’s place.¹¹⁶ Images of Christian motherhood were often used by women activists in gaining moral leverage and in justifying their move into the public sphere. This rhetoric was adopted, for example, in white women’s fight for the abolition of slavery.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, the rhetoric of motherhood was most famously deployed by Josephine Butler in the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts. I will demonstrate that while Martineau resorts to the same notions of motherhood and women’s role as moral guardians, she uses the rhetoric of motherhood much less extensively and deploys a slightly different meaning. Furthermore, I identify a new representation – that of matronhood – presumably only offered by Martineau, which deploys the notion of moral guardianship more inclusively.

As Walkowitz notes, Butler’s emphasis on motherhood was a political device aimed at superseding patriarchal authority; her political rhetoric gave mothers, not fathers, the right to control sexual access to their “daughters”.¹¹⁸ Thus, in Butler’s rhetoric mothers were depicted as fearless and aggressive political agents, acting beyond the constrictions of traditional maternal roles.¹¹⁹ However, in this rhetoric, the lower-class women often became the passive powerless object of their action – the daughters. Using such polarized representations was an intentional tactic by the middle-class reformers, for they pursued to gain a new political voice through presenting themselves as powerful agents and altruistic beings.¹²⁰ At the same time, middle-class women also used motherly care to assert authority and control over the women of lower social standing.¹²¹

Nonetheless, many of the repeal women truly felt pious motherhood to be their source of motivation and purpose in the movement. Josephine Butler originally turned to work with prostitutes after her own daughter died. She felt that social reform was only possible when it was

¹¹⁵ Nead 1988, 26.

¹¹⁶ Mort 1987, 61.

¹¹⁷ Rogers 2000, 8–9.

¹¹⁸ Walkowitz 1982, 81.

¹¹⁹ Ichikawa 2015, 108–09.

¹²⁰ Ichikawa 2015, 111–112.

¹²¹ Van Drenth & De Haan 1999, 24.

based on the female instinct for caring for people as individuals.¹²² This conviction was shared by many of her contemporaries; for example, the famous Victorian nurse Florence Nightingale often justified her position with woman's natural instinct to care and saw the soldiers she attended to as her "sons".¹²³

The rhetoric of motherhood is apparent in Martineau's activism as well. However, Martineau relies on the notion of motherhood less than Butler and her other contemporaries, as it is used only in one of her letters. On top of this I argue that her usage of motherhood differs from that of Butler. For example, she does not attempt to assert authority over the lower-class women by advertising motherly care, but rather highlights the duty of upper-class English mothers to control their sons and prevent them from taking part in degrading these women. She writes "To such Mothers it is almost worse that the sex most guilty in regard to the sin should be protected from the natural retribution by the sacrifice of the victimised sex".¹²⁴

She emphasises her point by continuing to say that:

The mothers of sons, sinning sons as well as pure, shrink from any sort of countenance of a law which, on the one hand proposes to render vice safe from its worst penalty, and on the other, compels the wronged and deluded victim of a man's guile.¹²⁵

It was a common belief that men were to blame for women's move into prostitution. Especially the repealers argued that lower-class women were driven into the sex industry by seductive upper-class men.¹²⁶ This argument is strong in Martineau's writing. She aims to rouse the sense of guilt and responsibility of the mothers of sons who corrupt innocent women, or who upon reaching manhood would come to do so. In the Victorian ideology, women were seen as the spiritual and moral superiors of men and became the moral guardians of the home.¹²⁷ Therefore, it was ultimately the mother who was responsible for her son's immoral behaviour.

According to Lynda Nead, woman's role as the moral guardian even surpassed the private sphere into the public. The Victorians believed that private morality was the source and indicator of public morality, and thus women as the guardians of the private sphere played a central role in the

¹²² Boyd 1982, 246–248.

¹²³ Boyd 1982, 188.

¹²⁴ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN 29.12.1869.

¹²⁵ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN 29.12.1869.

¹²⁶ Lee 2013, 3–4.

¹²⁷ Morgan 2007, 155.

formation of public morality as well, which manifested either in social stability or revolution.¹²⁸ This cultural ideology was readily adopted by the repeal women, and they justified their new political influence as an extension of their traditional role as moral guardians of the family and the home.¹²⁹ Usually, as in the case of Josephine Butler, it was deployed with the rhetoric of motherhood. Martineau, on the other hand, relies on a more inclusive label of matronhood.

Presenting middle-class women as “mothers” was resourceful because it was the role that most of middle-class ladies identified with the most. However, Martineau includes the childless in referring to women’s role as moral guardians. Many times, in writing about the LNA women, Martineau introduces them as the “Matronage of England”. For instance, she records: “the Matronage of England is moved to avowal and action which it would have supposed impossible till these new perils became manifest.”¹³⁰

The word matron under most settings refers to “a married woman marked by dignified maturity or social distinction.”¹³¹ Therefore, in Martineau’s activism, the middle-class women in the repeal campaign are presented as distinguished married ladies and mothers. Martineau’s rhetoric was in line with the other repealers. It was felt that married women – such as Butler – should lead the movement, because their status as wives and mothers gave them more authority and protected their reputation. Single women often filled a more obscure position in the movement.¹³²

Nonetheless, in Martineau’s case, her omission of unmarried women seems bizarre to say the least, given that Martineau herself was quite famously and happily a single woman herself.¹³³ By leaving single women out of her rhetoric she seems to disregard herself as well, which could be interpreted as an intentional tactic to attract the attention of the married middle-class women. I would argue however, that in using the term “matronage” Martineau is referring to all the women in the movement in the appropriate matronly age – whether or not they were in actuality married with children. This is supported by the fact that at the age of fifty-two, Martineau requested all her correspondents to address her henceforth as “Mrs.” even though she had not married. Her wish had more to do with the acknowledgement of dignity, for the title of “Mrs.” carried a greater

¹²⁸ Nead 1988, 92.

¹²⁹ Nead 1988, 205.

¹³⁰ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN 29.12.1869.

¹³¹ Merriam-Webster, Matron, Definition and meaning.

¹³² Mort 1987, 76.

¹³³ As noted by many scholars Martineau’s single status gave her relief and joy, for the freedom it offered. In her Autobiography she writes: “I long ago came to the conclusion that, without meddling with the case of wives and mothers, I am probably the happiest single woman in England”. Hattaway 2012, 231.

respect than “Miss”. Her wish was an assertion that she – although a single lady – was entitled to such respect.¹³⁴ Therefore, it would be characteristic for Martineau to include herself and other older single women in the “Matronage of England”, for she definitely considered herself dignified and socially distinct.

Martineau’s words to Maria Weston Chapman strengthen this analysis. Recorded by Chapman in the Memorials Martineau refers to her role in the campaign:

“I am told,” she said, “that this is discreditable work for woman, especially for an old woman. But it has always been esteemed our special function as women, to mount guard over society and social life,—the spring of national existence,—and to keep them pure; and who so fit as an old woman?”¹³⁵

It is clear that Martineau considered herself, a mature distinguished lady, to be a fit moral guardian of society, no matter her marital status. It is also apparent, as Chieko Ichikawa notes, that Martineau – like Butler – saw British women to have a duty as guardians of British moral purity.¹³⁶ This duty she emphasises in her references of home and marriage, the cornerstones of Victorian domestic ideology. Victorians valued family and the home life above all and for them family was “an island of purity and peace”.¹³⁷

In her first letter, she emphasises the importance of women’s role in the movement and the magnitude of the threat of the regulation on the home and family life of England. She writes that “these [the women of LNA] are striving to save home itself, and to preserve the most sacred of institutions, and one hitherto pre-eminently our own—the Family.”¹³⁸

In her letters, Martineau warns her readers that the C.D. Acts would cause the “corruption of the rising generation of citizens who will find the way of vice made easy, and the dens of vice thrown open to them.”¹³⁹ She emphasises throughout her letters that it is the duty of the women to “sustain the honour and the life of our country and people”¹⁴⁰, drawing on the image of women as the moral guardians of the future generations of England.

¹³⁴ Yates 1985, 23.

¹³⁵ In Yates, 1985, 241.

¹³⁶ Ichikawa 2015, 108–109.

¹³⁷ Vicinus 1972, xiii.

¹³⁸ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN 28.12.1869.

¹³⁹ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN 28.12.1869.

¹⁴⁰ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts III” LDN 30.12.1869.

She again defends women's political involvement as the protectors of the home while rousing her readers to assume this role of moral guardianship in order to save the sacred, endangered bourgeois home. Approximately a year later, she continues appealing to women's sense of responsibility of moral supervision in her placard *To the women of Colchester* by asking: "Are you aware that this eminent honour and security of our sex and our homes are at present exposed to urgent danger, and even undergoing violation?"¹⁴¹

She goes on to recount the facts of the laws and Sir Henry Storks advocacy thereof.¹⁴² She tells the women of Colchester: "Let it be your work to take care that your husbands, fathers, and brothers hear of them [the facts of the Contagious Diseases Acts]."¹⁴³

At the end of her placard, her tone becomes even more demanding: "It is your business to lift up your voices within your homes and neighbourhoods".¹⁴⁴

In her letters and placards, Martineau presents middle-class women as mothers and matrons, the moral guardians of the home and society, whose duty it is to raise their families and nations morality. Here Martineau again turns the dominant definitions of femininity to her advantage. In my view, like many of her fellow repealers, she works around the ideology of sexual differences, manipulating its fundamental values rather than rejecting it completely.¹⁴⁵ In depicting women as the protectors of home, Martineau works in line with the image of respectable womanhood, yet again defying them in presenting middle-class women as active agents.

2.3 "The most distinguished for intelligence and culture": Women as intellectuals

Even though Martineau's representation of women conforms to predominating representations of womanhood, much like the Christian repealers', at times, she also strongly and distinctively challenges them. As has been mentioned earlier, Christian repealers most often presented middle-class women as active agents, working in the name of God, rescuers of the fallen and moral

¹⁴¹ Martineau, "To the Women of Colchester" c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 246.

¹⁴² Sir Henry Storks was a loud supporter of the Contagious Diseases Acts and a Liberal Party candidate who ran against a "repealer" in an 1870 Colchester by-election. The feminist opposition to his election led to his loss and even caused Prime Minister William Gladstone to reconsider the Acts. Weiner 2017, 166.

¹⁴³ Martineau "To the Women of Colchester" c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 247.

¹⁴⁴ Martineau "To the Women of Colchester" c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 248.

¹⁴⁵ Attwood 2011, 74.

guardian angels watching over the morality of the society. Martineau does represent women in similar ways at times, but her representations have quite notable differences, as we have seen in her appeals to readers sense of nationality rather Christian morality. Her more radical and secularist approach is idiosyncratic to her activism. In this section I will demonstrate that Martineau's representation of women as intellectuals – equals to men in rationality even surpassing them – is in line with her core belief in women's intellectual potential. Furthermore, I will argue that her representation is in part a means to reinvent Victorian femininity.

As already acknowledged in the first chapter, Martineau – like other freethinkers of her time – believed education to be the remedy for evils of society. She assumes the role of an educator on the subject of Contagious Diseases Acts, as most strongly seen in her third letter, in which she immerses herself to explain the likely repercussions of the Acts. However, she also raises other women of the society to the same authoritative level:

If its [the Ladies' National Association's] members succeed in proving that these Acts are as weak in reason as they are offensive to feeling, they must surely attain their object [of repealing the Acts].¹⁴⁶

In her statement, she presents the LNA women as providers and distributors of knowledge, well-informed and perceptive women whose intellect enables them to educate the public on the subject. This notion is even stronger in her constant emphasis on the ignorance of the male advocates and legislators of the laws. For example, Martineau throughout her letters emphasises the incompetence of the medical professionals “who have been treated as oracles on a subject which they are proved mistaken at every turn”.¹⁴⁷

Martineau's criticism on doctors is quite personal for, as Hattaway notes, she had already fought a quite similar battle for “self-government” against physicians two decades before when her book *Letters on Mesmerism* (1844) – in which she recorded her mesmeric cure – was published.¹⁴⁸ Her criticism was quite justifiable, for that matter. In the 19th century, physicians and medicine were just gaining authority among the middle classes. In order to please their bourgeois customers, the physicians and surgeons of the time often used their professional status to validate hegemonic

¹⁴⁶ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN 28.12.1869.

¹⁴⁷ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN 28.12.1869.

¹⁴⁸ Hattaway 2012, 267.

definitions of femininity and female sexuality. Their attitudes toward prostitution corresponded and contributed to that of the respectable middle-class society.¹⁴⁹

In portraying the advocates of the laws as ignorant and cowardly, Martineau highlights the repeal women's genius and bravery of being on the "right side" of the debate. For her, the repeal women were "some of the most distinguished for intellect and culture"¹⁵⁰ as opposed to the "ignorant" "careless" and "coarse" physicians and legislators.

Martineau's faith in women's capability to rational thinking is very clear, as already argued in chapter one, in her writing that "under the pressure of their present danger, women are awaking day by day to the realities about them."¹⁵¹ She continues by saying that

we must exert ourselves to learn the precise position in which we stand, and to face the difficulty and endure the pain of entertaining the subject, and to stir up the legislature—every member of it—to undo the fearful mischief wrought by its carelessness and ignorance during the closing hours of last session.¹⁵²

She also envisions women as a hitherto untapped source of intellectual prowess in wait of a proper education to reach their potential. I argue that by presenting women as intelligent rational beings, Martineau contradicts the prevailing view of women as the naturally more emotional but less rational counterparts of men, redefining what constituted as feminine.¹⁵³ Martineau strongly believed that women were capable of anything and everything that men did, as long as it was within their individual skills. In her autobiography, she writes: "Whatever a woman proves able to do, society will be thankful to see her do – just as if she were a man."¹⁵⁴ This included working-class women as well, for Martineau believed that if only educated, labourers could "take part intelligently in their living and working lives".¹⁵⁵ As Hattaway states, Martineau advocated for an egalitarian view of human intellect in which individual's minds were neither "feminine" or "masculine".¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ Nead 1988, 141–143.

¹⁵⁰ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN 28.12.1869.

¹⁵¹ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN 28.12.1869.

¹⁵² Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN 28.12.1869.

¹⁵³ Vicinus 1972, 144.

¹⁵⁴ Weiner 2017, 155.

¹⁵⁵ Watts 2017, 38.

¹⁵⁶ Hattaway 2012, 234–235.

In her portrayal of women as knowledgeable teachers, Martineau differs quite strongly from her Christian counterparts, who mostly emphasised women's role as the moral guardians, mothers, sisters and good Christians. Butler and many women in the movement were of course strong advocates of female education, but rarely used female rationality in their political rhetoric as means to justify their position.¹⁵⁷ They relied on more traditional images of femininity in order to get more support from the conservative middle-class audience. Thus, in my view, Martineau's idiosyncratic approach reflects her belief in reason as the pre-eminent virtue needed for a just society.

¹⁵⁷ Nead 1988, 105.

3. Representations of working-class sex workers

According to several scholars, the Victorian discourse on prostitution was in a state of constant change and flux. Nonetheless, the most enduring pair of images of Victorian prostitution were that of “prostitute as autonomous agent” in contrast to “prostitute as a helpless victim”.¹⁵⁸ As mentioned in previous chapter, the dominant myth of Victorian prostitution presented sex workers as a physical (in the form of disease) as well as a moral threat to society.¹⁵⁹ In this discourse, the prostitute was a degraded, filthy seductress “who endangered the respectable women in her vicinity, threatened the health and strength of the nation’s armed services and influenced young, impressionable women”¹⁶⁰ and thus prostitution became referred as the “great social evil.” However, in the 1850s and 1860s, another discourse rose to challenge this dominant view: the rhetoric of victimhood.

In the rhetoric of victimhood, most famously deployed by the repeal feminists such as Josephine Butler, sex workers were depicted as desperate victims in need of support rather than “uncontrollable pestilence feeding on the body social”.¹⁶¹ In this framing, the prostitute was redefined as the “fallen woman”, and the moral language of temptation, fall and repentance enabled the prostitute to be accommodated within the hegemonic notions of femininity and morality.¹⁶² In this process, however, the sex worker was stripped of her agency and became a passive object of action rather than an active participant of the repeal movement.

In their campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts the women of LNA resorted to this notion of “fallenness” and victimhood in order to gain support for their cause and assert dominance over lower-class women. They most often presented these women as daughters, sisters, victims and fallen. These depictions of sex workers as sisters and daughters for example were, although caring and protective, also hierarchical, and custodial, as Walkowitz observes.¹⁶³ The rhetoric of passive working-class woman worked in opposition to the active middle-class repealer. Harriet Martineau’s representation of working-class sex workers is in places similar to that of the Christian repealers. She does resort to victimhood in presenting working-class women as the victims of

¹⁵⁸ Lee 2013, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Lee 2013, 67.

¹⁶⁰ Attwood 2011, 6.

¹⁶¹ Nead 1988, 124–125.

¹⁶² Nead 1988, 139.

¹⁶³ Walkowitz 1980, 117.

upper-class men's seduction. However, as I will argue, her refusal to refer to the sex workers as fallen, as well as her unparalleled emphasis on their equality to "respectable women" in terms of law and nationality, sets her apart from the Christian repealers.

3.1 "Victims of the vice of men": Sex workers as the sufferers

Many of the religious repealers doing philanthropy work among prostitutes preached the equality between the women of different classes. This egalitarian conception was implemented by characterising the working-class women as proverbial sisters instead of daughter-figures to their middle-class counterparts.¹⁶⁴ However, the class-ratified culture was present in this rhetoric as well, for as Nina Attwood argues, to the middle-class repealers, the prostitutes were "most definitely "little" sisters – worthy of help and assistance yet fallen and disgraced nonetheless."¹⁶⁵ The often-used term "fallen" refers to the prostitute's fall from respectability into prostitution. The repeal women claimed that the "fall" was due to the seduction done by upper-class men, and it was a common argument that prostitution only existed because of men.¹⁶⁶ The notion of fallenness meant that it was possible for the sex worker to gain back her respectability, thus creating an alternative result to the prostitute's life than that of painful decline and death.¹⁶⁷ The term does, however, draw distinction between the respectable and unrespectable, making a clear difference between the lower- and upper-class women.

As Walkowitz states, the rhetoric of fallenness and the depiction of prostitutes as passive victims of upper-class men worked as a political tactic to gain support for the repeal effort.¹⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the victimization rhetoric presents sex workers and working-class women as weak beings, incapable of managing their own actions. The narrative of victimhood was partly an effort to regulate the threat of sexual deviancy; by portraying the prostitute as an object of pity and a victim in need of reclamation and rescue, the repeal women, striving for moral reform, attempted to contain and control their power as threat to society.¹⁶⁹ It stands to reason, then, that the decision to frame prostitutes as defenseless victims was not solely motivated by the desire to rally

¹⁶⁴ Attwood 2011, 85.

¹⁶⁵ Attwood 2011, 88.

¹⁶⁶ Attwood 2011, 92.

¹⁶⁷ Nead 1988, 158.

¹⁶⁸ Walkowitz 1982, 84.

¹⁶⁹ Nead 1988, 138.

support around a sympathetic character. Rather, there was just as big of a motivation to undercut their power by asserting dominance over them by boxing them into objects of pious familial care provided by their middle-class benefactors.

In contrast to the Christian repealers, Martineau abstains from referring to prostitutes as fallen women explicitly but does deploy the narrative of falling that is the trope of the seduction of an innocent girl. As I will demonstrate below, the rhetoric victimhood is ever-present in Martineau's writings as well; however, my claim is that Martineau views sex workers more as victims of society rather than men's corruption.

Often when writing about women in the sex trade, Martineau refers to them as the "victims of the vice of men"¹⁷⁰, thus partaking in the common repeal discourse and stripping them of their agency. Her victimisation rhetoric is most emphasised in her depiction of the working-class women as "ruined women in their weakness".¹⁷¹ Martineau emphasises the sex workers status as passive creatures ruined by the "animal passion"¹⁷² of men. Furthermore, she describes the sex workers as "wronged and deluded victims of man's guile"¹⁷³ and "helpless"¹⁷⁴, thus partaking in the portrayal of them as naïve, frivolous girls, easily fooled by men's charm.

In the narratives of innocent girls falling into the "evils of prostitution", it was common to portray them as young women from the countryside. Many repealers argued that it was the young rural girls who were at most risk of falling since they were, due to their natural and tranquil surroundings, unaccustomed to the corruption of the urban bourgeois men.¹⁷⁵ This image of the degradation of an innocent country girl is used by Martineau as well:

Many thousands of girls, as innocent as any of their countrymen, have been courted down in the rural districts by a soldier, idling away his days, or a commercial traveller, appearing periodically, or a lawyer going the circuit, or some other heartless vagabond. Each of these many thousands has probably believed herself the favourite of Fortune—destined to marry a great man in the great town—London or other. After an agonising decline and a heart-

¹⁷⁰ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN 29.12.1869.

¹⁷¹ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN 29.12.1869.

¹⁷² Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN 29.12.1869.

¹⁷³ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN 29.12.1869.

¹⁷⁴ Martineau, letter to unknown correspondent 1871, in Yates 1985, 249.

¹⁷⁵ Nead 1988, 159.

breaking struggle, she finds herself an outcast in the streets of the great town—doomed to a fearful fate, from the earliest days of the existence of her calling.¹⁷⁶

In the Victorian domestic ideology, the city was often contrasted with the countryside. The countryside was seen as the rural idyll; healthy, stable, and peaceful as opposed to the “disease-ridden” and revolutionary city life.¹⁷⁷ The rural idyll represented above all morality and purity, and it is no wonder it was so often utilized in the repeal rhetoric. In the narrative, the rural girls represent the pure, unsullied, and morally just – taking the notion of female asexuality and moral position to the highest – who have been disgraced by the “heartless” city men.

In addition to deploying the images of naïve country girls, Martineau shares the Christian repealers’ tendency of over-estimating the numbers as well as universalizing the causes for prostitution. Some sex workers truly came to their profession due to seduction. However, as numerous scholars have noted, the causes of prostitution were a lot more complex and varied than merely the unworldliness of young girls. The most common causes for prostitution included poverty as well as poor education - and employment opportunities. In most cases, women’s move into sex work was more truthfully a “rational choice, given the limited alternatives open to them”.¹⁷⁸ This fact was not lost on the feminist repealers either; because the narrative of prostitutes as “fallen women” was politically advantageous to them, they were not moved to explore the actual motives and lifestyles of registered sex workers.¹⁷⁹

The trope of victimhood was not idiosyncratic to the Christian repealers, for the secularist activists too considered working-class prostitutes as victims. For example, one female freethinker characterized prostitutes as “women poor and friendless, who loathe the very trade they ply”.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, even for some of the secularists prostitution represented degradation and immorality. Secularists, however, usually attributed prostitution to poverty rather than seduction¹⁸¹, in which case it was society that was to blame for women’s moral degradation and not men’s “hypersexuality”.

¹⁷⁶ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN 29.12.1869.

¹⁷⁷ Nead 1988, 39.

¹⁷⁸ Walkowitz 1980, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Walkowitz 1980, 110-111.

¹⁸⁰ Schwartz 2013, 161.

¹⁸¹ Schwartz 2013, 161.

It has been noted that Martineau along with her contemporary freethinkers considered poor education- and work opportunities as the main reasons for prostitution.¹⁸² Martineau's reliance on the narrative of sex workers as victims of men's seduction seems, therefore, out of place for her beliefs. My argument is that albeit Martineau resorts to the common repeal language of sex workers as victims of men, she, however, considers prostitution as a matter of society's failure to provide proper opportunities to working-class women.

The notion of prostitutes as victims of society appears in some places in Martineau's writings on the Contagious Diseases Acts. For example, she refers to them at points as "abandoned"¹⁸³ which can be interpreted to mean abandoned by society. She depicts prostitutes as victims of society in the unjust and corrupt regulation system. In her third letter she writes:

It is but too true that there are instances on record of medical officers and the police being actually in the pay of the prostitutes, these wretched women being held at the mercy of the extortioners by threats of being informed against.¹⁸⁴

In presenting the police and physicians as extortioners, demanding money from prostitutes for their silence, Martineau portrays the sex workers not only as victims of men's sexual urges, but as victims of the British society and its new legislation as well.

Although the rhetoric of victimhood is strong in Martineau's writing, she does not only refer to the prostitutes as the victims. Speaking of the Contagious Diseases Acts Martineau portrays all women as victims of men and the society as well. She writes: "it is almost worse that the sex most guilty in regard to the sin should be protected from the natural retribution by the sacrifice of the victimised sex."¹⁸⁵

In victimizing the women, she always pits them against men, portraying men as responsible for women's victimhood. In Martineau's writing men are "the cause of the sin"¹⁸⁶ and all women are "the victims of a vice"¹⁸⁷, in plain terms: the men's vice. Her portrayal of all women as victims is another attempt to find the common ground beneath her readers and the sex workers. After all, as women, they are all bound by the same laws. At the same time, she emphasises the common

¹⁸² Logan 2002, 148.

¹⁸³ Martineau "The Ladies' National Association for the repeal of The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN, 31.12.1869.

¹⁸⁴ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts III" LDN, 30.12.1869.

¹⁸⁵ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN, 29.12.1869.

¹⁸⁶ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN, 29.12.1869.

¹⁸⁷ Martineau "The Ladies' National Association for the repeal of The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN, 31.12.1869.

repeal argument that it was men “backed by the medical lust of handling and dominating women” that were the source of contagion and moral corruption, not the prostitutes.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the seduction narrative makes it plainly clear that whereas the upper-class woman is afforded political agency, the sex worker is left robbed of hers. Thus, I would suggest that Martineau’s victimhood rhetoric is therefore not fully impartial even though it includes upper class women.

In addition to Martineau’s reliance on the narrative of victimhood she also refers to the reclaiming of the “fallen”. For example, in her second letter she states: “No doubt it will be new to many readers that the chance of retrieval has lately been cut off in this way from that class of women wherever the new Acts operate”.¹⁸⁹ In her third letter she again points out that “fewer can be reclaimed”¹⁹⁰ in the areas under the legislation of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Although she does not emphasise the importance of rescue work in her writings as Butler and other Christian repealers and moral reformists did, her reference to it is important to note, for it contradicts Martineau’s own atheist beliefs.

The notion of reclamation of prostitutes was a crucial part of the purity movement which followed the repeal of the C.D. Acts in the 1880s. The moral purity movement, or moral reform, was an attempt to reinforce Christian norms of sexuality, marriage and family and therefore purify the morals of the whole nation.¹⁹¹ The reclamation of prostitutes generally took the form of rescue work, in which missionaries were sent out into the streets and brothels to persuade sex workers to enter a refuge or penitentiary.¹⁹² Rescue work was purely religious in nature, it was the social function of evangelical Christianity¹⁹³ and Butler, for example, saw reclaiming prostitutes as the duty of every Christian woman.¹⁹⁴

The moral reformists believed that rescue and reclamation could restore the prostitute to her “pre-fallen state of virtuous morality and asexual purity”.¹⁹⁵ They believed that women who came within the sphere of the rescue group could escape from the downward progress of prostitution, gain back their respectability, and find new opportunities.¹⁹⁶ However, in order to be reclaimed

¹⁸⁸ Mort 1987, 73.

¹⁸⁹ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

¹⁹⁰ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts III” LDN, 30.12.1869.

¹⁹¹ Morgan 2007, 151–152.

¹⁹² Nead 1988, 199.

¹⁹³ Nead 1988, 159.

¹⁹⁴ Ichikawa 2015, 108–109.

¹⁹⁵ Mort 1987, 76.

¹⁹⁶ Nead 1988, 158.

the prostitutes had to identify their own debasement, their status as victims of male vice. Only when showing humility in their self-recognition of degradation and repenting their sins would the registered women gain sympathy from the Christian repealers.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, the aid offered by the middle-class women was most often conditional.

Even though Martineau refers to rescue work – which in itself is quite odd given the strong religious fervour underlying it – she does not use it as her main rhetorical tool as many of the Christian women in the movement did. The strongly religious leader of the LNA, Josephine Butler, often incorporated the tale of reclaiming in her melodramatic activism. For example, Butler made one of her protégées, a woman named Mary Lomax, into an example of the miracle of rescue work of a victimised working-class woman. Butler portrayed Lomax as the victim of an upper-man’s seduction per usual. She depicted Lomax’s reclamation and transformation into a pious Christian woman under her protection and emphasised her sacredness. In this narrative “Lomax became the ideal embodiment of Butler’s vision of resurrection of a fallen angel.”¹⁹⁸

Martineau steers clear of this sort of religious depiction of the function of rescue work and leaves it mostly on a level of mention, making it possible that she did not subscribe to its strong religious aspects. Her possible moral reformist ideals – including the concept of rescue work – will be further examined in chapter four which deals with Martineau’s political purposes and motives.

3.2. “The real sinners”: Defining the prostitute

In Victorian Britain, the discourses on prostitution constantly attempted to define and redefine the prostitute. To redefine respectable and non-respectable groups of people, according to Nead, was “part of the obsessive attempt to segregate the pure and the impure”.¹⁹⁹ One of the reasons why the Contagious Diseases Acts angered so many women was indeed – in addition to their double standard – the fact that the laws did not define who the “common prostitute” was.²⁰⁰ In theory, the laws allowed any woman who the police suspected to be a prostitute to be attained. This is

¹⁹⁷ Attwood 2011, 94.

¹⁹⁸ Ichikawa 2015, 111.

¹⁹⁹ Nead 1988, 97.

²⁰⁰ Nead 1988, 101.

the reason why many repeal-campaigners' texts emphasise that the Acts pose a threat to every woman.²⁰¹

The loose definition of the "common prostitute" also resulted in an undertaking amongst the repealers to define who the "real prostitute" was. The call for proper definition of the prostitute is apparent in Martineau's writing as well. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate how her rhetoric in other ways differs quite distinctively from that of the Christian repealers in her singular depiction of the sex worker and her benevolent attitude towards her.

The attempt to differentiate the chaste from the unchaste resulted in incoherent and scattered representations of the prostitute. For example, Butler's goals of creating a society based on Christian morality produced multiple images of the sex worker.²⁰² The repealers strived for a unitary front but their ambivalent attitudes towards the women in the sex trade made clear their mission to subject lower-class women to their ideal of moral purity. This is apparent in their segregation of the fallen woman from the "true prostitute".

The attempted distinction between the prostitute and the fallen woman was an effort to differentiate and categorize the diverse forms of illicit behavior.²⁰³ In Butler's rhetoric, the difference of the fallen woman and the prostitute is quite distinct. The fallen woman, as mentioned before, was a female victim of a man and had potential for salvation and reclaiming her respectability. The prostitute, however, was presented as an active agent in her own degradation. She was the woman who refused rescue work and happily manipulated her sexuality as a commodity.²⁰⁴ Women in the sex industry rarely identified themselves as "prostitutes", and according to Attwood, this indicates that they did not define their activities as prostitution or that their activity did not define them.²⁰⁵ However, to the repealers their activity – or rather their indulgence in it – very much defined them.

When the moral reformist repealers faced refusal of rescue work and redemption, they became morally indignant and even punitive towards the sex-workers.²⁰⁶ Butler's representation of these women – the "real prostitutes" – was quite different from the victimizing rhetoric of the innocent

²⁰¹ Walkowitz 1980, 1-2.

²⁰² Attwood 2011, 71.

²⁰³ Nead 1988, 96.

²⁰⁴ Attwood 2011, 82.

²⁰⁵ Attwood 2011, 14.

²⁰⁶ Attwood 2011, 73; Walkowitz 1980, 132.

fallen. The real prostitutes were hardened women, denoted by the loss of shame and self-respect (which in Butler's rhetoric was connected to sexual morality), who voluntarily and continuously worked in the field of prostitution. Butler referred to these women as "shameless", "hard" and "arrogant".²⁰⁷ Butler's attitude towards the self-identified prostitutes was very harsh. For example, she noted that the examination paper signed by the surgeon was "indeed a prize to a shameless woman".²⁰⁸ This, contrasted with her usual stance on the pelvic examination as "instrumental rape"²⁰⁹, makes apparent the radical change of attitude when writing on the unrepentant women.

This sort of strong differentiating of women working in the sale of sexual services is not as distinct in Martineau's writing. In fact, Martineau does not seem to differentiate the fallen and the "real prostitute" almost at all. In my view, this is most apparent in her broad usage of the term prostitute in referring to the sex workers and the complete lack of the word fallen.

Butler and her fellow Christian repealers only referred to the self-identified prostitutes as "prostitutes" or "harlots".²¹⁰ Martineau, however, uses the term prostitute much more extensively, making it hard to detect who she defines as the prostitute. For example, she often refers to the medical examination of prostitutes²¹¹ and to "prostitutes – pursuing their trade".²¹² Unlike Butler, Martineau does not attempt to specify who "the real prostitute" is. Only once does she use the word "hardened" in saying that in result of the laws "more women become heart-broken or hardened"²¹³ However, even in referring to the hardened, she makes no separation between the women. Rather, her aim is to highlight the horrors of the pelvic examination.

While Martineau uses the word prostitute as a catch-all term for women in the sex trade, not singling out the "fallen", she does distinguish to some extent between the different types of women victimised in this context. Martineau differentiates the women in sex work from the respectable women mistakenly claimed as prostitutes by the police. She writes:

If a tithe of the stories were told which might be truly told of innocent women who have confessed, under the torture of the new peril, sin which they never dreamed of, or of real

²⁰⁷ Attwood 2011, 80-82.

²⁰⁸ Attwood 2011, 82.

²⁰⁹ Walkowitz 1980, 110.

²¹⁰ Attwood 2011, 83.

²¹¹ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts III" LDN, 30.12.1869.

²¹² Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN, 29.12.1869.

²¹³ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts III" LDN, 30.12.1869.

sinner so unable to endure what is now imposed upon them as to faint or to go mad, the people of the country would be heartbroken.²¹⁴

Here again Martineau highlights that the Acts affect the chaste and the unchaste alike, regardless of whether they have “sinned” or not. Martineau seems to lot all women who have sold sexual services under the same title “real sinners”, regardless the duration of their career. This separates her from the Christian repealers. Butler often stated that there is a wide difference between the old, hardened prostitute and the recently seduced woman, arguing that the Acts should not treat them alike.²¹⁵ Martineau’s attitude towards all the unchaste is gentler; she depicts the “real sinners” as the victims of the regulation together with the innocent. Her benevolent demeanour towards sex workers is strong from the start, for in the first letter she states that the Acts are – falsely – believed to

amend the health, and possibly the morals and behaviour of the unhappy women who were the first of our countrywomen to undergo the outrage and heart-break (as it truly is to many of them) of personal violation under sanction of law and the agency of the police.²¹⁶

“The unhappy women” Martineau writes about most likely refers to the known sex workers, for the first to undergo the medical examinations were the common prostitutes who had been in business for a longer time. Martineau again depicts them as the victims of the regulation, highlighting that the outrage of the medical examination is not a prize to them but a heart-break as humiliating and violent as it is to their chaste countrywomen.

It was uncommon for a repealer not to segregate the repentant victims from the self-identified prostitutes. In Martineau’s case, it could be due to her intolerance of sexuality and unorthodox relationships.²¹⁷ She could have seen all the sex workers as similarly “unchaste” and thus boxed them all in “that class of women”²¹⁸. Still, it is more likely that Martineau’s refusal to separate the women had more to do with rhetorical aims and possibly served some sort of political purpose. However, in the scope of the available sources, it is near impossible to identify what these purposes might have been and why Martineau eschews defining the prostitute. One possible explanation could be her belief in the deterministic doctrine of necessitarianism in which humans

²¹⁴ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

²¹⁵ Attwood 2011, 80.

²¹⁶ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

²¹⁷ For example, Yates 1985, 17.

²¹⁸ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

were believed to be creatures of circumstances. I will examine the effect of her necessarianist beliefs on her representations of prostitutes more deeply in the following chapter.

In her letters Martineau nevertheless emphasises the fact that the legislation does not define the “common prostitute”. She writes:

A woman, chaste or unchaste, is charged by a policeman, rightly or wrongly, with being a prostitute. The law makes no distinctions of degrees or kinds, provides the accused with no means of trial or defence, but subjects her to legal violation.²¹⁹

It is ironic that Martineau so adamantly demands a proper definition for the prostitute but offers none herself. This makes the question of her avoidance of the classification of sex workers all the more interesting and creates fruitful grounds for further exploration.

In her quite singular depiction of sex workers as victims of men and society, Martineau takes agency from all of them but at the same time regards all of them – fallen or voluntarily in sex work – with the same amount of respect. Respect for the individual was one of the doctrines in Martineau’s activism; along the lines of the liberalism of the time, she believed that every individual had natural rights and earned to be treated with respect.²²⁰

Even though Martineau’s attitude towards sex workers is respectful instead of punitive or judgemental, she does still depict sex workers as inferior to her and other repealers in presenting them as passive victims. She also differentiates them from the virtuous women speaking of “chaste and unchaste women” as well as “innocent women”. However, she also portrays sex workers as equals to all the “respectable” women of England. Her sense of solidarity culminates in her portrayal of sex workers as English citizens equal to everyone in terms of the British law.

3.3. “Our countrywomen”: Sex workers as equals

As mentioned earlier, Christianity was used in unifying the repealers and in attracting middle-class women to join the movement. Often the notion of pious sisterhood was deployed in unifying the upper and the lower-class women. Butler argued that they were all equal before the eyes of God

²¹⁹ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

²²⁰ Yates 1985, 5.

and had the same individual rights as such.²²¹ However, this rhetoric was often hierarchical, placing the lower-class women under the power of the middle-class reformists. This, together with Butler's urge to separate the virtuous from the "harlot", resulted in quite unequal setting, making the repeal movement a matter of the middle-class ladies. Many scholars have accordingly observed that, for the feminist reformers in the repeal movement, the aim was less to help prostitutes and more to redress the sexual double standard of the C.D. Acts as well as to fight for the women who were in their opinion wrongly identified as prostitutes by the police (that is, the fallen victims).²²²

Martineau's depiction of sex workers is in places similar as in her use of the victimizing rhetoric of the seduction of young rural girls. Nevertheless, the strongest rhetoric in her writing is that of patriotism. As argued in 2.1, Martineau used the rhetoric of patriotism and self-sacrifice in attracting middle-class women to join the movement. Furthermore, she includes prostitutes under the same unifying title: Englishwomen. In my interpretation, her depiction of sex workers as fellow countrywomen as well as her emphasis on their rights as English citizens makes her activism much more egalitarian.

In her first letter she writes that the prostitutes, the "unhappy women", were the "first of our countrywomen to undergo the outrage and heartbreak".²²³ Throughout her letters, she keeps addressing prostitutes as "countrywomen" or "English women", including the lower-class sex workers in her patriotic rhetoric. The Christian repealers contended that sex workers were (fallen) sisters in Christ and therefore should be helped. In including prostitutes in her rhetoric of patriotism, Martineau however argues that her readers should participate in the repeal effort and help sex workers under the legislation because of their shared national identity, rather than their shared status as Christian women.

Martineau emphasises the common status of all English women the most in her second letter. She states:

Up to the date of the passage of these Bills every woman in the country had the same rights as men over her own person; and the law extended its protection over all alike—of both

²²¹ Attwood 2011, 88.

²²² Attwood 2011, 79–80.

²²³ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN, 28.12.1869.

sexes, and altogether without regard to any question of character, manners, and calling. Prostitutes were as other women, and as men, in their claims upon the law.²²⁴

Martineau highlights that all English women have the same legal status as English citizens, no matter their social standing or occupation. By accentuating the equality of women under the British law, Martineau conjures a more tangible and effective backdrop for solidarity than the one offered by conditional and hierarchical Christian rhetoric. In her more secular depiction, the sex workers are seen as true equals to all the other Englishwomen. Furthermore, Martineau confesses prostitution to be a calling, and occupation, in a quite neutral tone, which was very unusual for a repealer. Butler and other Christian repealers understood the prostitute in terms of the absence of “certain notions of appropriate femininity rather than in terms of a delineable occupational description”.²²⁵ Therefore, Butler seldomly referred to the calling of prostitution but described it in more moralistic language.

Butler represented prostitutes as both different from and similar to women in general. However, she only included the sex workers who repented their sins in the class of women²²⁶; unrepentant sex workers she regarded unfeminine. My argument here is that Martineau’s more neutral and inclusive language is in this sense rather radical. As noted previously, she separates the chaste respectable women from the unchaste sex workers; however, she does not draw attention to the prostitute’s apparent unfemininity and does not define her less feminine or less woman. On the contrary, Martineau depicts the sex worker, while unchaste and victimized, as a fellow British woman.

The lack of moral language and definitions is quite characteristic for Martineau. As Valerie Sanders observes, Martineau expressed herself clearly and “eschewed the elaborate metaphors and biblical prognostications”.²²⁷ Martineau’s insistence on the British laws and the equality of all citizens under it mirrors her personal journalistic voice which foregrounds the practical and commonplace.²²⁸ Therefore, it can be inferred that for Martineau, it was simply not productive or pragmatic for the repeal effort to focus on the definitions of femininity regarding the prostitutes.

²²⁴ Martineau “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

²²⁵ Attwood 2011, 79.

²²⁶ Attwood 2011, 91.

²²⁷ Sanders 2017, 188.

²²⁸ Sanders 2017, 188.

Martineau's egalitarian rhetoric culminates in the ending of her third letter (the last letter on the Contagious Diseases Acts) where she strongly pleads:

We [English women] cannot, will not, must not, surrender any of the personal liberty which is our birthright; and we may be sure that that could be no true remedy for our grief which should demand such a sacrifice from us at the outset.²²⁹

By writing "we" Martineau refers to all the English women whose rights are at risk. Although her letters are mostly aimed at the upper-class women unaware of the Acts, Martineau most likely attaches the lower-class women to this title as well. This can be conducted from her reference to prostitutes as "our countrywomen" as well as her statement that prostitutes "are as other women"²³⁰ in regard to their rights of personal integrity as human beings and as English citizens. This egalitarian representation of the sex workers is extremely progressive in challenging the hierarchical structure the middle-class women strived for in their moral reformist philanthropy.

Martineau's emphasis on gender, as already noted in 2.1, is an attempt to unify the women in England against the Acts which she sees as favouring "the grosser and stronger sinner".²³¹ Martineau highlights the purity and asexuality of women in her writings and presents men as either ignorant in advocating for the Acts or as "selfish", "gross", "heartless" and the "cause of the sin" in purchasing sexual services and seducing innocent women. By contrasting women and men, Martineau reveals her belief in the conservative notion of sexual differences where women are naturally more moral and pure. However, her rhetoric of female solidarity, manifest in her reliance in the British law and patriotism, is also an effective tactic to mobilize the women of England to take part in politics to fight for their "most sacred liberties".²³²

Martineau's representations of lower-class prostitutes have some similar attributes to that of Butler's Christian repeal rhetoric. She portrays sex workers as victims of men and society, taking away their agency; however, she partly puts respectable women in the same position as the victims. Furthermore, Martineau's depiction of prostitutes as equal English citizens as well as her benevolent attitude towards them reveals the differences of her activism. Still, Martineau's

²²⁹ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts III" LDN, 30.12.1869.

²³⁰ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN, 29.12.1869.

²³¹ Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN, 29.12.1869.

²³² Martineau "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN, 29.12.1869.

representation is not fully without contradictions and has similar problems of differentiating women as Butler's has.

Although Butler acknowledged agency to the prostitutes, her stark distinction between them and the virtuous fallen women resulted in a contradictory representation and thus posed a challenge to the rhetoric of female solidarity.²³³ At times, Butler's language was quite inclusive – speaking of the “vicious and virtuous alike” but then changed to exclusive setting apart the virtuous fallen from the “notorious and shameless harlot”.²³⁴ Martineau does not single out the “harlots” but is guilty of similar contradictions in her language. She includes all women in sex work under the same category “prostitute” and separates them from the innocent chaste women who “never dreamed of” such sins. At the same time, she, however, portrays them as equals as English women and at times demotes upper-class women to the same status of victim attempting to present women from all classes as equals under the British law. Therefore, Martineau's representations of women, although somewhat different from that of Butler's, are as inconsistent as hers.

However, Martineau's refusal to differentiate sex workers from another as well as her unprecedented egalitarian portrayal of them as fellow English citizens, makes her a distinct persona in the repeal movement and a unique Victorian activist ahead of her time.

²³³ Attwood 2011, 80.

²³⁴ Attwood 2011, 78.

4. Martineau's political aims and motives

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Christian repealers had ulterior motives for their campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts; that is, of social purity. Many scholars have studied Butler's political aims of moral purity and as Attwood observes, Josephine Butler's political campaign against the Acts can be seen as the first step in her larger programme of social and moral reform.²³⁵ For Butler, the repeal campaign and its insistence of a singular sexual moral standard was a (Christian) mission of purifying the nation and the moral reconstructing of British national identity.²³⁶ The moral reformist repealers' most important political aim was, therefore, to "reshape the world according to their own image".²³⁷ This led to the efforts to control and regulate the sexuality of the working classes through rescue and preventive work and, as Walkowitz notes, in the social purity effort, there was no place for a libertarian defence for prostitutes and they were often objects of "purity attacks".²³⁸ Butler's underlying agenda of Christian social purity had a direct effect on her attitudes and representations of sex workers in her activism.²³⁹

The repeal movement was not unified in its call for moral reform but rather a fragmented coalition characterised by differing opinions on the purpose and practice. For Butler and her fellow moral reformists, the repeal was first and foremost a matter of moral reform against the social and spiritual evils. Its ultimate aim was the "regeneration of society through expanding the moral sway of women and bringing about the transformation of men".²⁴⁰ However, some leading figures in the campaign saw the effort more pragmatically. For example, for Millicent Garret Fawcett, the movement was to be worked through accepted political channels, as she wanted to build repeal activism into an established political movement.²⁴¹

It is difficult to identify to which camp Martineau belonged. Her writings seem to support many notions of moral reform; her emphasis on sexual differences in terms of morality, home, and family as well as her depiction of sex workers as victims hint at a moral reformist goal. However,

²³⁵ Attwood 2011, 85-86.

²³⁶ Ichikawa 2015, 111.

²³⁷ Walkowitz 1982, 80.

²³⁸ Walkowitz 1982, 80.

²³⁹ Attwood 2011, 95.

²⁴⁰ Caine 1982, 574.

²⁴¹ Caine 1982, 574.

her rivalling representations of sex workers as equal citizens as well as her distinct mission to educate the public reveal her more materialist practice and purpose.

In this chapter I will argue that some of Martineau's representations most likely did stem from a moral reformist goal. Nonetheless, I will demonstrate that while she shared some aspects of the moral reform, she also actively challenged it with her more radical representations which I suggest derived from her belief on the necessarian doctrine as well as her belief on education as the key for repeal. Furthermore, I suggest that Martineau's representations of women in her writings on the Contagious Diseases Acts reveal the underlying tension between her middle-class moral background and her newly found materialist worldview. Therefore, in my view, her motives can be divided into two subsections: bourgeois morality, conflicted with her necessarianism, and an overarching aim of educating the public.

4.1 The moral reformist signs in Martineau's writings

As stated earlier, it is a difficult task to pinpoint Martineau's stance on the moral reform. Martineau died in 1876, before the repeal of the C.D. Acts and the ascension of the widescale moral purity movement. Thus, there is little writing from Martineau on the notion of moral purity itself and it is hard to assess if the moral reform motivated Martineau's political activism against the Acts. However, in this section, I will attempt to identify Martineau's moral beliefs and whether her representations of women sprang from a moral reformist mission or not.

Martineau's representation of women has similar hierarchical structures as Butler's. Martineau elevates women above men as both morally and intellectually superior. However, in representing working class sex workers as victims to be protected, she separates women of different classes, creating a hierarchy in which all women are above men and middle-class women above the lower-class sex workers. The representations of the middle-class women as moral guardians and working-class prostitutes as victims is tell-tale of both a moral reformist outlook as well as a possible desire to impose the middle-class ideal of female morality on working-class women. As Ichikawa and Walkowitz observe, Butler's maternal imagery and the desire to protect the fallen

victims served the reconstruction of national morality and the attempt to enforce a middle-class social code that stressed female adolescent dependency.²⁴²

Nevertheless, many freethinking feminists in the movement often defaulted to more conservative imagery of womanhood in fear of driving their supporters away if they accentuated their radical thoughts on the characteristics of women.²⁴³ Martineau was a skilled orator and, as noted by scholars, utilized different rhetorical devices that worked in her favour. Thus, it could be that the representations of women's domestic virtue served as linguistic devices. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to delineate those ideas which were advanced purely out of pragmatic considerations from those which can be taken to reflect her true beliefs.

As noted in the previous chapter, Martineau possessed a distinct writing style characterised by a practical and familiar manoeuvre. Her letters of 1869 with their lack of moral judgment or religious metaphors are a great example of Martineau's cut-to-the-chase writing style. However, her placards, written a few years later, approximately in 1871, differ greatly from her previous rational prose.

Martineau's placards are rife with Christian language and straightforward references to moral purity. For example, in her placard *To the women of Colchester*, she refers to a biblical doctrine when criticizing Henry Storks: "This is the professed "opinion" of a man who is regarded as a Christian gentleman, who cannot but be aware how fornication is denounced in the Scriptures".²⁴⁴ The deeply religious language is apparent in her other placard, *Old England! Purity and Freedom!*, as well. The title itself refers to the notion of purity that Butler campaigned. In the placard addressed to the electors of North Nottinghamshire, Martineau states her urge, along with the other three undersigned, Josephine Butler, Ursula Bright and Lydia E. Becker, to "entreat you – in the name of Religion, of Morality, and of our National freedom".²⁴⁵

It is quite peculiar that Martineau, a renowned atheist, would write in such pious terms, and furthermore list religion before national freedom in her appeals, since national liberty was so emphasised in her letters of 1869. The placards are evidently very different from Martineau's

²⁴² Ichikawa 2015, 108; Walkowitz 1982, 84.

²⁴³ Schwartz 2013, 133.

²⁴⁴ Martineau "To the Women of Colchester" c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 247.

²⁴⁵ Martineau "Old England" Purity and Freedom!" c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 248.

usual writing, and I would suggest that she exploited deeply religious language in the placards in order to advance the goal of repeal.

Yates notes Martineau's great presence in the repeal movement, which has often been left unnoticed by other scholars. Yates states that she was "the driving force, second to only the organizing leader of the campaign, Josephine Butler" in the feminist effort for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.²⁴⁶ According to her, Martineau wrote placards, drafts for petitions and even speeches for the campaign leader, Josephine Butler.²⁴⁷ The fact that Martineau wrote some of Butler's speeches, known for their passionately religious and moral language, explains Martineau's uncharacteristic writing style in her placards.

My position is that Martineau did not personally subscribe to the religious worldviews held by the moral reformists. Rather, she leveraged their zealous Christian rhetoric, believing it to have a greater impact on the target audience. This explains why her previous writing in the letters, which launched the repeal campaign of the LNA, differ so strongly from her later writing style. By the time Martineau wrote her placards, the Ladies' Association had already adopted the strong Christian rhetoric and culture it would later become famous for. I suggest that Martineau maintained the Christian rhetoric in her placards because she had seen its effect on the public and wanted to keep the message of the Association cohesive. Martineau knew that accentuating her own anti-theist beliefs – which two decades before Martineau had feared would "excommunicate her from the world of literature, if not from society"²⁴⁸ – would not work in favour of the repealers in the already radical repeal campaign.

Martineau's acceptance of the religious repeal rhetoric in her placards as well as some of its notions – like references to the reclamation of prostitutes – in the letters written a few years earlier can be seen as a compromise on her own irreligiousness in order to reach her goal of the repeal of the Acts she deems "the most conspicuous disgraces of our time".²⁴⁹ This, together with her high social status, are probable reasons why Butler so readily welcomed Martineau in the LNA ranks, and why she was so influential in it.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Yates 1985, 245.

²⁴⁷ Yates 1985, 2.

²⁴⁸ Roberts 2002, 170.

²⁴⁹ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN, 28.12.1869.

²⁵⁰ It has been recorded that Butler usually took issue with the non-believers of the LNA and attempted to silence them. Although Martineau was notoriously atheist, she was also famous for her skills as a popular educator and her

Although it is evident that Martineau did not adhere to the religiousness of the moral reform movement, she did share the same Victorian middle-class moral ideology that the moral reformist sought to impose on the lower classes, the moral importance of the family home and the domestic virtue of women. I maintain that Martineau's more traditional representations of women – specifically that of middle-class women as moral superiors and sex workers as victims – stemmed from her middle-class background that she shared with Josephine Butler and most of her fellow repealers.

The private women's sphere was that of home and family, but according to Barbara Caine, in the Victorian era, it involved "a new emphasis in which home and family came to be seen as the centre of religious and moral values".²⁵¹ The domestic ideology therefore was not only in line with the Christian way life but was the bastion of morality in general. The idea of the family home was especially important to the middle class. For a fragmented body of people from different occupational groups, it was important to create a coherent and definite class identity which would separate them from the other social classes. In many ways, this class coherence was built around the shared notions of morality, respectability and above all domestic ideology. Specified gender roles were a crucial aspect in the process of defining the middle-class.²⁵² It was this middle-class domestic ideology and its norms of women's purity, moral supremacy, and domestic virtues that the moral reformist philanthropists imposed on the lower-class prostitutes they sought to "reclaim."²⁵³

The importance of the family home is present in almost all of Martineau's writings on the Contagious Diseases Acts. Hattaway argues that, of the four letters of 1869, the first drew most prominently on the powerful rhetoric of Victorian domesticity and portrayed the private sphere under attack.²⁵⁴ Martineau's first letter does state that the LNA women's mission is even greater than that of Lady Godiva's, for they "are striving to save home itself, and to preserve the most

involvement was seen as an effective way to publicise any political enterprise. Additionally, Martineau was deemed observationally pure and morally just by her admirers and thus, although a controversial character in the Victorian society, enjoyed the status of a person famous for a moral high ground. Martineau's influence was simply too great to be left unutilised, and Butler indeed made good use of Martineau's name in her campaign. Walkowitz 1980, 123; Watts 2017, 42-43; Sanders 2017, 191.

²⁵¹ Caine 1982, 541.

²⁵² Nead 1988, 5.

²⁵³ Nead 1988, 203.

²⁵⁴ Hattaway 2012, 274.

sacred of institutions, and one hitherto pre-eminently our own—the Family.”²⁵⁵ However, in my view, her domestic values are most apparent in her second letter in which she highlights women’s role as moral guardians the most, as demonstrated in chapter two. In her second letter, she boldly states that the Government is “enlisted on the side of animal passion and against the old institutions of Marriage and the Home”.²⁵⁶ In contrasting the home and marriage – the epitomes of moral purity – to animal passion, Martineau highlights the private sphere’s civilized status which the (assumed) rise of prostitution threatened.

Martineau’s references to the private sphere are most prominent in her placards which, as argued above, were written in a much more moralistic tone than her letters. In *To the women of Colchester*, she states that “The most endearing feature of our English life has been the reality of its homes”.²⁵⁷ She continues by highlighting the eminent danger the Acts pose for the home. At the end of her placard, Martineau argues that Henry Storks should be rejected by every elector “who values, as an Englishman should, the sanctity of his home”.²⁵⁸ In her placard Martineau underlines the holy status of the home as the nest of morality, and, for that matter, as the essence of British national excellence.

Martineau’s emphasis on the image of domestic virtue could be seen as another linguistic tactic to rouse the middle-class audience into action. As Attwood observes, the images of spiritual womanhood and domestic metaphor in Butler’s political rhetoric were important linguistic devices in mobilizing the middle-class housewives.²⁵⁹ Martineau’s appeal to domestic values surely is in part a means to the same goal. An alternative explanation could be that she used the rhetoric of home to attempt to downplay her freethinking ideology, and the threat it posed to the private sphere.

However, in Martineau’s case, it is more likely that she truly believed in the middle-class domestic ideology. This becomes evident in her private letters. In a letter to Maria Weston Chapman, she confesses her fear for the family home, writing that

²⁵⁵ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts” LDN, 28.12.1869.

²⁵⁶ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN, 29.12.1869.

²⁵⁷ Martineau, “To the Women of Colchester” c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 246.

²⁵⁸ Martineau, “To the Women of Colchester” c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 247.

²⁵⁹ Attwood 2011, 77.

this question of national purity plunges us into the most fearful moral crisis the country was ever in, involving our primary personal liberties, and the very existence, except in name, of the home and the family.²⁶⁰

In another letter to Josephine Butler in 1871, Martineau's tone is more hopeful and her belief in the moral power of the private sphere strong. Dramatically she writes that she has seen from her easy chair

the clear light of our ancient domestic virtue spreading from roof to roof among the homes of our land. The few dark years that are past will be remembered as a warning when the Acts that disgraced them are repealed.²⁶¹

Martineau's letters reveal her true concern for the existence of the family home and her belief in its position as the moral bastion. This is supported by the analysis of many scholars. For example, Ruth Watts observes that Martineau considered home to be the place where most people were educated morally and intellectually, and that like her contemporaries, she considered mothers to be at the centre of this education.²⁶² Therefore, Martineau legitimately shared the common notion of women as moral superiors to men.

My argument then is that Martineau supported and shared the moral reformist goal of elevating national purity at least to an extent. This is due to the shared middle class moral values, which can be seen as tightly entwined with religion. As Julie Melnyk notes, religion permeated Victorian lives in ways that modern readers may find hard to imagine. It deeply affected the moral beliefs and behaviours of the Victorians.²⁶³ Therefore, although Martineau did not share the religious beliefs of most of the moral reformists, she did share the moral values rooted in their religion, and this undoubtedly influenced her representations of women in some ways.

Martineau's moral beliefs and their manifestation in her political activism against the C.D. Acts is not exceptional for a freethinking feminist. As Schwartz detects, the Victorian secularists expressed the same powerful sense of moral mission that has been traditionally associated with the serious Christianity of the time.²⁶⁴ According to her, both the women's and the secularist

²⁶⁰ Martineau, A letter to Maria Weston Chapman c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 250-251.

²⁶¹ Martineau, A letter to Josephine Butler c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 250.

²⁶² Watts 2017, 41.

²⁶³ Melnyk 2008, 1.

²⁶⁴ Schwartz 2013, 156.

movements had in some sense a shared culture on morality. Therefore, freethinkers were also impressionable to the “militant moralism and powerful reforming zeal that characterised so much of the Victorian and early twentieth-century women’s rights campaigns.”²⁶⁵ Nead supports this argument in writing that the moral framework of the Christian tradition provided the language within which morality – even the morality of non-believers – was articulated as well as the formal practices which regulated sexual behaviour.²⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Martineau’s radical libertarian depiction of sex workers as equals in terms of nationality proves her more materialist point of view and the fact that she did not fully commit to the hierarchical practises of the moral reformists. Hattaway argues this to be due to her sense of “cross-class empathy” that grew out of a sense of identification, for she had previously “lived through a highly public version of the same kind of fallen accusation and treatment that the organization meant to protest”.²⁶⁷ This refers to scandal that Martineau’s record of her mesmeric cure resulted in.

I agree with Hattaway that Martineau’s protest of the laws was somewhat driven by empathy as well as her great sense of justice, but I disagree on her suggestion that Martineau identified with the sex workers’ fallenness. In my view, the backlash Martineau received from her book *Letters on Mesmerism* differs quite distinctively from the claims of fallenness that 19th-century sex workers held. While Martineau’s beliefs on mesmerism were considered blasphemy, they did not cause a similar loss of respectability as prostitution did. Therefore, in my view it is unlikely that Martineau identified with the prostitutes’ fallenness. In my interpretation, it was Martineau’s beliefs of necessarianism that underpinned her empathetic regard for prostitutes.

As demonstrated in chapter one, Martineau believed that all human action was influenced by “eternal and irreversible laws” that were beyond their control.²⁶⁸ In the deterministic necessarian doctrine, everything was a consequence of what had preceded it. It held that there is no free human will or action, a person is merely a creature of circumstances.²⁶⁹ In light of this, it can be argued that Martineau saw that the sex workers – due to their circumstances of poor life opportunities – did not have a choice on the matter of morality. This differs radically from the

²⁶⁵ Schwartz 2013, 156-157.

²⁶⁶ Nead 1988, 155.

²⁶⁷ Hattaway 2012, 271.

²⁶⁸ Roberts 2002, 12.

²⁶⁹ Diniejko 2010.

Christian repealers' view which emphasised prostitutes' choice to become reclaimed and, by extension, lifted in the moral hierarchy.

My position is that Martineau's materialist necessarian view in some ways dissolves the conception of moral agency altogether, thus removing the foundation of a moral hierarchy ranking human beings according to virtue. This is apparent in her belief on the lack of autonomy; if Martineau believed sex workers to be merely the prisoners of their circumstances, it would be entailed that she saw them to be predestined to resort to the best and only viable option available to them at a given situation, prostitution. It seems likely that Martineau's empathy and her depiction of sex workers as fellow English women grew from the belief that, given the same circumstances, she herself and other upper-class women could have turned to sex trade as well.

Her necessarianism could also explain why she does not classify women in sex work as "prostitutes" and "fallen". For her, every human is dependent on the natural laws in their actions, therefore it would be pointless to separate them from another in terms of morality. This is, however, at odds with her effort to separate sex workers from chaste upper-class women and participation in the creation of hierarchical structure of gender. I suggest that the clash of Martineau's middle-class moral background and her materialist beliefs is most apparent in this discrepancy. Additionally, it can be argued that women's involvement in the radical repeal movement and the verbal attacks of the regulation advocates required emphasis on the middle-class feminine respectability and thus separation from the 'impure' lower-class sex workers.

I argue that while Martineau possessed the same middle-class background and its moral ideals, her depiction of prostitutes as equals, that grew from her necessarian worldview, challenges the very foundation of gender hierarchy that Martineau built on together with other feminist repealers. The tension between her middle-class background and her newfound materialist beliefs is palpable in her representations of women regarding the Contagious Diseases Acts.

4.2 Bettering society through eradication of ignorance

Martineau believed – following her necessarian principles – that society was advancing according to natural laws and was optimistic about the development of social relations and institutions.²⁷⁰ This optimism is very clear in her activism for the repeal of the C. D. Acts, manifested in her firm belief that if only people were educated on the issue, they would choose to be on the side of the repeal movement. My position is that Martineau saw education as the means for repeal as well as achieving a morally just society. In this section, I will argue that while Martineau may have supported some aspects of the moral reform, her over-arching aim was that of a true freethinker – to educate the public to think “accurately and independently for themselves”.²⁷¹ I will demonstrate how her representation of women as intellectual teachers on the matter of the Contagious Diseases Acts as well as her emphasis on teaching and learning as civil duties indicate her goal towards national improvement by means of eradication of ignorance.

Martineau’s emphasis on the importance of education as the means to great social reform and her own dedication to the “diffusion of truth”²⁷² – that is, her assumed position as a popular educator – has been observed by many scholars. She saw that the moral well-being of both individuals and the nation was achieved through mental education.²⁷³ Martineau believed that it was the lack of liberal and rational knowledge that prevented the moral and intellectual development of both poor and rich alike and resulted in wrong life choices, possibly even in turn to evil.²⁷⁴ She quite optimistically concluded that if individuals were “taught good, they would do good”, and this she applied to people from all social classes.²⁷⁵

As already demonstrated in section 1.2, Martineau considered the repeal effort as a fight against ignorance and elevated herself, yet again, in the position of an educator on the matter. Her characteristic optimism on the possibility of social reform through education of every person²⁷⁶ is very apparent in her writing, as demonstrated in chapter one, for example in her references to the mental awakening of women. This belief together with her clear mission to inform and instruct reveal her freethinking worldview and reverence of the secularist notion of eradicating ignorance.

²⁷⁰ Roberts 2002, 194.

²⁷¹ Watts 2017, 32.

²⁷² Boucher-Rivalain 2012, 27-34.

²⁷³ Watts 2017, 34.

²⁷⁴ Watts 2017, 36.

²⁷⁵ Yates 1985, 6; Watts 2017, 31.

²⁷⁶ Watts 2017, 31.

Furthermore, her portrayal of middle-class women as fellow intellectual educators on the matter as well as her emphasis on the individual citizen's duty to learn about societal issues illustrate her aim to raise national morality through a more material outlet.

As Watts observes, Martineau's life-long mission was to inform the public about the matters she regarded the most crucial issues of the day.²⁷⁷ Her calling of a public educator was strong in the case of the C.D. Acts as well, so strong that she came out of retirement²⁷⁸ in order to write on the matter and convince people to side with "morality and the most sacred of personal liberties".²⁷⁹ It is evident that Martineau considered her most important duty that of a national instructor in the case of the Contagious Diseases Acts. In the *Memorials*, Weston Chapman records Martineau's statement regarding her participation on the repeal movement: "I felt that I should have no more peace of mind if I did not obey 'the inward witness.'"²⁸⁰

The inward witness can be seen as a reference to Martineau's deep sense of justice which compelled Martineau to write on the behalf of the suffering, whether it was the enslaved Africans in the United States or the sex workers undergoing "instrumental rape" in Britain.

Martineau's own position as the educator of public had been distinct for many years by the time of the repeal movement. As Watts argues, she was widely read because her readers realized her unique gift of articulating difficult and abstract matters in an understandable way.²⁸¹ In her letters on the C. D. Acts, Martineau, however, raises the other LNA women to the same position, making them the fellow diffusers of truth. Doing this, Martineau challenges the common assumptions of women's incapability of rational thought and at the same time marks the repeal movement as a matter of eradicating ignorance. This is evident in her first letter in which she states:

In our time, or any other, there never, perhaps, was a graver question than whether there are still time and means to rouse the country to the due sense and knowledge of what is doing.²⁸²

She continues by appealing to her fellow countrywomen to "exert" themselves "to learn"²⁸³ about the matter of the C.D. Acts. By accentuating that the graver question is that of "rousing" the

²⁷⁷ Sanders & Weiner 2017, 9.

²⁷⁸ By 1869 Martineau had already retired her post as the political commentator in the Daily News due to fragile health. However, she found that "the urgency of the issue required" to lift her pen once again. Logan 2002, 257.

²⁷⁹ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN 28.12.1869.

²⁸⁰ Martineau, A letter to Maria Weston Chapman, c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 251.

²⁸¹ Watts 2017, 43.

²⁸² Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN 28.12.1869.

country to the knowledge of the true meaning of the Acts as well as her instruction to the women to learn on the matter, Martineau brings to centre the importance of education and learning. This is emphasised further, as Martineau accentuates every citizen's duty to actively learn about social issues.

Martineau's life was dominated by her quest to educate firstly herself and then the public²⁸⁴, and many scholars have noted her thirst for new knowledge and embrace of modernity and scientific progress.²⁸⁵ Yet, in her letters on the Contagious Diseases Acts, she extends this thirst for self-education to every British citizen, claiming it their national duty. In her first letter she hints at this, writing that the "duty of individuals in the crisis" is to be "apprehended".²⁸⁶ Her belief in the duty of citizens to educate themselves is, nevertheless, clear in her third letter where she returns to the issue. She states: "It is the business of good citizens to examine into the truth of the opposing statements, in order to fulfil a duty incumbent upon us all in any case."²⁸⁷ Martineau's emphasis on citizen's duty to learn and partake in society is in line with her general beliefs. As Watts observes, all her writings, the prolific output of books, articles and newspaper leaders, strived for the promotion of liberal, humane, and active citizenship for all people.²⁸⁸

In her statement, Martineau again calls upon her readers' sense of patriotism, implying that if her female readers do not attempt to learn on the issue, they fail their duty as English citizens. This can also be seen as part of her patriotic justification for women's involvement in politics, for in her rhetoric, the female participants in the movement are only fulfilling their national obligation. She even goes as far as to strongly justify the LNA women's political engagement by highlighting the negligence of the press to inform the public of the Acts.

The theme of the failure of the press is constant in Martineau's writing on the C.D. Acts but is most apparent in her second letter: "liabilities of the most fearful kind have been introduced, without any adequate warrant, without due warning, and actually without the knowledge of the people, or of any class among them".²⁸⁹ She continues in her letter writing that the Acts have "been effected in the dark and in silence. The press has not fulfilled its function and its trust in regard to the more

²⁸³ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN 28.12.1869.

²⁸⁴ Watts 2017, 31.

²⁸⁵ Sanders & Weiner 2017, 13.

²⁸⁶ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts" LDN 28.12.1869.

²⁸⁷ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts III" LDN 30.12.1869.

²⁸⁸ Watts 2017, 42.

²⁸⁹ Martineau, "The Contagious Diseases Acts II" LDN 29.12.1869.

recent Act.”²⁹⁰ A few years later in her placard she returns to this topic, stating that “Some fifteen months ago a bill was carried through Parliament, by trick and under a misleading title, and without awakening the suspicions of the country”.²⁹¹

Martineau’s critique is not unreasonable, for the Contagious Diseases Acts indeed passed relatively quietly, without the knowledge of the public. Paul McHugh suggests this was due to the enactment of the Reform bill, which deterred attention from the passing of the C.D. Acts.²⁹² In my interpretation, her words can be seen as a warranted justification for her and her fellow repealers positions of public educators. However, Martineau’s critique most likely emerged from a genuine dismay of the failure and demoralization of the British press and an urge to better its functioning.

Martineau had a strong journalistic ethic, driven by her mission of educating the public. As Deborah Logan has noted, Martineau felt it her journalistic duty to inform the public of the nature of the C.D. Acts.²⁹³ This furthermore highlighted her self-assumed position of an educator on the matter. It is clear that she assumed this role because she sincerely felt she had to, because all other journalists, whose duty she considered to be same as her, had failed to inform the public. I argue that while Martineau exploited the press’ and the parliaments negligence in validating the LNA women’s involvement (as argued here and previously in chapter two), she attempted to not only hold her fellow journalists accountable for their mistake but also to awaken them to fulfil their calling by writing so boldly on the issue. In 1871 the London journalists finally performed their obligation, led by Martineaus example. In a personal letter to an unknown recipient, she rejoices: “the conspiracy of silence is broken up, and the London papers have burst out.”²⁹⁴

²⁹⁰ Martineau, “The Contagious Diseases Acts II” LDN 29.12.1869.

²⁹¹ Martineau, “To the Women of Colchester” c. 1871, in Yates 1985, 246.

²⁹² McHugh 1980, 38, 42.

²⁹³ Logan 2002, 160.

²⁹⁴ Martineau, A letter to unknown recipient 1871, in Yates 1985, 249.

Conclusion

The 19th-century women's movement commonly utilized religious language and practices in both justifying women's move into politics and advancing their political goals. So it was with the movement that campaigned for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which can be seen as the beginning of the broader women's movement. Because religion was a fundamental aspect of the movement, it has been studied mostly from the view of Christianity and scholars have researched widely, for example, Josephine Butler and her strong Christian faith and its influence on her language on prostitution. However, as Laura Schwartz argues, freethinking feminists also contributed significantly to the repeal effort and should be studied alongside their religious counterparts. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis was to examine the representations of women in freethinking women's activism for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and analyse the political aims behind these representations.

The freethinking feminist Harriet Martineau's representations of women in her writings on the Contagious Diseases Acts are varied and ambivalent. Her representation of middle-class women as true patriots, moral guardians and intellectual educators all serve as means to defend women's involvement both in the public sphere and among the taboo subject of prostitution. This is apparent in her rhetoric which accentuates women's duty as English citizens and mothers and matrons to protect their country and its youth from corruption. Martineau furthermore justifies their political engagement by highlighting the LNA women's intelligence and raising them as the educators on the matter of the legislation.

In these representations Martineau both relies on the dominant images of femininity and challenges them. Her representation of women as mothers and matrons, the moral protectors of the private sphere deploys the concept of the traditional feminine role most strongly. Additionally, in her rhetoric of patriotism she turns to the female passivity and self-sacrifice in part. By accentuating the sacrifice of the LNA women and that they are only active in the repeal movement because men were not, she further defends women's position in the effort.

Martineau's utilization of traditional feminine notions in her activism was not out of the ordinary. It was rather common for women activists to deploy traditional femininity in their activism, for it was more advantageous for their purpose of gaining political influence. Female repealers,

however, also contested traditional images of feminine passivity in presenting themselves as active political agents. Martineau's representations challenge the Victorian ideals of femininity even further in elevating the LNA women as intellectual educators on the matter of the C.D. Acts, emphasising their rationality rather than sensibilities. She highlights women's rationality more in presenting the regulation advocate men as ignorant. Martineau's representations of middle-class women can be seen as a clever rhetorical tactic to maintain the LNA women's respectable femininity while still promoting them as active and independent political agents.

Martineau's representation of sex workers is in line with the times in its inconsistency. She portrays lower-class sex workers as passive victims, taking away their agency, and as "real sinners", separate from virtuous women. Yet at the same time, she presents them as fellow countrywomen entitled for the same treatment as every other citizen by the British law. In her victimizing rhetoric, Martineau resorts to the same language as the Christian repealers in describing sex workers as helpless victims of man's guile, deploying the common tale of innocent women falling into prostitution by seductive men. Furthermore, she presents all women as victims of the sex that is the "cause of the sin". I argue, however, that like the other freethinkers in the repeal movement, Martineau saw prostitution more as a result of poor work and education possibilities, and thus, saw the sex workers as victims of society.

Although Martineau uses the story of falling, she never calls the sex workers fallen. I have demonstrated how Martineau does not attempt to define the prostitute by separating the innocent fallen from the hardened self-identified sex workers. Rather, she singularly refers to all sex workers as "prostitutes", "sinners" and "unchaste". This differs quite strongly from the rhetoric of Christian repealers, such as Josephine Butler, whose attitude towards unrepentant prostitutes was harsh and unforgiving. Even though she separates them from the virtuous middle-class repealers and depicts them as victims, Martineau's language towards sex workers is gentler and more respectful.

Martineau's most radical representation of sex workers is the one in which she presents them as equals to other women and men in terms of law. She states that no matter the occupation or class every English citizen holds the same rights under the law and refers to sex workers as "our countrywomen". I argue that this egalitarian depiction challenges the hierarchical gender structure – in which women are superior to men, but middle-class women are above lower-class women in virtue – of the Christian repealers, and which Martineau also participated in part.

Martineau resorts to many of the same representations of women as the Christian repealers such as women as moral guardians and sex workers as helpless victims. Nonetheless, her other representations are distinctly different, and as I argue, reveal her more materialist worldview. Her emphasis on patriotism and the law rather than religion and God's will together with her benevolent attitude towards sex workers as well as her unprecedented egalitarian depiction of them as English citizens make her stand out as a unique individual in the repeal movement. Furthermore, even her more traditional representations have nuanced differences. For example, in highlighting women's duty as the nation's moral protectors, Martineau uses the word "matronage" alongside with "mothers". I argue that Martineau includes in this term the childless and unmarried repealers, old enough to pertain the status of a woman dignified with maturity, like herself, and in doing so, is more inclusive in her appeals than Butler.

I argue that Martineau's wide and conflicting representations of women stem from two major elements: her middle-class moral background – contradicted with her strong necessarian beliefs – and her freethinking mission of bettering society through educating the public. I have demonstrated how Martineau's moral values that centred on domesticity affected her representations of middle-class women and lower-class sex workers. Her depiction of the repealers as moral guardians and sex workers as passive victims, together with her emphasis on the family home and the sexual differences of men and women, reveal that she shared Butler's moral reformist goals of elevating the national morality to an extent. However, I suggest that while Martineau shared some aspects of the moral reformist thought she did not adhere to its religious nature and argue that her more religious language later in the repeal activism is a tactic of both appealing to the target audience and unifying the movement.

Although Martineau's background resulted in more traditional representations of women which build on the same hierarchical structure the Christian repealers imposed, her other depictions challenged the common notions of femininity and respectability. I suggest that Martineau's egalitarian portrayal of sex workers as fellow countrywomen as well as her benevolent attitude towards them and the refusal to differentiate the virtuous from the true "harlot" derive from her necessarian beliefs, in which all humans are creatures of circumstances. I argue that her wide and conflicting representations of women are result of the tension of her middle-class moral background and her more newly found materialist beliefs.

While Martineau most likely shared Butler's goal of uplifting national morality I suggest that her over-arching goal was the secularist mission of eradicating ignorance. This is revealed in her depiction of middle-class women as intellectual educators as well as her emphasis on the civil duty of both teaching and learning. I argue that albeit her representation of middle-class women as intellectual and presenting the press, parliament, and the medical professionals as negligent was partly a means to justify women's involvement in the repeal movement, it was also her true belief that she and the women of LNA had a duty to assume the role of an educator and to rouse the country of what was happening. Her emphasis on duty and references to her obligation as a journalist reveals this belief.

In this thesis I have delineated the similarities and differences of the representations of women offered by a freethinking feminist to those by Christian repealers. Doing this I have attempted to furthermore emphasise the importance of religious controversy to women's activism and how it concretely affected the language of 19th-century and early 20th-century feminism. Nonetheless, there is need for further research on the collaborations and tensions of religious and irreligious Victorian feminists, and, for that matter, on Martineau's complex and contradictory philosophical beliefs.

Sources and literature

Primary sources

Martineau 1869: "Contagious Diseases Acts" Daily News (London, England), Tuesday, December 28, 1869; Issue 7382. *British Library Newspapers*, Part I: 1800-1900.

Martineau 1869: "Contagious Diseases Acts II" Daily News (London, England), Wednesday, December 29, 1869; Issue 7383. *British Library Newspapers*, Part I: 1800-1900.

Martineau 1869: "Contagious Diseases Acts III" Daily News (London, England), Thursday, December 30, 1869; Issue 7384. *British Library Newspapers*, Part I: 1800-1900.

Martineau 1869: "The Ladies' National Association for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts" Daily News (London, England), Friday, December 31, 1869; Issue 7385. *British Library Newspapers*, Part I: 1800-1900.

Martineau c. 1871: "To the Women of Colchester" in *Harriet Martineau on women* edited by Gayle Graham Yates 1985, 246-248.

Martineau c. 1871: "Old England! Purity and Freedom!" in *Harriet Martineau on women* edited by Gayle Graham Yates 1985, 248.

Martineau c.1871 Letters to an unknown recipient in *Harriet Martineau on women* edited by Gayle Graham Yates 1985, 248-249.

Martineau, c. 1871, Letter to Josephine Butler in *Harriet Martineau on women* edited by Gayle Graham Yates 1985, 249-250.

Martineau, c. 1871, Letter to Maria Weston Chapman in *Harriet Martineau on women* edited by Gayle Graham Yates 1985, 250-252.

Martineau, Nvmb. 9. 1870, Letter to Mary Martineau in *The collected letters of Harriet Martineau vol. 5*, edited by Deborah Anna Logan. London: Pickering & Chatto 2007.

Martineau 1877 Autobiography vol 1 & 2 reprinted in *Women without Superstition* by Annie Laurie Gaylor 1997, 47-52.

Research literature

Attwood, Nina. *The Prostitute's Body: Rewriting Prostitution in Victorian Britain*. London: Routledge 2011.

Boucher-Rivalain, Odile. "Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), from Unitarianism to Agnosticism." *Believing in Victorian Times*, 76 Automne | (2012): 27-43.

Boyd, Nancy. *Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale: Three Victorian Women Who Changed Their world*. London: The Macmillan Press LTD 1982.

Caine, Barbara. "Feminism, Suffrage and the Nineteenth-Century English Women's Movement." *Women's Studies Int, Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (1982): 537-550.

Clagett, Shalyn. "Harriet Martineau's Material Rebirth." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 2010, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2010): 53-73.

Columbia University: Content analysis.

<https://www.mailman.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis>

(Viewed 15.1.2022).

Deegan, Mary Jo. "Making Lemonade: Harriet Martineau on Being Deaf" in *Harriet Martineau Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives* edited by Michael R. Hill & Susan Hoecker-Drysdale. New York: Routledge 2002.

Diniejko, Andrzej. "Harriet Martineau: a Radical Liberal Social Commentator." *The Victorian Web* 2010.

<https://victorianweb.org/authors/martineau/diniejko.html> (Viewed 26.2.2022).

Gaylor, Annie Laurie. *Women without Superstition: No gods no Masters. The collected writings of women freethinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries*. Wisconsin: Freedom from religion foundation 1997.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation*. Second edition edited by Jessica Evans & Sean Nixon. London: Sage 2013.

Hattaway, Meghan. *Fallen Bodies and Discursive Recoveries in British Women's Writing of the Long Nineteenth Century*. The Ohio State University 2012.

Ichikawa, Chieko. "A Body Politic of Women's Own: Josephine Butler, Social Purity, and National Identity." *Victorian Review*, Volume 41, Number 1, Spring (2015): 107-123.

Lee, Catherine. *Policing Prostitution, 1856-1886: Deviance, Surveillance and Morality*. New York: Routledge 2013.

Logan, Deborah Anna. *The Hour and the Woman: Harriet Martineau's "Somewhat Remarkable" Life*. Northern Illinois University Press 2002.

Logan, Deborah Anna. "Harriet Martineau and Anglo-American abolitionism" in *Women's rights and transatlantic antislavery in the era of emancipation*. Yale University Press 2007.

Logan, Deborah Anna (editor). *Memorials of Harriet Martineau by Maria Weston Chapman*. Lehigh University Press 2015.

McEvoy, J.G. and McGuire, J.E. "God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent." *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, 1975, Vol. 6 (1975): 325-404.

McHugh, Paul. *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform*. New York: Routledge 1980.

Melnyk, Julie. *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain*. Westport, CT: Praeger 2008.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary: Matron.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/matron> (Viewed 15.1.2022).

Morgan, Sue. "Wild Oats or Acorns?" Social Purity, Sexual Politics and the Response of the Late-Victorian Church." *Journal of Religious History* Vol. 31, No. 2, June (2007): 151-168.

Mort, Frank. *Dangerous Sexualities. Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd 1987.

Nead, Lynda. *Myths of Sexuality. Representation of Women in Victorian Britain*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd 1988.

Roberts, Caroline. *The Woman and the Hour: Harriet Martineau and Victorian Ideologies*. Toronto University Press 2002.

Rogers, Helen. *Women and the people: Authority, Authorship and the Radical Tradition in Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Routledge 2000.

Sanders, Valerie. "I have an all-important review to write' Harriet Martineau's journalism" in *Harriet Martineau and the Birth of Disciplines: Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Powerhouse* edited by Valerie Sanders & Gaby Weiner. London: Routledge 2017.

Sarajärvi Anneli & Jouni Tuomi. *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*. Helsinki: Tammi 2018.

Schwartz, Laura. "The Bible and the Cause: Freethinking Feminists vs Christianity, England, 1870–1900." *Women: a cultural review*. 21:3 (2010): 266-278.

Schwartz, Laura. *Infidel feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation, England 1830-1914*. Manchester University Press 2013.

Scott, W. Joan. "Gender. A useful category of historical analysis" in *The Feminist History Reader* edited by Sue Morgan. London: Routledge 2006 (first published in 1986).

The British Newspaper Archive: London Daily News.

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/london-daily-news> (Viewed 15.1.2022).

Vainio-Korhonen Kirsi. *Musta-Maija ja Kirppu-Kaisa: Seksityöläiset 1800-luvun alun Suomessa*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura 2018.

Van Drenth, Annemieke & De Haan, Fransisca. *The rise of caring power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands*. Amsterdam University Press 1999.

Vicinus, Martha. *Suffer and be still: women in the Victorian age*. London: Methuen & Co. LTD 1972.

Vint, John & Funaki, Keiko. "Harriet Martineau and classical political economy" in *Harriet Martineau and the Birth of Disciplines: Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Powerhouse* edited by Valerie Sanders and Gaby Weiner. London: Routledge 2017.

Walkowitz, Judith. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. Cambridge University Press 1980.

Walkowitz, Judith 1982: "Male vice and feminine virtue. Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Britain." *History workshop journal* No. 13, Spring (1982): 79-93.

Watts, Ruth. "Harriet Martineau and Popular Education" in *Harriet Martineau and the Birth of Disciplines: Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Powerhouse* edited by Valerie Sanders and Gaby Weiner. London: Routledge 2017.

Webb, Richard. *Harriet Martineau: A radical Victorian*. Columbia University Press 1960.

Webster, Rachel 2019: "Community as Counterpublic: The Shield (1870–86) and the Campaign to Repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts." *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Volume 52, Number 1, Spring (2019): 146-165.

Weiner, Gaby. "Harriet Martineau and Feminism" in *Harriet Martineau and the Birth of Disciplines: Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Powerhouse* edited by Valerie Sanders and Gaby Weiner. London: Routledge 2017.

Yates, Gayle Graham (editor). *Harriet Martineau on Women*. Rutgers University Press 1985.