

HANNAH MORE AND THE EVANGELICAL INFLUENCE
ON THE ENGLISH NOVEL

by

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ABSTRACT

Hannah More was a significant literary, political, and social figure of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Ample evidence exists that More's only novel, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), played a significant role in increasing the popularity and acceptability of the genre of the novel. Yet, More's rightful place in the story of the "rise of the novel" has been largely overlooked in literary criticism today.

This dissertation examines the life, work, and influence of Hannah More, an Evangelical Anglican, feminist, and social reformer. Emphasis is placed on those aspects of her life that demonstrate More's unique position as a bridge between the social, religious, economic, and cultural chasms that helped to define eighteenth-century English society.

As an Evangelical, More helped to shape this influential movement's attitude toward the novel. Evangelicals tended to view the novel as, at best, a diversion from more pious pursuits and, at worst, a means of corrupting readers (particularly female readers) during an era experiencing an increase in leisure time and a perceived decrease in manners and morality. Because she was an Evangelical and because her work was imbued with the language and guided by the perspective of this increasingly influential movement, More exploited with remarkable success an otherwise objectionable art form for her didactic purposes.

The foundation for the success of More's novel can be found, in part, in the didactic tradition in literature. Conduct books, tracts, spiritual biographies and periodical literature all share a tradition whose influence can be seen in More's novel and in its public acclaim.

A survey of the periodical reviews finds a wide range of views on the literary and cultural implications of More's novel. Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* provides a case study of how More's novel shaped the development of the novel into the nineteenth century.

Ultimately, however, understanding the limits of the relationship between art and didacticism help to reveal the flaws in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* and to explain its failure, despite tremendous contemporary success, to maintain a place in the canon of English literature.

INTRODUCTION

The greatest significance of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, the only novel of the otherwise prolific eighteenth-century writer, social reformer, feminist, and Evangelical Anglican Hannah More, lies less in its contribution to the novel as an art form than in its role as a popularizer of the genre, and thus its importance in paving the way for the age of and literary and cultural influence of the nineteenth-century English novel.

The remarkable sales, circulation and popularity of More's novel and its phenomenal critical and popular attention earned More a prominent place among her contemporaries in both literary and religious circles, as well as among reading audiences in England and America. More's life and works received considerable critical attention in the late eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century. Yet, More has been all but forgotten in the twentieth-century canon, and her rightful place in the story of "rise of the novel" has been largely overlooked in literary criticism today. As her most recent biographer, Charles Howard Ford, points out, over a dozen biographies and about half a dozen articles about More were published between her death in 1833 and 1952 (ix). While these studies have examined More and her work from feminist, social, or political perspectives, none has given a full treatment to the literary significance of More's work, particularly her role in the rise of the English novel.

No examination of More's life and works could exclude those elements that contributed

to More's considerable influence in both literary and Evangelical circles. As a successful "bridge" between these two often exclusive realms, More managed to direct the literary tastes of the English elite to more didactic ends, and, on the other hand, to enlarge the audience of the novel to include more conservative readers. This more conservative audience included Evangelicals, a religious group experiencing a growing influence on the tastes and behaviors of late eighteenth-century England and who had long been wary of the potential "dangers" of reading novels.

One significant factor in the growth and development of the genre of the novel was the warily disdainful attitude of the Puritans toward the form and, subsequently, that of the growing population of Evangelical Anglicans of eighteenth century England. They viewed the novel as, at best, a diversion from more pious pursuits and, at worst, a means of corrupting readers (particularly young ladies) during an era experiencing, along with the growth of the middle class, a corresponding increase in leisure time and a (perceived) decrease in both manners and morality. Because she was an Evangelical and because her work was imbued with the language and guided by the perspective of this increasingly influential subculture, More exploited with remarkable success an otherwise objectionable art form for her didactic purposes. *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* was a powerful demonstration of the uses and merits of the novel, and thus advanced the exoneration, and therefore the popularity, of the novel as an art form.

The role of the didactic tradition in literature and its influence on the development of the novel and on More's work will also be examined here. Didactic literature such as conduct books, tracts, and other forms of narrative fiction were important in the novel's overcoming the objections of conservative and religious readers and, subsequently, reaching its height in the Victorian age. Following in the footsteps of such writers as Samuel Richardson (who relied heavily in his own novel-writing on input from the Bluestocking Ladies, of which More was a member), Hannah More attempted to use what she otherwise considered a dangerous form of entertainment for her own didactic purposes in *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*. The character of Coelebs, in fact, has many parallels in Richardson's paragon of male virtue, Sir Charles Grandison.

As she stated in her introduction to *Cœlebs*, More's purpose in writing a novel -- a form which she had often condemned -- was "to show how religion may be brought to mix with the concerns of ordinary life." Though her novel has received little praise for its artistic merits, More believed, as voiced by one of the central characters in *Coelebs*, "bad taste could never advance the interests of Christianity." Thus, her novel provides an important case study in the potential and the limits of didactic art, those creative endeavors undertaken for the primary purpose of imparting a message.

A survey of contemporary reviews and criticism of More's novel reflects the greatly divided opinion of the genre of the novel as well as of More's work in particular. Questions about the role of religion in any art form and the suitability of the form of the novel for religious or moral purposes were widely debated; this debate is clearly seen in the critical reception of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*. The close reading of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* included here will show why such questions were important ones and how attempts to answer them influenced the rise of the English novel in the nineteenth century. A critical examination of the work in light of its literary debt to conduct books, spiritual biography, and earlier novels will illuminate some of the overlooked artistic and literary merits of the novel, as well as its important religious and social contributions to early nineteenth century England.

Most twentieth century criticism, in examining the politics, purposes and methods of the eighteenth century More through twentieth century eyes, has minimized or failed to recognize the importance of More and her only novel. The success of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, along with its role in advancing the popularity of the English novel, is too important to leave in the obscurity where it has rested most of this century. The following study of this novel and its author in the context of evangelical Christianity's widening influence during the era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is an attempt to enlarge the critical understanding of the development, direction, and growth in popularity of the novel as a literary form as well as of the role in this development played by the evangelical movement.

CHAPTER ONE:
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HANNAH MORE

INTRODUCTION

In whatever sense the appellation GREAT can be legitimately applied to any human being, history perhaps will not furnish one name more truly deserving the appendage than hers who is the subject of these pages.

Thus begins the first biography of Hannah More, published in 1838, five years after her death, by Henry Thompson, who served as minister of the parish where More lived for nearly fifty years. Thompson's sources were the private letters and "living memories" of More's own family members and acquaintances.

In 1845, William Roberts compiled many of More's correspondences and those of her family members and friends and published them in two volumes entitled *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*. The next biography of More, *A New Memoir of Hannah More, or, Life in Hall and Cottage*, written with an American audience in mind, was published in

1851 by Helen Cross Knight.

A mere handful of books published in this century have examined the life of More since then: *Hannah More and Her Circle*, by Mary Alden Hopkins, published in 1947; M. G. Jones' *Hannah More*, published in 1952; *Hannah More: A Critical Biography*, by Charles Howard Ford, published in 1996. In addition, a condensed collection of More's letters was compiled and published by R. Brimley Johnson in 1925 under the title *The Letters of Hannah More*. In the space of little more than one hundred years, More's reputation underwent a dramatic reversal, and the opening accolade of her first biographer would be replaced by this later lament of another:

Her tremendous vogue is now forgotten, but everything she wrote was a best seller and editions were sold out before they were on the book stalls. No one could have dreamed that she would be so completely forgotten in a hundred years. (Hopkins 63)

Canonized as a "conservative Christian feminist" (Wynne-Davies 730), a label with which More would probably have found little to argue, More was by far one of the best selling and most influential English writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet, she has been all but forgotten within modern literary criticism, except to serve as a sort of foil for the more revolutionary, more socially and politically "correct" writers esteemed by many modern-day critics. The demise of her popularity is attributed, in part, by one recent biographer to More's having "acquired a misleading reputation as an intolerant and minor reactionary whose didactic works [have] become hopelessly out of phase" (Ford ix).

Yet, as a prolific writer of religious, moral, and educational treatises aimed at audiences that ranged from the upper to the lower classes of English society, More played a central role in improving the literacy of the low, the manners of the great, and the morals of many of all walks of life. In addition, More's only novel, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, contributed to the popularization of the genre of "religious novels" in such a way as to pave the way for the acceptability of novels

within the Evangelical movement, which, in turn, gave rise to the age of the Victorian novel.¹

What is most distinctive and instructive today about More's writings and her life's work is how her works threaded their way through and across the disparate and fragmented communities of the great and the low and the many gradations between² that comprised the whole of English society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. When conflict arose, whether political or economic, distinctions within English society were drawn with numerous lines based on faith, politics, or trade (Porter 68). In an age when much divided the people, More stands out as one who united them.

While More was considered "the favorite and caressed associate of all that was distinguished in contemporary rank and literature" (Thompson 2), she also was a powerful and influential reformer among the poor and illiterate underclass of English society. More has been accurately described as a "literary woman caught between various worlds" (Ford 2). More's place in these "various worlds" could be described not so much as in the "margins" (as Ford suggests) but in uniquely and effectively reaching across and bridging the chasms that separated these "various worlds."

[C]aressed by princes and nobles, the delight of intellectual society, the centre round which so many luminaries revolved, having her name echoed from shore to shore through the civilized world, [More] was yet a plain, home-bred, practical, and true-hearted woman. . . . Her history and her character, in great part, belong to and represent an age . . . none [were] so capable of making the voice of instruction echo from the cottage to the saloon. (Roberts *ii* 434, *i* 13)

¹ See Jones, Pickering, and Quinlan.

² Roy Porter, in *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, describes the England of Hannah More's day as having a "social order whose gross inequalities were landscaped in a gentle slope rather than in steps" (64). "People could quite easily rise towards the portal of the next status group. Crossing the threshold was more difficult ..." (65).

In the same way, More's only novel, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, reached across a cultural chasm -- where on one side, the novel as a literary form was disdained as base and empty, if not corrupt, amusement; and on the other, the newest genre was so widely read and accepted that it would, in a few short years, enter the height of its artistic and cultural merit.

Even a cursory look at More's life, personality, and accomplishments exhibits a rare individual, who, amidst a society deeply divided along economic, gender, and cultural lines, succeeded in writing literature that spoke to all and that helped to lead the way for the great era of the novel.

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

For More, religious beliefs and resulting social action were inextricably linked. Her own particular religious and social heritage was manifested in a variety of ways throughout her life. Unlike her maternal ancestors, who were traditional adherents to the Church of England, her paternal grandparents were, according to one of her relations, "zealous nonconformists": in violation of the dictates both of the Church and of social propriety, they held secret midnight worship services in their home, Hannah More's grandfather himself guarding the door by sword; two of her paternal great uncles had fought in Cromwell's army (Elizabeth Newson, Letter in Roberts *i* 16-17).

More's father, Jacob More, was a high churchman, but one at ease with dissenters and Catholics (Hopkins 4), a characteristic that was to blossom in his daughter Hannah. Jacob More had received an education in accordance with his prospects, which were promising. However, when sued by a cousin, he lost his expected estate with a worth at that time of more than eight thousand pounds a year. Jacob More then settled in Gloucester county in western England (Elizabeth Newson, Letter in Roberts *i* 16-17). Upon leaving Norfolk, Jacob More left family connections among both the gentry and the farmers in Norfolk (Hopkins 5), yet another hint of the

source of the fluidity with which Hannah More would move between and write for people of such vast differences in economic, as well as religious, status.

Jacob More became school master of the Free School at Fishponds, a parish school, and married Mary Grace, with whom he had five daughters: Mary, Sarah, Elisabeth, Hannah, and Martha. Hannah, the fourth of the five girls, was born on February 2, 1745. Less than one hundred years following the birth of this daughter of Jacob More, her biographer would write of him: “[T]he moral revolution which has taken place in this important province is largely attributable to the judgment and diligence of one pious and affectionate father in humble life” (Thompson 10). Significantly, many of the features of *Cœlebs’* Mr. Stanley can be likened to Jacob More.

Her earliest biographers describe young Hannah More as a precocious reader and writer. Her health was fragile all her life; she was nursed through her frequent illnesses by a woman who had lived in the household of Dryden, and Hannah often heard stories of the poet and his own verses repeated to her (Harland 4-5). At a very young age, Hannah More was “distinguished by great quickness of apprehension, retentiveness of memory, and a thirst after knowledge” (Thompson 17). She had learned to read by the age of three or four, when she could also repeat the catechism and began scribbling essays and poems; her first complete poem was composed at age four. As a young girl, More played the (very unladylike) game of preaching pretend sermons from a play pulpit before family members (Hopkins 12). From an early age, she told essays, poems, and tales -- always with a moral purpose -- to her eager audience of one, the younger sister who shared her bed (Harland 8).

Hannah and her sisters were educated by their father to become teachers. Jacob More, described as disliking “female pedantry,” was a somewhat reluctant teacher of his daughters. He quickly abandoned any subject of instruction not deemed appropriate for females, such as mathematics, as soon as an alacrity for it was discovered in one of his pupils (Roberts *i* 18-19). Such was the case with Hannah. Nevertheless, her father taught Hannah Greek and Roman history, including “the speeches of his favourite heroes, first in their original language” and then

translated into English. Having lost many of the books from his own library to the loss of his estate, More was forced to give many of his history lessons in the form of story and conversation (Knight 15), which no doubt contributed significantly to Hannah's later reputation as a gifted conversationalist. Through her private study of books provided by the new circulating libraries, Hannah mastered Italian, Latin, and Spanish (Roberts *i* 27).

Growing up in a home that served also as a classroom, receiving instruction from a parent who by profession was a teacher, and being themselves trained to be teachers, all the More sisters, particularly Hannah, "looked upon the whole world as one great schoolhouse, upon human beings as willful pupils who would not learn their lessons, and upon themselves as ordained teachers" (Hopkins 13). When the More children were granted gifts of their own asking,

Hannah's aspiration never varied. She would like to have money enough to buy a whole quire of paper for her very own use. Her wish was granted by her mother as a holiday-gift, and the child fell to work to write it full. Not a blank page remained at the end of a week. Mrs. More took the trouble to read the MSS through. All rang changes upon one theme. The child, the mother of the woman-who-was-to-be, knew nothing of evil except from the grown-people's books she had devoured. Yet she had drawn up letters to imaginary gamesters, drunkards, thieves, Sabbath-breakers, and poachers -- pleading with them to abandon their evil works and turn to righteousness . . . To right a crooked world was her fondest dream and loftiest ambition. Her pen was the wand that was to dispel darkness and create light. (Harland 9-10)

Thus, from her earliest years, More was characterized by her interests in books, doing good, and making others happy (Roberts *ii* 444). It was also from the time of her youth that More began to experience her lifelong battles with poor health and debilitating illnesses, thought by some as caused by emotional upsets,³ which, for the length of each bout's duration, virtually

³ More's lifelong struggle with debilitating and recurring illness receives ample treatment in most biographies; Hopkins devotes an entire chapter to the subject in her biography of More.

incapacitated More.

In 1757, when Hannah was twelve, the elder More sisters opened a boarding school for the daughters of Bristol's burgeoning middle class of merchants and slave traders. Hannah herself was one of the school's first pupils, and it was her "brilliant and rapid" progress as a student that brought the school to the attention of Bristol's intellectual community (Knight 16). The school ultimately would earn a high reputation throughout England (Hopkins 16) and produced namesakes in America and Ceylon.

The More sisters' approach to education uniquely balanced what they saw as necessary moral instruction with the more market-appealing instruction in French manners.⁴ The emphasis, however, was always on "practical moral and ethical instruction," the primary texts being the Bible and devotional works (Ford 7). The More sisters' approach to female education was in stark contrast to the philosophy of the day, which tended to focus on merely equipping young ladies with the necessary accoutrements for getting a husband, not for being a wife, nor for gaining more practical skills or genuine knowledge. The fact that this unique combination of practical and more fashionable instruction was widely appealing and brought great success to the school is significant in considering the characteristics, as well as the success, of Hannah's future writing endeavors.

It was with her audience of female students in mind that, in 1762, More composed a pastoral drama, *The Search After Happiness*, a piece that could be called "rather more moral than dramatic" (Thompson 12) and "by no means a specimen or an earnest of her poetical powers" (Roberts ii 444). More's purpose in writing it, as she stated in the play's prefatory remarks, was

⁴ Mary More had taken French lessons in Bristol and in turn taught the language to her sisters. In addition, Jacob More occasionally took into his home French officers on parole from a nearby state prison, thus providing ample opportunity for the girls to practice their French conversations (Thompson 10-11). Although Hannah held throughout her life suspicious contempt for all things French, this interaction with the French guests in her home was certain preparation for the remarkable fluidity with which More eased into and established relationships within the fragmented communities that comprised the whole of English society during her lifetime.

to furnish a substitute for the very improper custom . . . of allowing plays, and those not only of the purest kind, to be acted by young ladies in boarding schools; and to afford them an innocent, and, perhaps, not altogether unuseful amusement, in the exercise of recitation. (*Works of Hannah More* i 110-1)

So we see in More's first public offering the attempt to appropriate a central and influential component of popular culture⁵ for her didactic purposes.

While More would eventually abandon the theater altogether, we see in this attempt More's belief in the mimetic power of drama to influence, even more than the audience, the actors themselves. Her beliefs about drama were guided, in part, by the thought – not uncommon to the time – that

acting in fickle and fashionable roles might undermine personal integrity. She feared that pupils might assume the morally flexible characters that they played. Such acting complemented the artifice of elaborate court etiquette. More hoped to enlist the potential mimetic effects of role-playing on the side of virtue. If young ladies acted in salutary roles, then they would learn lasting moral sense from their characters. (Ford 8)

The prologue to *The Search After Happiness* explains the work as a “lesson in the guise of play,” a description that would find little objection in application to most of More's work,

⁵ The perspective of Thompson, himself a contemporary of More and fellow conservative and high churchman, regarding the role of the stage in English culture at this time is helpful. In his biography of More, he writes concerning the devout Christian and the entertainment of the drama: “Intervals not merely of rest, but of amusement, are not only uninjurious, but actually conducive to the prosecution of active duties; and he who proscribes all publick diversions in the gross, and denounces all participation in them as unbecoming a Christian is not less indiscriminating than he who should forbid the use of wine because it may be subservient to intoxication . . . The consequences, at the Restoration, were such as might have been easily foreseen. A violent reaction ensued; the iron pressure of dominant fanaticism once removed, the sense of newfound liberty, and abhorrence of every idea associated with the oppressor, carried the publick mind with irresistible elasticity to the opposite extreme . . . A voluptuous stage replaced an ascetick pulpit; and the ear, long stunned with the denunciations of Peters, was fain to repose on the blandishments of Rochester” (124-125).

particularly as will be seen (were the term “play” to be replaced with “novel”) in *Cælebs*. As Thompson notes,

Her pen, active almost from childhood, had been exclusively employed on the side of holiness and truth; the stage, when it spoke by her voice, commended the gravest lessons of moral wisdom to the world; and her most trifling productions were never deficient in reference to those principles by which her heart and her conduct were habitually controlled. (65)

From the start, More believed, as she wrote nearer the end of her life, that “a muse may be a missionary . . . where the sanctity directs and elevates the poetry; where genius is made subservient to Christian principle, and embellishes it without altering its character or debasing its purity” (Letter in Roberts *ii* 325). Clearly, the criticism that More’s art is secondary to her Christian pedagogy would only please her, for that was her primary purpose in all she wrote.

The social, intellectual, and cultural life of Bristol played no small part in the course of More’s career. Bristol was home to the famous Theatre Royale, also called the King Street Theatre, built in 1766. This stage was described as “the pride of Bristol” and “the most complete of its size in Europe”; the city itself is described during this time as “theatre mad” (Hopkins 42). Thus, the stage formed a convenient and attractive part of the Mores’ school curriculum. Bristol, as well as the school, which was located at 43 Park Street, drew regular visits from lecturers, actors and actresses, and other notables. The area also served as home to Charles and John Wesley (founders of the Methodist movement); Sir James Stonehouse (a Northampton physician who lived next door to the school on Park Street); Josiah Tucker, dean of Gloucester Cathedral; and Edmund Burke, who was elected to Parliament from Bristol in 1774. Both the Burke brothers, Edmund and Richard, were regular guests of the More sisters (Hopkins 24-27).⁶

⁶ Roberts characterizes More’s conservative position as a “Scriptural moralist” as akin to Burke as a philosopher and Pitt as a statesman – “thoroughly loyal and monarchical” (*ii* 434-5).

It was in Bristol that More attained her professional status as playwright when her tragedy *The Inflexible Captive* opened at the Theatre Royal on April 19, 1775. The next day's edition of the *Bath Chronicle* declared that the play "was received with uncommon applause, and promises to be a favorite piece . . ." (qtd. in Hopkins 50).

The two basic ingredients of More's success -- her talent and the audience to appreciate and encourage it -- were joined in Bristol, where she soon captivated the attention of numerous people of literary and social distinction (Thompson 11). In 1763, when she was sixteen years old, More made the acquaintance of Thomas Sheridan (father of Richard) through her extemporaneous verses addressed to him and inspired by a lecture on oratory given by him during his visit to Bristol. Around this age, More became acquainted and conversant with such learned adults as a local astronomer, a disciple of Hume, and her own physician (Roberts i 19-20). To these connections, along with the exceptional educational experience provided by her parents, can be credited More's remarkable and early maturation in critical thinking and writing.

At age twenty-two, More met a gentleman by the name of Edward Turner (more than twenty years her senior) when she visited his home in 1767 upon the invitation of his two young cousins, who were students at the More sisters' school. Over the course of the next six years, their proposed marriage was postponed three times. Turner was clearly the reluctant party, though no satisfactory evidence or theories explain his hesitance. Finally, after Turner's third postponement of the wedding, Hannah's family members insisted (without her knowledge) that he agree to an annuity of 200 pounds per year in way of compensation for her trouble. More declined two subsequent offers of marriage from Turner (Roberts i 28; Thompson 15-20) and never married at all.⁷ Turner may not have made Hannah a wife, but his annuity made it possible

⁷ Many have speculated concerning More's choice never to marry. The fact that none of the More sisters married, and that they actively opposed the marriage of one of their school teachers, Selina Mills, to Zachary Macaulay, suggests more than mere coincidence underlying the More sisters' perpetual states of singleness. Macauley believed that the Mores disapproved of marriage (Hole xvi), but More's treatment of marriage in many of her works (including *Cœlebs* and *Strictures*) demonstrates clearly the prominent role More gave marriage in the determination of both earthly and celestial happiness. Yet, there is enough evidence in the *Strictures* "to suggest that a

for her to be a writer. Upon accepting the annuity, More resigned from her active duties at the school in Bristol and thereafter “she looked upon writing as her profession” (Hopkins 109).

More never lacked male admiration and companionship, however. Though she tended to direct her chaste affections toward ineligible men -- made so either by age or by marital status -- she was never, even into old age, without male company or adoration; she received respectable offers of marriage from at least two other men in her lifetime. Among the passionate though virtuous attachments she held in her lifetime were those of David Garrick, Samuel Johnson, and William Wilberforce. Indeed, “she flirted with devoted bishops, young members of Parliament, and elderly generals and visiting noblemen, as long as her bright eyes could flash and quick tongue snap out repartee . . .” (Hopkins 247). Many excerpts from letters to her sisters exhibit that More, while chaste, was no prude. A lifelong spinster, she was a great lover of men: She wrote home in 1782, “By-the-by, I believe I never told you that Paoli is my chief beau and flirt this winter. We talk whole hours. He has a general good taste in the belles-lettres, and is fond of reciting passages from Dante and Ariosto” (Roberts *i* 141). “I have got a new admirer, and we flirt together prodigiously; it is the famous General Oglethorpe, perhaps the most remarkable man of his time,” More wrote to her sister in 1784 (Roberts *i* 181).

LONDON LIFE

During her twenties, More continued to enlarge her circle of notable literary colleagues. In 1773 (or 1774 -- the record is not entirely clear), following the publication of *The Search After Happiness*, More made her first visit to London, where she met the famous actor and dramatist, David Garrick. Garrick became intrigued by More after reading her letter to a mutual friend during this first visit, a letter in which she extolled Garrick’s performance in the role of Shakespeare’s Lear.

degree of moderate, organic change [particularly of the double standard of sexual behavior for men and women], within established boundaries, might not have totally appalled her” (Hole xvii) changes which might have made the married state more attractive to the More women.

Upon their first encounter, Garrick immediately introduced More into his coterie of learned and literary friends: Elizabeth Montagu, Sir Joshua Reynolds and his sister, and Dr. Samuel Johnson, who reportedly found More's enthusiasm and manner "genuine and unaffected" (Roberts *i* 38). "In the course of six weeks . . . she had become intimate with the greatest names in intellect and taste" (Thompson 24). Her enthusiastic reception in London "far exceeded her modest expectations and more than gratified the thirst she had so early felt for intellectual society" (Roberts *i* 38).

She wrote home to her family in 1776:

I am so much at my ease; have a great many hours at my disposal, to read my own books and see my own friends; and whenever I please, may join the most polished and delightful society in the world! Our breakfasts are little literary societies . . . (Letter in Roberts *i* 53)

More returned to London each year for the next thirty-five years (Hopkins xiii). There she "mingled with the same distinguished and intellectual society" to whom she had been introduced on her first trip (Thompson 27). Garrick called More his "dramatic pupil" (Thompson 31), and she continued to cultivate relationships among London's literati and social elite, most notably, Samuel Johnson.

Although he was well into his sixties and "bearing the accumulated infirmities of age and disease" (Knight 37), Johnson and More formed an immediate and strong affection for one another. Shortly after their initial meeting, this delightful repartee occurred:

Dr. Johnson asked me how I liked the new tragedy of Braganza. I was afraid to speak before them all, as I knew a diversity of opinion prevailed among the company: however, as I thought it a less evil to dissent from the opinion of a fellow-creature than to tell a falsity, I ventured to give my sentiments; and was satisfied with Johnson's answering, "You are right, madam." (Roberts *i* 40)

Frequent mentions of More and Johnson's friendship are seen in the family correspondence:

Hannah is certainly a great favorite. She was placed next to [Samuel Johnson], and they had the entire conversation to themselves. They were both in remarkably high spirits; it was certainly her lucky right! I never heard her say so many good things. The old genius was extremely jocular, and the young one very pleasant. You would have imagined we had been at some comedy had you heard our peals of laughter. (Sarah More in Roberts *i* 40)

Dr. Johnson and Hannah last night had a violent quarrel; till at length laughter ran so high on all sides that argument was confounded in noise. . .

(One of the More sisters in Roberts *i* 47)

In 1776, one of her sisters wrote concerning Johnson and More:

If a wedding should take place before our return, don't be surprised, -- between the mother of Sir Eldred and the father of my much-loved Irene; nay, Mrs. Montagu says, if tender words are the precursors of connubial agreements, we may expect great things; for it is nothing but "child," "little fool," "love," and "dearest". . . (Letter in Roberts *i* 46)

And from Hannah herself, we read:

I had the happiness to carry Dr. Johnson home from Hill street, though Mrs. Montagu publicly declared she did not think it prudent to trust us together, with such a declared affection on both sides. She said she was afraid of a Scotch elopement. He has invited himself to drink tea with us tomorrow, that we may read *Sir Eldred* [Hannah's poem] together. (Roberts *i* 45)

Yet it was not romance, but literature -- its reading, its writing, its discussion -- that formed

the center of More's relationship with Johnson (as with most of her newfound London friends). Indeed, upon first meeting More, Johnson had greeted her by quoting some of her own verses, written about rising late in the morning (Hopkins 57). One of the More sisters' most delightful recollections of a visit to Johnson's home at Seven Johnson Court centered on a discussion of one of Johnson's books in progress and Johnson's fond recollections of Samuel Richardson (Hopkins 58). (The influence of Richardson's novels on More's work will be explored in later chapters.)

The scene in the friendship between More and Johnson that is perhaps most colorful and telling, mentioned in various sources, unfolded in 1782 when Johnson took More to visit Oxford, his alma mater. There he escorted her into the common room where, earlier that same day, a sizable portrait of Johnson had been hung with the words imprinted under it: "And is not Johnson ours, himself a host. From Miss More's Sensibility" (Hopkins 60).

Johnson's friendship with More and her sisters was close enough that he visited them in their home in Bristol while More was away from London in the spring of 1776 (Hopkins 60). His death in 1784 signified an incalculable loss in More's life that would abide with her always.

As in her friendships with Walpole and others, More's relationship with Johnson illustrated her propensity for discovering and valuing in other people -- regardless of economic or spiritual station -- qualities that were apt to be unnoticed or unappreciated by most others.⁸ While Johnson's religion or compassion would not be seen by most as among his most notable characteristics, More observed:

In Dr. Johnson some contrarieties very harmoniously meet; if he has too little charity for the opinions of others, and too little patience with their faults, he has the greatest tenderness for their persons. He told me the other day he hated to

⁸ Referring to More's patronage of such persons as the "Maid of the Haystack" and the "Bristol Milkwoman," Hopkins notes, "Delight in unusual personalities combined with zeal in doing good led Hannah to discoveries of merit in unexpected persons" (121) -- not to mention discoveries of unexpected merit in persons otherwise noted.

hear people whine about metaphysical distresses, when there was so much want and hunger in the world. (Roberts *i* 145)⁹

More's immediate and complete success in London circles did not keep her enthralled with the fashionable life of the city for long. The blossoming socialite soon became its fiercest critic, writing that even the small-pox could not "be a more disfiguring disease than the present mode of dressing . . . but . . . more corrupt in its cause" (Letter in Roberts *i* 38-9). "I detest and avoid public places more than ever, and should make a miserably bad fine lady! What most people come to London *for* would keep me *from* it!" (Letter in Roberts *i* 50). In her disillusionment with city life and fashion, More's compassion for the plight of the poor fueled her conviction concerning the responsibility of the wealthy toward them (and their hypocrisy regarding them):

. . . I am annoyed by the foolish absurdity of the present mode of dress. Some ladies carry on their heads a large quantity of fruit, and yet they would despise a poor useful member of society who carried it there for the purpose of selling it for bread. (Roberts *i* 46)

Upon her return from London to Bristol in 1776, family members and friends noted that More's popularity and acclaim in the city circles had failed to change her deportment (Roberts *i* 61).

Yet, at the same time she disdained the fashionable life of the city, it was in this London circle that More's talent as a writer had been, and would continue to be, cultivated and recognized. Hopkins describes More's enthusiasms during this time as "poetry, theatre, and conversation" (62). Two of More's ballads, "Sir Eldred and the Bower" and "The Ballad of Bleeding Rock," were issued by London publisher Thomas Cadell in 1777. Cadell suggested to More that he base his pay scale for More's works on the amount received by Goldsmith for "The Deserted Village."

⁹ Even More's own personality has been noted for its apparent, but delightful, contrarities. For example, Thompson describes her temperament as one in which "sobriety and enthusiasm settle[d] well together" (31).

Cadell's publishing company made "a large amount of money" in publishing this and all of More's bestselling books (Hopkins 63). The occasion of "Sir Eldred"'s appearance in the *Monthly Review* produced a fond, if self-deprecating, memory for More of her beloved friend, David Garrick:

I'll tell you the most ridiculous circumstance in the world. After dinner Garrick took up the *Monthly Review* . . . and read "Sir Eldred" with all his pathos and all his graces. I think I never was so ashamed in my life; but he read it so superlatively that I cried like a child. Only think what a scandalous thing, to cry at the reading of one's poetry! . . . Mrs. Garrick twinkled as well as I, and made as many apologies for crying at her husband's reading, as I did for crying at my own verses.

(Roberts i 48-49)

When she returned to London in 1777, More's tragic play *Percy* was accepted and produced by the Covent Garden Theater. David Garrick, with whom, by then, More had developed a warm and lasting friendship, wrote the play's prologue and epilogue. Its first run lasted twenty-one nights and was soon produced at theaters across England and into France and Austria; its renown was, perhaps, unsurpassed at that time (Thompson 31-32). More described in a letter to her sister her own standard of success for the play: "One tear is worth a thousand hands, and I had the satisfaction to see even the men shed them in abundance" (Letter in Roberts i 78).

Percy is reminiscent of Richardson's *Clarissa* in its theme of the irresponsible and unreasonable exercise of parental authority in choosing a daughter's husband. More melodramatic and less psychologically compelling than *Clarissa*, More's play tells the tragic story of Elwina, who is in love with Earl Percy, cruelly forced to marry Percy's enemy after Percy had insulted Elwina's father. By play's end, all are dead except Elwina's father, who is left alone to repent of his stubbornness.

During this period, More passed many of her days at Garrick's home, where she penned various verses (including "Ode to Dragon," written to the Garricks' dog, and selling one thousand

copies in one week upon publication). David Garrick's special nickname for Hannah was "Nine," by which he meant that More was "the embodiment of all the Muses" (Harland 51). More also began her next tragedy under Garrick's tutelage. *The Fatal Falsehood* is a drama with the theme of "self-conquest." The prologue to the play sets forth unequivocally, as usual, More's priorities as a writer: "The verse though feeble, yet the moral's clear." Even so, according to a letter by Sarah More, the work "was greatly received. When the curtain dropped, the house absolutely shouted" (Thompson 37-38). This play didn't achieve the same level of success as did *Percy*, however, which is probably due in part to the death of its chief patron, Garrick, in 1779 (Thompson 41).

The deep and abiding friendship between More, Garrick, and Garrick's wife, Eva Maria, permeates their correspondences, is clear. The friends spent a tremendous amount of time together and "Aldelphi," the Garricks' home, was More's second home. More and David Garrick held mutual admiration and lent mutual support for each other's work. Upon Garrick's death, Hannah and Garrick's widow, Eva Maria Garrick, provided each other with a primary source of consolation during the days, months, even years following his death.

More remained close with Mrs. Garrick for many years following David's death. Their lasting friendship is one of the best examples of More's rare combination of her own devout religious conviction and her generous acceptance of the religious practices of others. As staunch a Protestant as More was, the fact that Mrs. Garrick was Roman Catholic never threatened their close friendship. Mrs. Garrick even referred to More as her "domestic chaplain" (Thompson 36). "Theological argument never arose to divide the two women . . . for both had tolerance for sectarian differences" (Hopkins 97). As steadfast and committed a proselytizer as she was, More was liberal and sincere enough in her affections for people -- both in the abstract and in the particular -- to maintain a secure place in various kinds of relationships with people of differing backgrounds, ideas, and faiths. Even Johnson teased More, who, he said, as a "good Protestant" shouldn't have been reading books by Catholic authors as she was in the habit of doing (Letter in Roberts *i* 124).

However, the death of this dear and valued friend, David Garrick, “broke the pattern of Hannah’s life” (Hopkins 95) and marked the awakening of More’s previously latent bias against the theater. With the passing of Garrick, who arguably could be credited with having the greatest role in raising the level of theater in terms of both quality and morality (Bready 166), More lost her primary, perhaps sole, attachment to the stage. Furthermore, during the negotiations with the publisher Cadell for the bookrights to *The Fatal Falsehood*, the publisher is reported to have remarked to More, “You are too good a Christian to be a dramatic author” (qtd. in Harland 75). More gave up the theater altogether, neither attending plays nor writing for the stage. Even the revival some years later of her play *Percy* did not shake her resolution, despite the additional temptation of the heroine’s part being played brilliantly by a popular actor (Thompson 43-44). More later stated, “To have gone would have been inconsistent with my publicly professed opinions” (qtd. in Thompson 44). Long after her decision was made, More occasionally made mention of it in her correspondence, such as in a letter to her sister Martha, reminding her that More had long withdrawn herself from theatre (Roberts *i* 159).

More’s most detailed explanation of her shift in views about the theater is found in the introduction to her collected dramas when she points to not inconsistency but “a revolution in [her] sentiments.” More grants that “a well written tragedy is, perhaps, one of the noblest efforts of the human mind . . . [and] . . . that of all public amusements it is the most interesting, the most intellectual, and the most accommodated to the tastes and capacities of a rational being . . .” (“Preface to the Tragedies” in *Works of Hannah More i* 502). Yet, because More was concerned with not only the rational side of man, but even more the spiritual, she grounded her objection to theater on what she called “a prominent thread of false Principle” that “almost inevitably runs through the whole web of the tragic drama”:

Honour is the religion of tragedy. . . . Fear and shame are the capital crimes in her code. . . . Injured honour can only be vindicated at the point of the sword; the stains of injured reputation can only be washed out in blood. Love, jealousy,

hatred, ambition, pride, revenge, are too often elevated into the rank of splendid virtues, and form a dazzling system of worldly morality, in direct contradiction to the spirit of that religion whose characteristics are "charity, meekness, peacableness, longsuffering, gentleness, forgiveness." (*Works* 504)

More's growing objections to the stage in particular did not extend to her views on literature in general. Indeed, her writings during the period following Garrick's death "evinced that she saw no inconstancy between the devoutest piety and the cultivation of elegant literature and taste" (Thompson 70). In 1782, More was elected to membership in the Academy of Arts, Science, and Belles Lettres at Rouen (France), and she maintained communication with this organization until the French Revolution (Harland 89). Having given up theater, More still recognized the power of dramatic literature and was drawn to employing that influence toward didactic ends. In 1782, she finally completed a long term dramatic project with the publication of her *Sacred Dramas*. Those who find More merely a puppet of complicity in the prevailing literary patriarchy¹⁰ fail to recognize that the publication of these plays directly opposed the sentiments of Dr. Johnson himself, who had, just prior to the publication of the *Sacred Dramas*, delivered this proclamation concerning biblical history:

All amplification is frivolous and vain; all addition to that which is already sufficient for the purpose of religion, seems not only useless, but in some degree profane. Such events as were produced by the visible interposition of Divine Power are above the power of human genius to dignify.

(*"Life of Cowley"* in *Lives of the English Poets* 49-50)

Thompson describes More's feat this way: "Hannah More ventured to controvert the supremacy of Johnsonian authority, and obtained, even from the publick of 1782, a triumphant verdict" (45).

¹⁰ Some twentieth century feminist writers critical of More's approach to reform include Lynne Agress, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, and Sylvia Harcstark Myers. (See works cited.)

Her book turned out nineteen editions and was translated into at least one foreign language (Hopkins 102). Yet, such a work was controversial within religious as well as literary circles. Ten years after publication, one attempt to produce on stage one of the stories from the *Sacred Dramas* was thwarted when

. . . the announcement that the play was to be performed threw the religious people of the town into a frenzy and the preachers “so barked at and tore to pieces” the proposal of putting Biblical characters on stage that [the producer] abandoned the attempt. (Hopkins 102)

THE BLUESTOCKING CIRCLE

More spent much of her time in London during this period with the *bas bleu*, or the “bluestocking circle.” One of the very first dinner gatherings More attended upon her introduction into London life had been hosted by Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, known as “Queen of the Blues” (Hopkins 54). More described being received by Montagu upon their first meeting with “the most encouraging kindness” (Letter in Roberts *i* 39). Thus, More joined this literary society which began around 1740, coalescing around the friendships of such women as Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Catherine Talbot, among others. England’s bluestocking circle was a group of mainly women and some men who met informally to discuss literary and intellectual topics during the last half of the eighteenth century. The women who comprised the circle,

in spite of peculiarities at which their own and succeeding generations have laughed, were women of strong intellect and personality who outraged the opinion of their contemporaries by insisting women were capable of the same intellectual pursuits and interests of men; and the male members were broad-minded enough to admit this also. (Cruse, *Englishman and His Books*, 26)

The elder women of the group, such as Elizabeth Montagu, often had the sponsorship of a wealthy, literary man and, in turn, sponsored one of the younger women in the circle. As a “second generation” member of the circle (as Sylvia Myers refers to her in *The Bluestocking Circle*), More was the “protegee” of Montagu, who had the sponsorship of Lord Lyttleton, followed by Sir William Pepys (Hopkins 105).

More’s standing among the bluestockings rose to such prominence that by 1779 she could be included in a painting by Richard Samuel, a detail of which is referred to as *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain*. Taken from *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*, which hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London, the detail depicts many of the women of the bluestocking circle gathered in a grecian-style temple. Elizabeth Anne Sheridan is in the center; to the left are Angelica Kauffman, Elizabeth Carter, and Anna L. Barbauld. Seated on the right are Catherine Macauley, Elizabeth Montagu, and Elizabeth Griffith, who are holding manuscripts. Standing behind them are Hannah More, lifting up a chalice, and Charlotte Lennox, who appears to be playing a lute. An engraving of *The Nine Muses* was also included in *The Ladies’ Pocket-book*, published in 1778 (Hopkins 80). At this time, More was the least known of all these women (Hopkins 81), but she had clearly established her place among the fashionable literary set in such a way that everything she wrote from this point forward would be received with respect and, for the most part, acclaim.

The characteristics of the bluestocking circle and More’s involvement in the group provide an important key to understanding More’s evolution as a writer and the tremendous influence her works had at every level of society. The bluestockings’ approach to long established notions of class, sex, and the role of the literary woman translated into important influences on and opportunities for More as a middle-class woman writer during the latter years of eighteenth-century England. More’s introduction into and rise within the London literary world occurred at a time in English society when women of talent and intellect were just beginning to receive recognition apart from the economic and social status they were born into (Hopkins 56). This

phenomenon did not go unnoticed by More, who, upon being invited to one of Mrs. Boscawen's "select parties," remarked, "They are all very advanced in life and in knowledge, and it is a great honour for such a young nobody as I am to be admitted" (Letter in Roberts *i* 103). The bluestockings'

view of friendship as a medium leading to supportive relationships between individuals of different backgrounds irrespective of gender and social class has been traced . . . to the philosophical movements of the second half of the seventeenth century, in which particular men and women were appealing to the use of reason to 'reconcile religion and science, authority and liberty, women and men (Sylvia Myers 61)

The bluestocking women "show a reaching out across distances of space and, to a certain extent, of class, to create connections of friendship based on similar interests and similar problems" (Sylvia Myers 61). More's friendship with fellow bluestocking Mrs. Barbauld is exemplary of the kinds of connections fostered by the circle. While the two women differed vastly on religious and church matters, their mutual interests in female education and literature, among other things, contributed to a friendship that endured until Mrs. Barbauld's death (Murch 13n).

This same "reaching out" across religious, class, and gender boundaries is foremost in More's own life and work. She reached upward, socially, to the upper class with works such as *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, and *Strictures on Female Education*, and downward to the lower classes with her Cheap Repository Tracts, Sunday Schools, and her patronage of poor writers and laborers.

More also transcended gender boundaries by participating in social circles that were otherwise exclusive to men, such as the so-called "Sourcroust Party," a weekly men's meeting which derived its name from the main course (Hopkins 79)., and at which Roberts notes that More was always welcome (*i* 82). We learn in a letter written in 1776 that More, in addition, had attended an annual meeting at the Adelphi, "where nothing but men are usually asked." She admits, "I was,

however, of the party and an agreeable day it was to me" (Letter in Roberts *i* 48). Within the Evangelical Clapham Sect, with which More became involved later in life, she was the only female considered to be "one of the 'great men'" (Howse 166), on a par with the male members of that influential and prestigious group.

The first generation of bluestockings had "hoped to change the attitudes of both men and women by advocating the cause of women" (Sylvia Myers 121). While some have viewed More's attitudes in terms of the roles and rights of women as the most "regressive" of the bluestocking circle (Sylvia Myers 260) or, at best, "conservative" (Wynne-Davies 730), a closer look at More's work within her contemporary context demonstrates that, indeed, she was "a reformer, not a reactionary" (Ford xi). In fact, More's views on the education of women "were in advance of those of most people in her time" (Hopkins 229). Even Porter, who derides More as a "do-gooder" in her philanthropic efforts on behalf of the poor (313), admits that as a philanthropist More was taking advantage of one of the few opportunities her society offered for women to employ their managerial skills (309).

As a reformer, More was certainly less radical than her contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft, to whom she is usually compared. More's stance toward the kind of reform advanced by Wollstonecraft is made clear in this letter:

I have been much pestered to read the "Rights of Women" but am invincibly resolved not to do it. Of all jargon, I hate metaphysical jargon; besides there is something fantastic and absurd in the very title. How many ways there are of being ridiculous! I am sure I have as much liberty as I can make a good use of, now I am an old maid; and when I was a young one, I had I dare say, more than was good form. If I were still young, perhaps I should not make this confession; but so many women are fond of government, I suppose, because they are not fit for it. To be unstable and capricious, I really think, is but too characteristic of our sex; and there is perhaps no animal so much indebted to subordination for its good behaviour as woman.... I believe [my female friends] used to suspect me of art in [this view], as if I wanted to court the approbation of the other sex, who, it must be

confessed, politically encourage this submissive temper in us; but I really maintained the opinion in sincerity and simplicity, both from what I felt at home and have seen abroad. (Roberts *i* 427)

This passage emphasizes More's perception of what must be changed for the betterment of society, a theme that is seen throughout her entire life's work, from the school for girls in Bristol to her treatises on manners and education. As a social, political, and moral conservative, More believed that individuals needed to make changes in themselves in order to bring improvements to society, not that changes in society would cause improvements in individuals. More found women to be "capricious" and "unstable" and in other writings placed much of the blame for that on the typical education of girls, which encouraged them to be so. (Such an education, of course, was designed for a young lady's landing as good a husband as she could get based on her station. One could justifiably surmise that More's lifelong state of singleness can be attributed more than anything else to her refusal to play by those rules of courtship.)

Greater significance, however, is in More's derision of the very title of Wollstonecraft's work, *The Rights of Women*. What More found "ridiculous" in this, as demonstrated throughout her life's works, is the emphasis on "rights": it wasn't the rights of *women* to which More objected, as much as the idea of an individual's relationship to society being based on a framework of *rights*, rather than *obligations*, or as More would have put it, *duty*. In all her didactic works, More expresses concern with the obligations, or the duties, of her given audience: the duty of the wealthy to set the example of morality for the poor, the duty of the poor to be good and frugal stewards of what little they might have, the duty of children to honor their parents, and the duty of Christians to serve God. Critics who interpret More's disdain for the ideas promulgated by Wollstonecraft as opposition to women's reform or progress have failed to understand the basis of More's disagreement, a basis which by no means precludes radical change, but rather would produce not-so-different results from vastly different means.

More believed in differing roles and duties for men and women. Elizabeth Boscawen

defended More's essay on education not as granting the superiority of men (as one reader took it) but as contending for the merit of women being not inferior to men but "of a distinct and different kind" (Elizabeth Boscawen, Letter to Hannah More in Roberts *ii* 113). More found women uniquely able to succeed in efforts where men would have failed. For example, she found the effectiveness of the public exhortations of a Quaker woman to be an example of "how God fits the instrument to the work" in a situation where a man's attempts would have been ineffectual (Roberts *ii* 282).

Though More relished being the only female in the all-male "sour-croud parties," and she was one of only two or three ladies in the learned Oyster Club (Harland 87), upon being named an honorary member of the "Royal Society of Literature" she responded, "I have written a strong remonstrance, declining the distinction, partly on the ground that I have no claim to it, but chiefly that I consider the circumstance of sex alone a disqualification" (Roberts *ii* 330). There were some gender roles separated by boundaries that, evidently, More was not willing to cross.

Yet ample evidence exists that More's beliefs about the proper roles of men and women differed significantly from traditional notions, enough to warrant the kind of disparaging remark by Charles Pigott, who referred to More as a "Bishop in petticoats" in her conservative positions on religion and monarchy (qtd. in Sylvia Myers 287). Ford, in fact, sees in much of More's work a resistance to the prevailing patriarchy, usually masked by an appearance of accommodation.¹¹

While many feminists of More's time and today would dismiss More's views of men and women as synonymous with antifeminism, the evidence is irrefutable that More, in fact, heralded expanded education, opportunity, and roles for women. In later years, upon being asked to make an addition to the *Sacred Dramas* (to prevent other publishers from profiting from her work following copyright expiration), More wrote a new scene in which a woman, Miriam, performs the important feat of prophesying Israel's deliverance out of Egypt (Letter in Roberts *ii* 221). She

¹¹ More's works "pulsate with both accommodation and resistance to masculine supremacy. Most revealing is the frequent masking of resistance by apparent accommodation in More's poems, plays, and essays" (Ford xi).

derided the antipathy many men (and women) had for learned women, such as those among the bluestocking circle. Even in as early a work as More's didactic drama *The Search After Happiness* such sentiments can be found in the epilogue she wrote to of this play that featured an all-female cast:

Tho' should we still the rhyming trade pursue,
The men will shun us, -- and the women, too;
The men, poor souls! of scholars are afraid,
We shou'd not, did they govern, learn to read,
At least, in no abstruser volume look,
Than the learn'd records -- of a Cookery book;
The ladies, too, their well-meant censure give,
"What! -- does she write? a slattern, as I live --
"I wish she'd leave her books, and mend her cloaths,
"I thank my stars I know not verse from prose . . ."
(qtd. in Hopkins 47)

Knight described More as having "more enlarged views of female education than were common" at that time (10). Even the unsympathetic Ford K. Brown writes, "Mrs. More's sardonic criticisms of such things as contemporary novels and education in young ladies' seminaries are the work of an intelligent, observant, informed woman" (137).

What More did *not* advocate for women was affectation in education. Roberts reports her to have observed that

many things had been cultivated since her youth by her own sex which she had determined to make no effort towards acquiring, as a superficial, or even a deeper knowledge of them would tend to no utility, either to herself or to others; that she frequently heard ladies using philosophical terms and technical terms, but it did not inspire her with any desire to dabble in the sciences, which would have consumed much time without any of that good which was the result of a

thorough acquaintance with a few things. (ii. 317)

The fact that much of this affectation could be attributed to the lack of real opportunities for women's education is also addressed by More in her treatise on female education. More herself provided a perfect example of the benefits of the kind of education she wanted for all girls. More's contemporary, Mary Hamilton, praised Hannah More as an exception to the many women she considered to be "pretenders to learning" (Sylvia Myers 264).

Characteristic also of the bluestockings' beliefs about the family,¹² was More's concern about the kind of education that would prepare a woman to be a good wife, rather than merely landing a good husband. This topic was of great enough concern to More that it would later form the theme of her only attempt at writing a novel.

I am acquainted with a great many very good wives, who are so notable and so managing that they make a man every thing but happy; and I know a great many others who sing, and play, and paint, and cut paper, and are so accomplished that they have no time to be agreeable, and no desire to be useful. (Roberts *i* 316)

More believed that "it is almost the worst sort of domestic immorality [in a wife] to be disagreeable" (Roberts *i* 168). In More's mind, being an "agreeable" and "useful" wife was essential for mutual domestic happiness. A happy marriage, as More believed and later demonstrated in *Cœlebs*, was a channel of allowing the individual to satisfactorily employ whatever gifts and talents had been bestowed on him or her by God for the benefit of all, both within the family and without. The happiness and success of the marriage partnership would spill over onto the children, who were empowered by the firm foundation of the parents, as was the case in More's upbringing. As Hole notes, the traditional family structure More supported in her writings enabled women to "be

¹² The bluestockings placed much importance on the role of family and on family ties. For example, see the introduction to and chapter on "Marriage and the Bluestockings" in Myers' book, *The Bluestocking Circle*.

intelligent, rational, virtuous, and noble creatures, capable of great intellectual and moral achievements. They had the potential for immense influence on their husbands and sons, on their other relations, their servants and the poor" (xvii). More held, therefore, along with her fellow bluestockings, that "the ideal of rational domesticity helped to liberate the individual within a supportive family framework" (Sylvia Myers 16).

Closely tied to the high value the bluestockings placed on family was their conscientious adherence to and promotion of virtue. More characterized the women of the London literary circle, from the start, as "all ladies of high character and piety" (Letter in Roberts *i* 41). Virtue in sexuality, in fact, was inextricably tied to the virtue of learning. "The women of the bluestocking circle were determined to combine their learning with virtue -- a term which covers such traits as chastity for single women, fidelity for married ones, and Christian piety" (Sylvia Myers 2). Men were valued most not as vehicles of sexual seduction and fulfillment, but rather as conveyors of intellectual learning and knowledge.

This can certainly be attributed, in part, to the fact that by necessity it was men who introduced these women to higher learning (since the traditional exclusion of women from this realm made men the sole possessors of intellectual understanding). "In the generation which produced the first bluestockings, mentors (most often fathers or brothers) were influential in helping these girls to read and study" (Sylvia Myers 16). Such was certainly true for More throughout her life, having received a classical education from her father and the encouragement, mentoring, and support of numerous literary men during her writing years. Even as a young student at her sisters' school, More had received the notice and encouragement of Sir James Stonehouse, who predicted then her success (Knight 16). For More, as well as for the other women who formed the bluestocking circle, the most significant role played by the men in their lives was almost exclusively that of mentor and teacher; this profoundly affected the way in which they related with men. The fact that the men in the lives of these learned women tended to serve as arbiters of learning rather than sexual pleasure was surely a factor in their elevation of virtue and

chastity. Sylvia Myers states:

In general, the bluestockings resisted the erotic element, although they were aware of its importance to other members of their society. They particularly disliked conventional male "gallantry" in which women were treated in a flattering way as sex objects. As respectable women of the eighteenth century, committed to virtue and chastity, the bluestockings resisted the intrusion of eroticism into both their male and female friendships. (17)

The following excerpt from a letter More received from William Pepys shows the perspective with which More and the other bluestockings were viewed: "Upon receiving back your 'Bas Bleu,' which I had lent to Lady ----, she sent me a note, which I will transmit to you, as it bestows such an appropriate title upon you as that of a 'virtuous wit' " (in Roberts *ii* 266).

Chastity in life and morality in writing were essential codes for the woman writer during this period (Spender 75). Of course, balancing these two was no easy task, as More recognized. Her letters often reflected an uneasy tension between her attempts to promote virtue in her writing and then to live up to those high standards. This example is from a letter written by More to fellow bluestocking Elizabeth Carter in 1784:

It is so easy to practise a creditable degree of so seeming virtue, and so difficult to purify and direct the affections of the heart, that I feel myself in continual danger of appearing better than I am; and I verily believe it is possible to make one's whole life a display of splendid virtue and agreeable qualities, without ever setting foot towards the narrow path, or even one's face towards the strait gate.

(Roberts *i* 201)

More repeated this sentiment in a letter to Elizabeth Boscawen when she wrote, "Do you know, my dear madam, as I have said before, I feel a little awkward about this same book? I am so afraid that strangers will think me good! and there is a degree of hypocrisy in appearing much better

than one is" (Roberts *i* 302).

More regarded feminine virtue "as a springboard for the exercise of feminine power . . . [that] bestowed to women the moral authority and legitimacy to censor the wicked, especially evil men" (Ford 209). Of course men, too, recognized this potential power of female virtue, as one of her many male correspondents expressed in this letter to More: "What I wished you to insist upon principally, is the very extensive influence which your sex might have on ours by an active and judicious use of every fair opportunity to discountenance vice, and encourage the profession of virtuous principles" (William W. Pepys, Letter to Hannah More, in Roberts *ii* 21-22).

This "extensive influence" of women writers was seen increasingly in this time like no other before it, and the bluestockings played a central role. In the space between two generations of women writers is a dramatic shift in women's willingness to present themselves as educated, literary women and to offer their works for public review, critique, and consumption. While the first generation of bluestockings "did not move beyond limited publication prompted by friendship" (Sylvia Myers 243), More and the second generation of bluestockings, along with their works, enjoyed unprecedented recognition and acceptance.

By the 1770s, these women were being observed not only by their friends, but by various poets, journalists, even painters, who would make bluestockings part of their work. . . . Men of good will used some of the bluestockings as touchstones of learning and virtue -- they became token women who had demonstrated that learning was not dangerous, and did not unsettle society.

(Sylvia Myers 271)

One of More's most widely acclaimed poems was an affectionate account of the bluestocking circle. The poem celebrated their individual personalities of the women against the backdrop of their social and literary relationships. "The Bas-Bleu; or Conversation" introduced the term to the wider society while portraying More's own experience in and perspective of the bluestocking circle. This poem was very popular within the circle itself, having been circulated in

manuscript among the members for several years before its publication in 1786. King George even requested a personal copy of the poem from More's own hand (Sylvia Myers 262), and Johnson wrote a letter expressing his desire to see More so he could praise her work in person (Hopkins 106). In a letter to her sister, More wrote of that occasion:

He received me with the greatest kindness and affection; and as to the "Bas Bleu," all the flattery I ever received from everybody would not make up his sum. . . . He said there was no name in poetry that might not be glad to own it. You cannot imagine how I stared; all this from Johnson, that parsimonious praiser!
(Roberts *i* 183)

Characteristically modest, More insisted to her sister in this letter that she not tell of anyone of Johnson's praise.

"Bas Bleu" has been accused of making "a rather superficial estimate of the significance of the bluestockings without going into the original motives of the older women," namely the injustice of excluding women from intellectual intercourse with men, hampering the growth of women's learning (Sylvia Myers 262). But as is often characteristic of those who reap the fruits of the seeds planted by those who went before, More did perhaps take for granted, because of her own generously given acclaim the role those before her had played in making her recognition possible. Any criticism of the poem's lack of adequate political perspective is surely valid; however, More's purpose in writing the poem can clearly be seen in the work itself as a deeply personal rather than political one.

MORE'S RETREAT FROM FASHIONABLE LIFE

In the early 1780s, More mentored and sponsored a promising female poet from the laboring class, Anna Yearsley, the "Milkmaid of Bristol," whose voluminous poetry was published

by More's own publisher, Cadell. The project ended badly, however, when Yearsley broke with More over the control of the profits and royalties from the publications. Yet, the experience did enable More "to ascertain the powerful influence which her popularity with the great empowered her to wield" (Thompson 67) and further proved More's ability to bridge the two worlds of the great and the low; her power to connect the likes of an Anna Yearsley with such supporters as Elizabeth Montagu depended on more than superficial relationships with the women. And, tellingly, More considered both of these women who were worlds apart to be her genuine friends.

In 1782, More attacked the prevailing fashion of "sensibility" with the publication of her poem by that name. The poem was evoked by her grief over Garrick's death (Hopkins 98). More's versified assault on the hypocrisy she saw among the fashionable in their excessive emoting over trifles while ignoring real human suffering is an anticipation of the kind of sensibility More depicts in the character of Lady Melbury in *Cœlebs*. ". . . I have attacked that mock-feeling and sensibility which is at once the boast and disgrace of these times, and which is equally deficient in taste and truth," More wrote to her sister in 1782 (in Roberts i 138). It is from this poem that the line under Johnson's portrait at Oxford, mentioned above, was taken.

In 1785, following the death of her father in 1783 and that of Johnson the next year, More built Cowslip Green, a one-story thatched cottage situated outside the village of Blagdon across from the Mendip Hills. Her plans to retire to a quiet, rustic country life were thwarted, however, by the stream of visitors that flowed to her retreat. Soon Cowslip Green was overflowing with not only More's sisters, but friends such as Mrs. Garrick, Elizabeth Montagu, William Wilberforce and other members of the Clapham Sect, as well as an abundant library cushioned with a copy of each edition published by Horace Walpole's Strawberry Press, sent by Walpole himself (Hopkins 112).

By 1788, More's literary reputation warranted inclusion in Marshall's *Catalogue of Five Hundred Celebrated Authors of Great Britain Now Living*, which was published that year.¹³ The poems "Bas Bleu" (which had been written in 1782) and "Florio" were both published in 1786,

¹³ She was later included in Rivers' *Literary Memoirs of Living Authors of Great Britain* (1798).

and More spent the summer of 1787 at Cowslip Green where she wrote *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society*. This treatise is described as “her first methodical battery on vice and error” (Thompson 79). More published it anonymously in 1788; its authorship was at first attributed to William Wilberforce and then the Bishop of London (Knight 111). “[I]ts influence was soon traceable in the abandonment of many of the customs which it attacked” (Thompson 81): elaborate hairdressing on the sabbath, masters employing servants to lie, Sunday concert-parties of sacred music. More addressed “practices” rather than “principles” because she sought to better attract her desired audience (Thompson 82). Just as More believed that change in all of society must be initiated by the great, then imitated by the low, so she addressed first practices, or effects, that she might better win her audience for an address on principles, or causes.

This was accomplished with the publication of *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World, by one of the Laity* in 1790. In a somewhat ironic twist (considering More's disdain of popular fashion), her book “itself became fashionable” (Thompson 127). The thoughts she had during this time on English society had been expressed a couple of years earlier in a letter to Horace Walpole in September of 1788: “In vain do we boast of the enlightened eighteenth century, and conceitedly talk as if human reason had not a manacle left about her, but that philosophy had broken down all the strong-holds of prejudice, ignorance, and superstition...” (in Roberts *i* 293). Characteristic of More's balanced and reasoned view even amidst social and political turmoil is her comment following the acquittal of Lord George Gordon, leader of the “No Popery” riots: “I am glad he is acquitted, for it disappoints the party, and uncanonizes the martyr” (qtd. in Harland 82).

This period in More's life is where she markedly shifted her interests and attentions. Disillusioned following her disheartening study of the great in society, More seemed to find even more reason to renew her attentions toward the less fortunate of society. In addition, More was growing closer to active and influential members of the Evangelical Party of the Established

Church, particularly those of the Clapham Sect, a group of lay leaders (originally from the London suburb of Clapham) who were part of the Evangelical movement. (More's relationship to the Evangelical movement will be examined in more detail in a later chapter.) This group included abolitionist William Wilberforce and former slave-trader Rev. John Newton. The sect was distinctive in that it "rose splendidly above the ordinary barriers of party, class, creed, colour, and nationality"; its members included men of various backgrounds who cooperated with Catholics, Unitarians, and Utilitarians in projects for the common good (Bready 304).

Among the causes to which her energies were directed at this time was the growing movement headed by Wilberforce¹⁴ to abolish the English slave trade. More had met this foremost opponent of slavery in Bath in 1786, and their friendship and mutual admiration lasted forty-seven years (Hopkins 157-158). More had also begun a correspondence with slave trader turned abolitionist and minister John Newton in 1787. "This most important cause [to abolish the slave-trade] has very much occupied my thoughts this summer" (Hannah More, Letter in Roberts i 266). She composed a descriptive, railing antislavery poem, "The Black Slave Trade," published in 1788, which bore witness to some of the horrors of slavery More herself had witnessed firsthand. More's relationship with Wilberforce was among those that had the greatest influence on her life and work. "It would be difficult to exaggerate Wilberforce's influence on Hannah's life. He liberalized her views and gave her a worthy outlet for her splendid zeal" (Hopkins 158). Wilberforce was also the impetus for More's pioneering work in the Sunday Schools.

In 1789, More's poem "Bonner's Ghost" was published and dedicated to Beilby Porteus, Bishop of Chester, later London, and George III's private chaplain (Hopkins 136). It was printed by Walpole's Strawberry Hill Press (Hopkins 137). In his biography of More, Roberts felt it "painful" but necessary to apologize for More's "long and animated correspondence" with Horace Walpole. Although his life and writing "were such as to throw him out of the circle of Christian fellowship,"

¹⁴ More also joined Wilberforce in his opposition to bull-baiting (M. G. Jones 90) among many other evangelical causes.

Roberts believed that if Walpole had only lived a few years more, he would have been transformed under More's "pure and prevailing superiority" (Roberts *ii* 442-3). Though criticized by enemies and friends alike, More's friendship with Walpole, marked by a noticeable lack of religious content in her letters to him, was not a compromise of principle; his respect for her is evident in the language of his addresses to her in their correspondence and in his continued support of her work (Thompson 159-161). To Walpole, More was testimony that "the most implicit faith and the most devoted zeal in Christianity could consist with the highest mental attainments; and that the most devoted piety was no obstacle to cheerfulness and humour" (Thompson 161-162). This particular relationship, rather than warranting an apologetic defense, is but another example of More's rare and laudable ability to bridge a cultural gap between the irreligious, social elite and the conservative evangelical community. More's ability to do so was recognized by John Wesley, who said upon her decision to retire from society, "Tell her to live in the world; *there* is the sphere of her usefulness, they will not let *us* come nigh them" (Roberts *ii* 345).

More's goal to reach people from all strata of society was by no means unconscious or accidental, as she openly expresses in this letter:

I have no doubt that it is a part of Christianity to convert every natural talent to a religious use, and therefore I declare I think you are serving God by making yourself agreeable, upon your own views and principles (for the motive is the act), to worldly but well-disposed people, who would never be attracted to religion by grave and severe divines, even if such ever fall in their way.

(Roberts *i* 468)

ATTENTIONS TURNED FROM THE GREAT TO THE LOW

Primarily through the influence of Wilberforce (Hopkins 160), More and her sisters decided in 1789 to open a Sunday School in Cheddar. Following the example of Robert Raikes, widely held as the “Father of the Sunday School Movement,” the More sisters endeavored to teach the children of the laboring classes to read and write, to learn the catechism of the church, and to become more dutiful and moral citizens of their class. More believed that “learning is the next best thing to religion” (Letter in Roberts *ii* 330).

When setting up the first of about sixteen schools in Cheddar, More once again employed her winsome skills of diplomacy. She disarmed the suspicious opponents among the villagers through many friendly visits to their homes, as well as by the practical suggestion that children “could not rob orchards and attend Sunday schools at the same time” (Thompson 92).

Nearly two hundred children attended that first Sunday. The students were taught to repeat the catechism, to read the New Testament, to answer questions about the gospel, as well as to sew, knit and spin. Profits from these latter activities were given back to the children. To More has been attributed the replacement of instruction by “deadly monotone” and learning by rote, the accepted method of the time, with her lively, more stimulating approach using the dramatic method (M. G. Jones 15).

The Cheddar schools were replicated in nine other parishes nearby, enrolling about five hundred children (Thompson 90-96) as “the parochial clergy in general fell in with Mrs. More’s plans, and cordially promoted both her schools and her clubs” (Thompson 110).

In connection with the schools, More also set up mutual benefit societies for women. In the remotest and poorest of communities, these support groups were “as rare as schools for the poor.” Through her characteristic tenacity and persuasiveness, More’s societies became “the source of much contentment, comfort, and improvement” in these poor and isolated villages (*ii* 62). Some of the clubs had memberships of 150, with women who were able paying weekly dues

and others receiving assistance from private subscriptions. In this way, women received financial assistance according to a payment schedule for needs arising from illnesses, births, and funerals (Hopkins 173).

Viewed through twentieth-century eyes, More's adherence to contemporary beliefs regarding class (namely, that the status into which one was born was ordained by God) seems regressive, at best. More did not believe in educating children beyond their station (thinking that to do so would leave them unsatisfied and unhappy in a lot in life nearly impossible to escape). Yet she firmly believed and demonstrated that one's lot could be vastly improved through the individual's own moral and righteous efforts combined with the benevolence of others. There can be no doubt that More had the best interests (at least what she perceived those to be) of her beneficiaries at heart. More's reformation attempts were certainly controversial, garnering respectable opposition each step of the way. Hopkins notes that though "from today's viewpoint her opinions seem reactionary and her efforts toward social betterment seem conservative, yet in her day she was savagely attacked as a dangerous radical" (2).

It is rather ironic that one considered so unacceptably conservative today was part of a movement considered in its day dangerously radical. At this time, much of the British, including most churchmen, viewed popular education suspiciously, including the Sunday Schools. Even the esteemed Bishop Horsley pronounced "that there was much ground for suspicion that sedition and atheism were the real objects of some of these institutions rather than religion" (Howse 96). In 1797, *The Gentleman's Magazine* printed an article that voiced the prevailing suspicions about educating the poor, proclaiming instead the advantages of keeping the poor man in ignorance and illiteracy:

The laborious occupations of life must be performed by those who have been born in the lowest station; but no one will be willing to undertake the most servile employment, or the meanest drudgery of his mind is opened, and his abilities increased by any tolerable share of scholastic improvement. . . . His ignorance is a

balm that soothes his mind into stupidity and repose, and excludes every emotion to discontent, pride and ambition. . . . While those who are qualified by a tincture of superficial learning . . . will be the first to excite rebellions, and convert a kingdom into a state of anarchy and confusion. (qtd. in Kovacevic 47)

A dangerous revolutionary More was not. Indeed, she condemned revolutionary approaches as hindrances to reform, as expressed in a letter to Wilberforce:

Now, in my poor judgment, all this has a revolutionary as well as irreligious tendency; and the misfortune is, the growing ultraism on the side of learning, falsely so called, will irritate and inflame the old bigotry which hugged absolute ignorance as hidden treasure not to be parted with; while that sober measure of Christian instruction which lies between two extremes will be rejected by both parties. (Roberts *ii* 360)

Yet More's attempts at reform were successful enough and immediate enough that Thompson would write shortly after her death that her works

have already effected a moral revolution, not merely on the surface, but in the inmost vitals of aristocratick and middle life. . . extensively influential in calming the passion and correcting the delusions of a misguided populace . . . from them many a cottage continues to derive a little treasure of knowledge, piety, and economy . . . Her personal esertions [sic] altogether changed the moral conduct of the labouring classes within their influence, and abated, if not annihilated, . . . the popular prejudice against the religious education of the poor.

(Thompson 2-3)

More's moderate reforms, although less radical than those proposed by Wollstonecraft, for example, were more acceptable and therefore more effective, because More successfully positioned herself in the nexus between two worlds at odds. Concerning the proper boundaries of education for the poor, she placed herself against the "ultra-educationist," remarking, "I have

exerted my feeble voice to prevail on my few parliamentary friends to steer the middle way between the Scylla of brutal ignorance and Charybdis of a literary education. The one is cruel, the other preposterous” Roberts *ii* 340).

More is seen, once again, engaging in activity that could be faulted by the extremes of two sides, bridging an important religious, and consequently cultural, chasm. Her Sunday Schools were supported by the Evangelical Party of the Anglican Church, whose members, by resisting Methodism’s break from the established church and instead bolstering the church from within, could be counted as the church’s strongest advocates. On the other hand, More, a conservative herself, was criticized by the conservative element of the Church, which considered the Sunday Schools to be nothing more than “dangerous Methodist propaganda” (Hopkins 185).

Part of the “danger” of the Sunday Schools was that by educating the lower classes, and thereby elevating the general culture of England (Hopkins 161), More was, even to a small degree, narrowing the gap between the rich and poor of England. Jones observes, “Thirty years before Disraeli, forty years before Dickens, Hannah More did something to make the Two Nations known to one another” (148). As More wrote to John Newton in 1796:

One great benefit which I have found to result from our projects is the removal of that great gulf which has divided the rich and poor in these country parishes, by making them meet together; whereas before, they hardly thought they were children of one common father. (Roberts *i* 477)¹⁵

Such a declaration demonstrates that More’s approach to reform was far from conservative. Yet, More’s approach to reform had a religious, not a political, foundation; in turn, the results she sought were religious, not political. This fact seems to be the basis for her critics’ dismissal of her work as complicit with the status quo, when, in fact, the idea of removing “that great gulf” between

¹⁵ This excerpt clearly refutes M. G. Jones’ charge that More’s successes in bridging the “great gulf” were “unwitting” (148).

the rich and the poor was reform that could surely be termed radical.

With her work in the Sunday Schools turning her time, attention, and resources fully away from the great to the low, More's pen was all that remained to be similarly directed. This transpired in her next writing endeavor. "To teach the poor to read, without providing them with safe books," wrote More to Bishop Beadon (qtd. in Thompson 151n), "has always appeared to me to be an improper measure; and that induced me to the laborious undertaking of the Cheap Repository Tracts." The literary and social significance of the Cheap Repository will be examined more closely in a later chapter.

"THE HARP AND THE VIOL, THE WHEEL AND THE FORGE WERE STILL"

The poor and illiterate were not long to remain the sole focus of More's attentions, however. Following an address by Jacob Dupont to the national legislature of France in December of 1792, during which Dupont called for France's establishment of national public schools that would remove religion from the hands of the church as well as from the curriculum of the children, More (after much solicitation from her friends) produced the tract "Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont."¹⁶ This pamphlet was extensively circulated and produced a profit of 240 pounds (Thompson 141), which was used, as More had intended in writing the tract, to support French emigrant clergy driven from the antireligious climate of their homeland to the more hospitable shores of England. For many years thereafter, More sheltered exiled members of the French clergy in her family's home (Thompson 144). Devoted Anglican that she was, More easily defended her support of these Roman Catholic clergy on biblical grounds, even against fellow

¹⁶ More was somewhat of a reluctant political participant, though – living in such volatile times – it was natural for her to hold strong alignments with the factions of her times: she was a royalist, a conservative, and an opponent to both the American and the French Revolutions. Her approach to all things political, however, is best summed up by this remark in a letter written to her sister in 1775: "They seem to think the man and the politician are different things; but I do not see why a person should not be bound to speak truth in the House of Commons as much as in his own house" (Roberts *i* 42).

Anglicans who claimed that it was indeed the atheist Dupont who was doing the work of God by expelling Catholicism from France (Thompson 146-47). More, in yet another set of circumstances, is seen bridging a cultural chasm, this time within the Christian body.

In 1799, More followed up a vein of thought begun earlier in her *Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable* by publishing her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, with a View of the Principles and Conduct prevalent among Women of Rank and Fortune*. More now attempted in this work to bring what, in her opinion, was much-needed balance to the prevailing approach to the education of young ladies. Calling for greater emphasis on knowledge and less on decorous accomplishments, plus a recognition of the importance of not only rational education, but of spiritual education as well, More addressed not only daughters of rank and fortune here, but those of the rising middle class. The treatise covers a range of educational concerns from language, history and geography to public amusements and the proper use of time. The following excerpt, taken from Chapter IX, "On the Religious and Moral Use of History and Geography," demonstrates an approach to learning surprisingly compatible with modern education's emphasis on critical thinking, practical application, and integration of approaches:

All human learning should be taught, not as an end, but a means; . . . In the study of history, the instructor will accustom the pupil not merely to store her memory with facts and anecdotes, and to ascertain dates and epochs: but she will accustom her also to trace effects to their causes, to examine the secret springs of action, and accurately to observe the operations of the passions.

(*Works of Hannah More* i 346)

This work, unlike its predecessors, was published with More's name and was well received. "Congratulations and compliments arrived from almost every name of religious or literary distinction," including nobility and royalty (Thompson 170). "[Y]ou must be pleased for the sake of others that your most excellent work is so universally read and admired, and I trust will on many produce a suitable effect" (Elizabeth Carter, Letter to More in Roberts *ii* 36).

In 1801, More removed to Barley Wood, a larger home she had built just outside the village of Wrington that would provide more suitable accommodations for her many visitors and friends. That same year, More also had her complete works published in eight octavo volumes. With the republication of her tragedies, she included the lengthy preface, excerpted above, explaining the evolution of her views regarding the stage.

Around this time, More's publishing was suspended due to an all-consuming controversy surrounding one of her Sunday Schools. The so-called "Blagdon Controversy," which revolved around accusations made against More of Methodism in her school at Wedmore, played out in newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, and even books from 1800 to 1804. Periodicals such as *The British Critic* and *Anti-Jacobin* joined in, along with individual publications from clergymen and bishops. "Much of the controversy centered on the exact degree to which Hannah was tainted with 'enthusiasm'" (Hopkins 194). More was accused not only of "Methodism," "disloyalty," and Jacobism," but of "not believing one word of Christianity" (Thompson 193).¹⁷ Sadly ironic for More was the fact that she had a strong aversion to religious or doctrinal strife. More shunned such controversy and division, remarking it was not her "object to teach dogmas and opinions, but to train up good members of society, and plain practical Christians" (qtd. in Thompson 199).

In response to attacks made against More during the Blagdon Controversy, Mr. Knox described her as "one of the most illustrious females that ever was in the world -- one of the most indefatigable labourers in the husbandry of God -- one of the most truly evangelical divines of this whole age" (Roberts *ii* 87). Even amidst this assault on her integrity and her character, More's company was still sought by many. "The world broke in upon her from every quarter, and as the greater part of her visitors resorted to her for improvement and advice, she felt it her duty to be free and accessible towards all who sought her society" (Roberts *ii* 89). "All" included the great

¹⁷ Interestingly, Thompson parallels this entire controversy with the art of fiction writing and reading itself, calling the written attacks against More a "canon of fiction," attacks which warranted the counsel given by the poet John Gay (1685-1732): "Lest men suspect your tale untrue, keep probability in view" (193).

and the low, and those in between. "It was her privilege in an extraordinary manner to compel attention. The harp and the viol, the wheel and the forge were still, for an interval at least, to listen to the voice of this charmer, charming so wisely" (Roberts *ii* 434).

After raging for several years, the Blagdon Controversy resulted in vindication for More, but such that came at great cost to her health. From 1803 to 1805, she suffered what she and subsequent biographers would come to call her "great illness." A journal entry dated November 27, 1803, reads, ". . . I have to lament that through my want of faith and piety, they [the written "attacks"] had nearly destroyed my life." Years later she would still lament any cause for strife within the church body, writing, "Oh how I hate faction, division, and controversy in religion!" (Roberts *ii* 237).

The first work produced upon the slow emergence in 1805 from More's longest illness yet was the treatise *Hints for the Education of a Young Princess*, written at the suggestion of Rev. Dr. Grey that More lend her advice to those responsible for the education and training of Princess Charlotte, only child of the Prince of Wales, the future George the Fourth (Hopkins 227).

Once again More published the work anonymously, which resulted in a correspondence beginning between More and the Bishop of Exeter in which he addressed the author as a "gentleman" until the "internal evidence betrayed the secret, and the discovery gave birth to an acquaintance and intercourse . . . agreeable to both the parties" (Roberts *ii* 117). Years later, when informed by one of her correspondents that her *Hints for the Education of a Young Princess* had received wide acclaim in the United States, More is said to have exclaimed, "I have conquered America!" (Roberts *ii* 418). For the royalist More, this sounds like sweet victory indeed.

CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES IN THE DRESS OF NARRATIVE

More passed the next two years regaining her complete health. Before fully recuperating,

she took up pen and paper “in executing a scheme which had long occupied her mind, of presenting Christian principles and duties in the dress of narrative, in the colours of character, and with the breathing vivacity of dialogue and discussion” (Roberts ii 131). Thus in 1809, More published her only novel, whose full title was *Cælebs in Search of a Wife: Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals*.

This novel, as we shall see in a later chapter, represents the epitome of More’s appropriation of literary forms for didactic purposes. In her introduction to *Cælebs*, More expressed that her purpose in writing such a work was “to show how religion may be brought to mix with the concerns of ordinary life.” Here, More employed a literary form to function as a bridge between and therefore to integrate what some treated as separate spheres of life: the “religious” and the “ordinary.”

As stated previously in this chapter, literature for More served as the handmaiden of religion. She “was as warm an advocate of elegant literature and severe science as those who profess to see in these things all that is necessary to the regeneration of mankind, she could not discover their power to transform and renew a vitiated moral nature” (Thompson 73). For More the value in writing lay less in art than in practicality. As she had once reflected,

It is not, indeed, a very brilliant career, but I feel the value of a thing lies so much more in its usefulness than its splendour, that I have a notion I should derive more gratification from being able to lower the price of bread than from having written the Iliad. (Roberts i 435)

MORE'S LATER YEARS

More’s later writings grew even more concerned with spiritual matters. Her literary efforts produced in 1811 *Practical Piety; or, the Influence of the Religion of the Heart on the Conduct of*

the Life, and then in 1812 a treatise titled *Christian Morals*. The former exceeded even *Cælebs* in the number of editions and copies sold, while the latter was somewhat less successful (Thompson 257). More later presented *Practical Piety* to two Muslim acquaintances who “declared they would translate into their language immediately on their return home, and that it would be the first work which should bring into exercise the knowledge they had acquired of the art of printing, and employ the printing press which they were carrying back to their own country” (Roberts ii 276).

These works were followed in 1815 by the two-volume *Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of St. Paul*. Upon completion of this essay, More nearly lost her life when her shawl caught on fire as she reached across the fireplace to a bookshelf. The delay in publication of this work, however, was brief.

Around 1817, England's low employment and economic depression saw new appeals for More's assistance from various supporters. The result was the publication of several new ballads and tracts and a reprinted version of “Village Politics” (Roberts ii 248). Upon publishing these, More wrote,

And now shall I confess how low I have been sinking in the ranks of literature? I did not think to turn ballad-monger in my old age; but the strong and urgent representations I have had from the highest quarters, of the very alarming temper of the times, and the spirit of revolution which shows itself more or less in all manufacturing towns, has led me to undertake as duty a task I should gladly have avoided. Thousands and tens of thousands have been circulated without its being known from what source they proceeded. (Roberts ii 252)

To help circulate these a committee was formed in London. The Religious Tract Society reprinted More's religious tracts in “elegant form” not for the poor but for the wealthier readers (Hannah More in Roberts ii 285), thus proving once again the unusually broad appeal of More's work.

More received a letter in 1818 from Sir Alexander Johnstone, Chief-Justice of Ceylon,

informing her that he had many of her tracts and portions of her other works translated into the native languages of Cingalese and Tamul and that her works were "read with pleasure and avidity by the natives" (Roberts *ii* 269). Her popularity among the islanders was attributed, in part, to the fact that the most popular moral writer among them at that time was another woman, the philosopher Aoyar, who lived in southern India during the eighth or ninth century (Roberts *ii* 273). When Ceylon enacted a law that would free every child born after August 12, 1816, More was asked to compose a ballad to commemorate this partial abolition of slavery (Roberts *ii* 269-270). She produced the "Feast of Freedom," later set to music by Charles Wesley (Roberts *ii* 275).

In 1819, More's *Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign and Domestic, with Reflections on Prayer* was published, followed some years later in 1825 by *The Spirit of Prayer*. This last, written in More's eightieth year on her deathbed, went through eleven editions and was immediately translated into French (Thompson 306-307).

She confided to a friend that "the only remarkable thing which belonged to her as an author was, that she had written eleven books after the age of sixty" (Roberts *ii* 289). More remained active in mind and body through much of her later years, writing in 1813:

My own health and that of my sister Patty is broken and infirm; yet we are still, except in severe weather, able to attend our school: we keep up about seven hundred children, besides receiving the parents, who attend in the evening . . . After having spent thirty-five winters in London, I have never ventured thither since my last great illness. . . . (Roberts *ii* 214)

Roberts notes that her schools remained successful in terms of enrollment and attendance. More wrote to Wilberforce in 1816 that the schools were "flourishing" (Roberts *ii* 238). "We have pious, faithful teachers, who have served us twenty years; and we have reason to believe that many young persons, especially at Cheddar, are living in the fear of God."

More spent much of her declining years comforting friends faced with difficulties and counseling the many who sought her advice, including many young clergymen.

Thinking it right, almost twenty years ago, to gain a little interval between the world and the grave, when I renounced the society of the great and the gay, the learned and the witty, I fully made up my mind to associate only with country people. Yet it so happens that the retirement I sought I have never been able to find; for though we neither return visits nor give invitations. . . . I never saw more people, known and unknown, in my gayest days. (Roberts *i* 238)

During this time More generously applied her financial as well as her literary means to relieving the distresses of poverty. The author and educator turned investor in her continuing efforts to assist those in need. "So I turned merchant myself; Mr. ____ and I set up trade and have purchased a certain quantity of ore for three months; but I, not having, like my partner, a finger in the treasury, am compelled to stop . . ." (Roberts *ii* 256). Later that year, in a letter dated September 19, More wrote to a friend, "Did I ever tell you I am in trade, and capable of being bankrupt? The poor miners at Shipham & c. have, I believe, experienced a distress nowhere else felt. Besides begging a considerable sum for them, I employed my own money in purchasing their ore" (Roberts *ii* 263). In addition, More assisted widows and students among the poor. More also used the profits from her investments to sponsor members of the clergy who found themselves lacking not only the sage wisdom of the seasoned Christian but monetary means for books of religious instruction. More supplied these, as well as her "epistolary advice" with "a munificent hand" (Roberts *ii* 220). In an 1814 letter to Wilberforce, More enclosed money and requested that it be put to the subscription of a destitute fellow in the cause of religion who was experiencing financial difficulties, though More herself, she wrote, had been "stripped almost bare by the accumulated demands on my slender purse."

More survived all of her sisters, Mary having been the first to die in 1813, Elizabeth following in 1816, Sarah in 1817, and, finally, Martha in 1819. More spent the years following her

beloved Martha's death as an invalid, not often leaving the confines of her upstairs bedroom. Her letters during this period show great concern for her declining health, though she was able to spend hours upon hours reading and responding to the voluminous letters she received from around the world (Hopkins 244). More continued to receive visitors, who numbered in the hundreds, and since she had outlived both family and old friends, she was, perhaps, constantly rejuvenated by the flow of new friends from the younger generations. "She could still charm, and her natural gaiety flared out in the joy of greeting these pilgrims to her home, although she was afterward overwhelmed with fatigue" (Hopkins 245). She admitted to a friend in that it had been two years since she had been downstairs and over four years since visiting outside her home (Roberts *ii* 367). She lamented that she was the sole survivor of her "youthful set," in which she included "the Johnsons, the Garricks, the Burkes, the Bryants, the Reynolds's [sic]." She expressed regret for some of the time she had spent in her later years writing instead of with those who had passed away: "My thick volume *Moral Sketches*, more than five hundred pages, was first thought of in January, entirely written, printed, and published at the end of August. In September of the same year, dear Patty died" (Roberts *ii* 412). She wrote that she "never had so little leisure in my life, now that I ought to have the most," but filled her days instead answering letters and requests and hosting visitors. "Though I have long since left off the rhyming trade, yet I am prevailed on every year to give a few trumpery lines to the bazaar. . . ." (Roberts *ii* 413). "When I turn my thoughts upon the world, there are but three things there which deeply interest

me -- the state of the church, the religious progress of the king, and the abolition of slavery” (Roberts *ii* 344).

Even after giving large portions of her income to charitable causes, More's income from her writings had accumulated the amazing sum of £30,000 (Murch 18). The active phase of More's social and literary life ended at the same time as did her residence at Barley Wood. She removed from there to Clifton only upon being virtually forced out through the intervention of her friends as a result the unscrupulous behavior of the household servants who were squandering More's household means. She lived on Windsor Terrace from April 18, 1828, until her death on September 7, 1833.

Just a few years later, Roberts acknowledged her far-reaching influence in saying, “Hardly an individual distinguished for learning, virtue, or piety, during this period, was a stranger to her merit, or without participation in her interests and objects” (Roberts *ii* 443). Among the many testaments to the power and influence of More's life and work is that from this letter:

I need only call to the mind of Mrs. Hannah More what was the state of morals and religious opinions, among all ranks of persons in this country, twenty years ago. The poor were in profligate ignorance -- the rich in presumptuous apostasy. . . . You were then, dearest madam, “sowing seeds in the Lord's vineyard.” And the pious Mr. Raikes, of Gloucester, was “bringing little children unto Christ” by the opening of Sunday-schools. From you and from him, under Heaven, I date the regeneration of the people of this country. Your pen addressed the young, the old, the high, and the low; and, most happily, your former literary fame was a bright forerunner to your promulgation of the gospel. It made it fashionable to read your works; and by that word, they passed into all hands, and gradually infused their contents into all hearts. (J. Porter, Letter to Hannah More in Roberts *ii* 230-31)

CHAPTER TWO: EVANGELICALS AND THE NOVEL

METHODISM: EVANGELICALISM'S BEGINNINGS

Who would have guessed that the renewed commitment by a handful of Anglicans to that centerpiece of the Reformation, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, would be the catalyst for a radical transformation not only of the church, but of the morals and manners, the life and literature of a nation? This re-emphasis on “faith alone” that grew into the Methodist movement and gradually spread to various denominations, including the Anglican Church, in turn gave birth to evangelicalism, a movement many claim helped to usher in the Victorian age.

To find the beginnings of Methodism, one must look at John Wesley. The appellation “Methodist” was initially a pejorative term used by those outside the movement to describe the methodical religious lifestyle followed by John Wesley and his associates during the 1720s, the years Wesley and his brother Charles were students at Oxford. It wasn't until 1738, however, after both brothers had been serving in the ministry for some time in both England and America, that they had separate, personal conversion experiences. Eventually the Wesleys and their followers came to emphasize the doctrine of justification by a faith in Christ alone, which one usually received through an individual and identifiable conversion experience. This doctrine was the center of the revival to follow and the catalyst for the later rise of the Evangelical party of the

Church of England.

John Wesley's fifty-year career in evangelistic preaching began in 1739 with his first open-air sermon; years later he would make the startling proclamation, "The world is my parish" (Kuiper 289, 293; Greene 29). His ordination of two lay preachers in Bristol in 1784 (not far from where Hannah More was living at the time) marked Wesley's reluctant break (albeit an undeliberate one on his part) with the Church of England, and the Methodist Church was born. Eventually, the Anglican Church lost thousands of its members to the new denomination (Kuiper 303).

Lyles describes the relationship of the eighteenth-century Methodist to the Church of England as "complex and confusing" (149) in that the Methodist, in the early years of the movement at least, considered himself a member of the Established Church, yet usually found his primary source of spiritual instruction in one of the growing number of unlicensed Methodist preachers forbidden by the Established Church. The tendency of the clergy of the Established Church to emphasize the natural abilities of man rather than the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit was one concern of the Methodists. This was further compounded by the fact that "the men assigned by the Church to be their spiritual guides sometimes led immoral lives and scarcely practised, at least toward the Methodists, what they were expected to preach" (Lyles 149-50). Wesley and his followers grew increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of leadership by the ordained clergy of the Church, who as a group were often known for gluttony, drunkenness, and lasciviousness.

While the statement penned by an anonymous writer in 1781 that "Pure METHODISM requires of its votaries to commit themselves to the guidance of the Spirit, with an utter contempt of reason and all human learning" (qtd. in Lyles 23) may be exaggerated, it is true that because of their reliance upon unordained ministers and their deliberate decision to be guided less by the official teachings of the Church than by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the Methodists gradually placed less emphasis on a learned clergy or on ecclesiastical scholarship which lacked a foundation based on the Christian faith. As the Methodists became increasingly disillusioned with

a clergy that became less and less distinguishable -- and in some cases worse -- from the public they served, the need for a clearer separation from the activities of the world was perceived. "Thus a new puritanism -- a disdain of such worldly and, the Methodist was sure, such basically evil activities as swearing, dancing and theatre-going -- came into being" (Lyles 150). In search of spiritual authenticity, Methodists were more than willing to relinquish the empty decorum of much of what constituted the Church teaching of the day. For while the Church of England's sermon literature from that era boasts artistic and literary merit, it tends to lack depth of spiritual insight and application. As Bready explains,

Theory and speculation, dogma and adage, metaphor and rhetoric, technique and polish all contributed to the elite preacher's stock-in-trade. Not a few of the applauded sermons were "artful" to a degree. But therein lay their damnation; if as smooth and polished as marble, they at heart were as cold and dead as marble: they were too artful to convey life and warmth to the souls of men. Little of the approved preaching of the eighteenth century ever passed through the crucible of personal experience. (94-95)

And it was through this "crucible of personal experience" that the Methodist movement touched the soul of eighteenth century England. Though Wesley's authoritarian political views did not directly challenge the social order (Morgan 438), the movement's emphasis on the individual certainly had unforeseen results. After all, through Wesley's

attitudes and those of his followers ran only one concern: the total availability of the evangelist's salvation to all, above all to the poor, to the outcast communities of mining and manufacturing England, neglected by more fashionable divines.
(Morgan 438)

The movement thus gave rise to a social and spiritual climate that would engender a new appreciation for the individual and the consummate artistic representation of the individual in the

form of the novel.

Karl notes the slow but definite changes being made in eighteenth-century attitudes and views and how these were reflected in the novel:

Not the least as a parallel and anticipatory development with the novel was the growth of Methodism. Just as the novel both reflected and prodded its audience, demonstrated its sense of community and yet mocked its deceits, so Methodism proved a mirror of men's souls, indicating the degree to which they were receptive or antagonistic to Jesus Christ. . . . [Methodism's] basic tenets suggested a growing openness of manner toward religious orthodoxy, the same kind of latitude that, apparently, characterized literary endeavors leading to the novel. (11-12)

Thus, with its emphasis on the individual soul, the regenerative process, and the operation of God's grace in human affairs, Methodism "produced a new spirit" in England (Gill 23).

This new spirit gave rise to new voices, including those of women, and Methodism did seem to attract women in particular. "In an age when avenues for women into any sphere outside the home were being closed, Christian zeal brought them into prominence" (Bebbington 26). Hannah More can be considered both a beneficiary of this phenomenon and a contributor to the expanding roles for women, both because of the exhortations in her writings for such expansion and because she provided an example of a woman who successfully filled more public roles. "The Evangelicals were amongst the first in the Church of England to give anything like a true value to women's work" largely through the successful efforts and influence of women like Hannah More (Binns 157). Karl attributes this growth of women's voices directly to the growth of Methodism, noting that "paralleling the fortunes of female characters, Evangelical Methodism became a precursor of the 'sentimentalist' movement in English fiction, which surfaced after 1750." He writes:

Further, Methodism came to emphasize certain elements that also characterize the novel: the commonplaces of life, the fact of universal redemption, the individual's salvation through faith, the need for good works as evidence of one's authentic faith, the taking in of God's will through revelation. (12-13)

While correctly viewed as a conservative movement in terms of its doctrinal and social positions, Methodism contributed, on the other hand, to the liberal and romantic cause of social change and progress on behalf of the individual. After all, a central characteristic of Methodism was a revolutionary emphasis on the individual. As Gill describes it, "Everywhere the individual was coming into his own. The cry of liberty was in the air" (29). The Methodist movement provided new images, symbols, and language, and thus a new framework for artistic expression. "Methodism gave rise to new forms of self-expression. It contributed also its quota to the new forms of speech, the new images of Nature, and the new conceptions of personality" (Gill 17). The activities of the central figures of the movement "presented an atmosphere of sustained vitality, warm human passion, intense emotion, and imaginative sensibility" (Gill 19).

Contrary to widely held perceptions, Methodism was not opposed to the arts. While Methodists did indeed frown upon various forms of entertainment popular at the time, they had a great love and appreciation for music, song, poetry and books (Gill 21, Shepherd 25; also see Wesley's *Journal*). Much that formed the center of Methodist life and worship came to characterize the literature of the nineteenth century. Indeed, argues Gill, "[a]part from Methodism there would still have been a Romantick revival, but . . . attenuated and less significant." Further support for this is seen in this excerpt from Cazamian's *History of English Literature*:

Pre-Romanticism as it developed borrowed from certain elements, without which the oncoming revolution in literature would never have approved itself to the most entrenched instincts of the English character. . . a more friendly spirit had to be shown in England toward the poetry which appealed to the heart; the reading public had to acquire a more spontaneous facility for seeing and feeling according

to the laws of mystical imagination; and there had to be a rekindling of thought, a regeneration of the whole inner soul. Romanticism, and the idealistic zeal which in part inspired it, owes something to the new exaltation in religious sentiment.

(qtd. in Gill 15)

THE GROWTH OF EVANGELICAL INFLUENCE

So many of these individual conversion experiences took place within the Church of England between the years of 1730 and 1750 (including Wesley's own conversion in 1738) that this period has come to be known as the "Evangelical Revival" (Anthony Armstrong 50). Yet, what is properly considered the Evangelical movement, according to Rosman and others, covers the period from 1790 to 1833, one generation following the revival brought by the Methodists. Methodism and Evangelicalism are, in fact, distinct movements that should not be, but often are, confused. Indeed, "the frequently expressed belief that Evangelicals and Methodists can be lumped together into something called 'the Evangelical Revival', wholly miss[es] the nature and accomplishment of the reform movement" (Brown 5). Though the term "methodist" was "soon applied to any person with pretensions of strong religious experience of any sort" (Lyles 22), the Methodist and Evangelical movements experienced distinct histories and characteristics.

The Methodist movement emphasized those key doctrinal tenets articulated, elevated, and popularized by both Wesley and his co-laborer in the ministry, George Whitefield. The Evangelical movement arose more directly from the branch of Methodism that adhered to the Calvinism of Whitefield and the Established Church rather than the Arminian doctrines of Wesley.¹⁸ This emphasis gradually gained influence within many other Protestant denominations and came to be called Evangelicalism. While the Methodist and the Evangelical movements are

¹⁸ Calvinism holds that salvation can be attained only by the elect, while Arminianism teaches that salvation is attainable to all, but once gained, can be lost; both belief systems, however, would look for evidence of salvation in the life of the believer.

often treated synonymously in literary criticism,¹⁹ the Evangelical movement of eighteenth century England was not limited to any single Christian denomination.²⁰

And while debate continues over whether or not Evangelicalism was an “offshoot of Methodism” (see for example R. D. Altick’s *Victorian People and Ideas*), it is clear that “many of the early Evangelicals did sympathize with the aims and methods of Methodism, and accepted the blanket title ‘methodist’, though with increasing reluctance” (Jay 17). The term “evangelical” was at first applied to clergy who supported the Methodist Revival (Binns 1), but came to be the standard word used to describe those associated with the doctrines of the movement, both inside and outside the Established Church (Bebbington 1).

Though evangelicalism found its way into most of the existing Protestant denominations in Great Britain, the evangelical movement generally revolved around the Evangelical party of the Anglican Church, where this branch was also referred to as the Low Church (Kuiper 303). The evangelical movement experienced remarkable growth, despite being subject to severe and continued criticism, such as “scathing articles in the Edinburgh and witty denunciations in both public and private places” (Cruse *The Englishman and His Books* 58). This growth of the movement was described by the first volume of *The Evangelical Magazine* in 1793:

In the beginning of this century there were few persons of evangelical principles in the kingdom; but now, it is supposed, there are more than three hundred

¹⁹ For example, in Lyles’ *Methodism Mocked*, a key source for background to the Methodist movement and its reception in the broader context, the author notes: “There will be no attempt in this study to distinguish between the Evangelicals and the Methodists since, as the discussion of the term Methodist will make clear, for the conservative anyone possessing certain attributes was a Methodist” (22n).

²⁰ While some historians and critics fail to make any such distinction, those that do denote the revival’s adherents from within the Church of England as “Evangelicals” (with a capital “E”) and those from the larger movement that transcended denomination as “evangelicals” with a lower case “e.” For example, the historian Bradley uses “Evangelical” to refer to those revivalists within the Anglican church and “evangelical” to refer to those both in and out of the church “who adhered to an evangelical form of Christianity” (16n). This is the pattern followed here.

thousand Calvinists, and many others, savingly converted to God, who trust in the merits of Christ alone for salvation. (2)

Despite their similarities to the Methodists in their approach to spiritual, social, and political change, the evangelicals differed in that they insisted on working entirely within their own denomination, whether the Anglican or one of several other Protestant denominations. In the words of Armstrong, “Evangelicals were bent on making the old system work” (214). While the Methodists originally hoped to change the Established Church from within, but ended up ordaining their own preachers and establishing their own meetings and organizations, the Evangelicals succeeded in remaining within their own churches. They resisted the use of lay preachers and emphasized their reliance on the Prayer Book, the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Homilies, as well as Reformation doctrine (Armstrong 121).

This distinction between the desire to work within or outside the existing church denomination had ramifications that reached beyond religion and into social and cultural attitudes as well. Members of the Evangelical movement strove to avoid being despised as so often were their Methodist counterparts. This led to the development among Evangelicals of what Robin Reed Davis describes as a “cult of respectability,” which discouraged “any unbecoming austerity of dress, manner, or household economy.” Thus, while Methodists and Evangelicals shared similar religious doctrines and ideas, the Evangelicals developed a more deliberate and effective approach to transforming -- rather than merely rejecting -- the culture.

By 1785, a group of probably less than one hundred people led by Reverend John Newton and including forty to fifty clergymen across England became known as “ ‘the Evangelicals’ of the ‘Evangelical Party’ ” (Ford 2). This movement based its life and philosophy on the religious traditions of the previous century and on the literature of John Bunyan, William Law, and John Wesley (Morgan 484).

Regrettably, little historical or critical attention has been focused on the Evangelical movement (as opposed to Methodism) in England (Bebbington *ix*). However, Bebbington points

out the four "special marks of the Evangelical religion": the belief in the need of a life change, or conversion; an emphasis on the effort to live out the gospel through activism; the centrality of the Bible in the faith; and a stress on justification through Christ alone in His sacrifice on the cross (2-3). The evangelical movement as it existed within various denominations and the Established Church differ not in their doctrines, but in their emphasis. In addition, the evangelicals believed strongly that placing the key doctrines of the Christian faith foremost would (and did) bring about changes in the lives of individual believers. Most historians agree that evangelicalism was one of the most influential forces in shaping the Victorian era. Between 1800 and 1860, "there was hardly an area of life which they did not touch and affect" (Bradley 14, 17).

The evangelicals tended to draw a disproportionate number of their followers from the class of artisans and skilled tradesmen, as well as, at times, an overrepresentation from among the gentry (such as Hannah More), but less often from among the country's poorest. The evangelicals' successful enlistment of all classes -- high, middle, and low -- was "an important step in the 'Victorianizing' of society" (Armstrong 151).

In *Evangelicals and Culture*, Rosman describes two general schools of thought concerning the relationship of evangelicals to the broader culture: one that emphasizes the way in which the movement was uniquely suited for, or in some way responsible for, the complex changes brought about by the industrial society of the nineteenth century; the other, the way in which the traits of the evangelicals were actually typical of the age (7-9). Indeed, Rosman argues that even absent adequate theological justification, "evangelicals shared in the tastes and interests of the more cultured of their contemporaries to a far greater extent" than is generally acknowledged (43). In fact, girls in conservative religious families often received at the hands of Evangelicals the most rigorous and intellectual of educational programs available (Davis 29).

In a similar vein, Bebbington finds the evangelicals to be partakers of the larger culture and links the rise of the evangelical movement with the Enlightenment, arguing that evangelicalism, contrary to the beliefs of many, was not a reaction against rationalism, but an

outgrowth of it (50 - 55). Indeed, Wesley himself wrote in 1768, "It is a fundamental principle with us that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion" (qtd. in Bebbington 52). In addition, the evangelical doctrine of assurance of salvation is itself based on "empiricist canons," with some of its chief leaders speaking of Christianity as "experimental religion" (Bebbington 54, 57), which emphasizes each individual's personal salvation experience.

Even while arguing that the weakest characteristic of the evangelical movement was a lack of intellectual capacity and emphasis (*A History of England in the Eighteenth Century* iii 150-152), the nineteenth-century historian Lecky acknowledges that, "Methodism, or at least the Evangelical movement which grew out of it, soon left a deep impression on the literature of its time" (119). Similarly, Smith points out that the quality of the scholarship within evangelicalism "has been habitually underestimated whether because it is out of date or simply because it is forgotten" (102). Thus, some critics have argued that the Evangelical party represented a theological and cultural shift away from Wesley, one for whom art had less importance and influence (Gill 11). Further, Gill attributes to the Wesleyan faction, and not to the Evangelical party, an indirect influence in the growth of the English novel, as well as biographical and psychological modes of writing (12).

Yet, such analysis overlooks the leading role the evangelicals played in the rise of popular education, the spread of literacy, the celebration of the individual and how these are central to the rise of the novel. "Wherever the Revival spread, its first avowed aim was to dispel religious illiteracy, and in so doing it became a mighty and ennobling educational force" (Bready 296). In the latter part of the eighteenth century the vast majority of England's religious literature reflected the theology of the evangelicals (Lecky *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century* iii 120). Bready attributes to the Evangelical Revival the "sincere reverence for purity, truth, temperance, virtue, integrity, justice, honour, bravery, liberty, and the quest for righteousness" seen in such authors as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sir Walter Scott, Ruskin and Carlyle, Irving and Hawthorne,

Dickens and Thackeray, Austen and the Brontes, Helen Keller, and, of course, Hannah More (305), whom Bebbington counts as one of the “old leaders” of the Evangelical movement (75).

The Evangelicals also founded several esteemed periodicals that contributed significantly to the contemporary public debate and literary discourse. The launching of the *Evangelical Magazine* in 1793 is considered one marker in the growth of the Evangelicals into a national movement (Rosman *Evangelicals and Culture* 20). This movement, or various facets within it, was also responsible for publishing periodicals such as the *Christian Observer* (first published in 1802) and the *Eclectic Review* (first published in 1805), the latter of which was “designed as an evangelical counterpart of the *Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews*” (Rosman *Evangelicals and Culture* 22).

More’s remark in *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* that “action is the life of virtue and the world is the theatre of action” exemplifies the characteristic evangelical emphasis on political and social reform, albeit for the cause of heaven. Thus, the evangelicals “became a powerful element in politics, a ‘party’ in the Church of England, and the propagator of most of the essentials of Victorianism” (Armstrong 122). The evangelicals’ newly found significance in the value of every human soul, the great characteristic of the movement (Binns 76), precipitated a “series of religious and humanitarian movements which altered the whole course of English history” (Howse 7). The evangelicals were among the foremost reformers of the day, able to accomplish so much because of their willingness to reach outside the church to like-minded, but secular, progressives (Howse 135). “They were willing to take lightly all sectarian differences, and welcomed labour with men who held in the main the same views and fought for the same objects as themselves” (Howse 171). The movement recognized that

the reform of this world can only be brought about by the ways and means of this world. One fact in particular the Evangelical leadership saw from the beginning in the most realistic way: their attempt to reform the nation was certain to fail unless they won over a substantial number of the ruling class that to so great an

extent set the moral tone of the people. (Brown 4)

Yet, despite such deliberate attempts to participate in cultural and political life, these were not the locus of the Evangelical movement's strength. Instead, their life of faith was centered in the soul of the individual and in the family rather than in the state or the church (Bready 296). There, perhaps, lay the success for the Evangelical improvement of English manners and morals at the turn of the century, an improvement, Brown argues, that has generally but mistakenly been ascribed to the Methodists; indeed, states Brown, while Wesley undoubtedly laid the foundation for "a religion of the heart," such a reformation would not have occurred had it not been for the Evangelical movement (4).

Evangelicals were generally not considered to be as much of "a socially disruptive force" as Methodists (Jay 43).²¹ Yet Evangelicals played a leading part in some of the century's most radical changes in social structure, changes reflected in the growth of the novel as it celebrated such progress and the incumbent questions and anxieties in the course of human affairs. The institution and spread of popular education and the abolition of the British slave trade are among those events in human history that have been squarely attributed to the Evangelical revival. Many argue that although it remained "all but unrepresented" within the government of the Anglican Church,²² Evangelicalism "represented the only virile, creative religion of the period" (Bready 59). In the years surrounding the end of the eighteenth century, the Evangelical movement was "perhaps at its purest" (Binns 43).

In short, it would be no exaggeration to say that, morally and spiritually, though by

²¹ The strongest evidence for this can be found in the kind of portrayals presented of Methodists and Evangelicals in popular contemporary novels.

²² When "the carriage of the Bishop of London took Hannah More to visit Venn at Clapham, it had to put her down at a public house a mile away, because it would not do for a bishop's carriage to be seen at an Evangelical rectory" (Howse 172).

no means intellectually, the dominant religious power, both inside and outside the Church of England, at the close of the eighteenth century, was that which had been evoked by the Evangelical Revival. (Overton qtd. in Bready 291)

THE CLAPHAM SECT

The so-called Clapham Sect -- a scornful label attached to the group by Sydney Smith, “who hated the Evangelicals almost as much as he hated the Methodists” (Cruse *The Englishman and His Books* 58) -- provides an excellent picture of how, on a smaller scale, the Evangelical movement grew and increased in influence. Indeed, the Clapham Sect is credited with being “a potent force in keeping the Puritan conscience alive and effectively engaged for the betterment of English life” (Greene 30). The Sect was a close-knit group of Evangelical Anglicans and was a driving influence behind the Evangelical movement’s great political, social, and literary successes. This fashionable group of Evangelicals that included John Newton, William Wilberforce, Zachary Macauley, Henry Thornton, Henry Venn, James Stephen and William Cowper “gave rise to the Clapham Sect . . . and in a hundred ways evolved and fertilized the Evangelical side of the Anglican Church” (Gill 11). Hannah More was the only female whose membership in the group was considered on a par with the male members.²³

Reverend John Newton was the leading clergy member of the Sect and one of the first of the Evangelical influences in the center of cultural and political life, London. When Newton was appointed to serve as minister at St. Mary Woolnoth church in London in 1780s, the church was probably the only one in London at that time that was sympathetic to Evangelical ideas (Davidson

²³ “[N]o account of the Clapham Sect can overlook the eminent Mrs. Hannah More . . . the appointed agent of Wilberforce and Thornton in their philanthropic activities. Equally with Wilberforce and Simeon, she was one of the ‘great men’ of the party.” More is one of the figures presented in the picture of the Clapham rectory drawn by William Knight in his work *The Missionary Secretariat of Henry Venn* (Howse 19, 169, and Halevy qtd. in Howse)

228). That was more than ten years before the fledgling religious movement would form the political and cultural vortex that came to be called the Clapham Sect.

The Clapham community began in 1792 when Henry Thornton purchased the home that was to be the center of life for this gathering of Evangelical friends. Upon acquiring the house, Thornton invited Wilberforce to live there and offered John Venn the curate's position (Rosman *Evangelicals and Culture* 19). While Thornton provided a hub around which the sect revolved, it was William Wilberforce who supplied the energy for the sect's political and cultural leadership.

Wilberforce had become involved with the Evangelical movement as a young member of Parliament who met secretly with John Newton during a time of spiritual confusion and searching. It was Newton who convinced Wilberforce that he need not relinquish his place in government in order to serve God, but could accomplish such right where he was, if only he would set his mind on some "worthwhile goal." Soon, Wilberforce had made it his life's work to promote the spiritual and social messages of the gospel in his own sphere among the members of the aristocracy who had yet to be reached on a large scale by the Evangelical revival (Davidson 245-47). If Whitefield and Wesley played the roles of prophets spreading a message, it was Wilberforce who was the consummate politician who brought the message home. Wilberforce embodied the movement's "ability to use worldly means for spiritual ends, a genius for expediency, opportunism, and 'accommodation,' " all necessary for a successful reform movement (Brown 3). As one of the first among the social and political elite to experience conversion at the hands of the Evangelical movement, Wilberforce is "but an outstanding instance of the character transformation which the Evangelical Revival wrought on a grand scale" (Bready 298-99).

The Clapham Sect is seen by some as a "second generation" of Evangelicals, differing from the first with their increased wealth, political power, education, and persuasive influence (Armstrong 131). It would in fact be difficult to overestimate the influence of the Clapham Sect in effecting social, political, and cultural change on a national scale. Their most significant and historical victory, by far, was to see the abolition of England's slave trade. One historian, indeed,

attributes to the Evangelicals' antislavery triumph the optimism that came to characterize the Victorian age: "Good had won such dazzling victories over such grim foes that multitudes of men were moved to a new faith in humanity, and a new confidence that almost any further victory might be possible" (Howse 185).

Among the many secondary causes undertaken by the Clapham Sect were the abolition of the lottery, duelling, and animal cruelty, and the promotion of Sabbath Day observance (Howse 121); the latter undertaking largely helped to alleviate the plight of laborers by shortening the work week by one day. In addition, the Sect supported penal reform and opposed the death penalty, in particular "the barbarous custom of hanging" (Howse 130). In many of their endeavors, it could be fairly said that the Sect "achieved little visible result; but they helped bring low contemporary standards into ultimate disrepute" (Howse 122).

The Clapham Sect, while theologically conservative, was noted for liberality in thought and deed (Howse 129). This tendency is demonstrated, for example, in the Sect's attitude toward differences in denominations and religion, as well as toward culture and the arts. Newton was criticized by his peers among the aristocracy for his camaraderie with the common people and condemned by the church hierarchy for associating with dissenters and for occasionally permitting Baptist ministers to share the pulpit with him (Davidson 198). The members of the sect were

on good terms with avowed Liberals, attached to no denomination, and with Free Thinkers who made no secret of their hostility to religion. . . . By a strange paradox men who were Protestant to the backbone, zealots for the dogma of justification by faith, were so devoted to philanthropy that on the common ground of good works they were reconciled with the most lukewarm Christians, even with declared enemies of Christianity. (Howse 135-36)

The Clapham Sect supported not only Sunday Schools but all approaches to popular education (Howse 98). While the Sect was sensitive to the frequently voiced concerns that enabling people to read the Bible also enabled them to read subversive works, they "put their

faith not in the preservation of ignorance, but in the production of good literature” (Howse 100) to which this new reading audience could turn its attention.

As liberal in their approach to literature as to people of differing beliefs, members of the Clapham Sect had found the existing periodicals dissatisfying in religious, political, and literary content (Howse 105). Thus in 1802, the Sect launched the *Christian Observer*, a project designed to fill a perceived gap in the offerings of periodical literature available at the time, and considered to be “more cultured and liberal” (Rosman “Evangelicals and the Novel” 303) than other evangelical periodicals. For a generation, the *Christian Observer* was “a stable institution” within the Evangelical community (Howse 107).

The Sect, “in proportion to numbers, achieved perhaps more than any other group in English history” in influencing England political and social policies, particularly those that affected the poorest classes of people (Bready 304). Clearly the Clapham Sect served as a model for the entire evangelical movement, which in turn had a great hand in developing the traits that would come to define the age to follow.

EVANGELICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ENTERTAINMENT AND THE ARTS

It is often believed that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Evangelicals, because of their renewed focus on the spiritual life, were, like the Puritans before them, unduly and unequivocally hostile to those things associated strictly with the material life. While it is certainly true that their approach to worldly pursuits was characterized by discrimination, caution, and sometimes rejection,²⁴ the evangelical attitude toward and even participation in some amusements and arts exhibits a much more complex perspective than might first appear.

²⁴ Most critics and historians note a difference in attitude between the early Evangelicals and the later ones, who were much more conservative concerning the arts. What one critic has called the Evangelical “backlash against the fine arts” didn’t occur until between the 1820s and late 1850s (Jay 190).

Understanding the nuances of Evangelical attitudes toward the arts as well as the wider cultural context for those attitudes is important in light of the kind of historical assessments that, correctly, charge the Evangelicals with tremendous sway during this period. The period has in fact been called a time when “Methodism and Evangelicalism had imbued English society with their ethos,” an ethos inaccurately described as “a spirit of positive antipathy towards the artistic” (Halevy 486).

The Evangelicals were not opposed to innocent amusements; but the standards by which one deemed an activity innocent or not, said Wilberforce in his *Practical View of Christianity*, “must not be tried by the loose maxims of worldly morality, but by the spirit of the injunctions of the word of God” (qtd. in Bebbington 130). As More’s first person narrator explains in her tract *The Two Shoemakers*, “I am not going to say a word against innocent merriment. I like it myself. But what the proverb says of gold, may be said of mirth; it may be bought too dear” (*Works* i 211). The Evangelicals indeed did not place great importance on undertakings that did not directly contribute to one’s spiritual state. The Christianity of the evangelicals was characterized by their emphasis on the practical and the useful.²⁵ “Philosophy, literature, art, and science were conceived apart from religion,” and the evangelicals exhibited “a preference for an active over a speculative life” (Binns 81, 82, 83). Yet, argues Binns, “to state that all the Evangelicals were neglectful of the more gracious side of life would be grossly untrue; one needs to think only of men like Wilberforce himself, and the poet Cowper, as well as Hannah More, the ‘bluestocking’ ” (81).

While many compare the Evangelical (and Methodist) perspective on the arts to that of the Puritans, it is instructive to compare, for example, their very different beliefs concerning music. While condemning the licentious and bawdy songs that were a popular a form of amusement,²⁶

²⁵ Robin Reed Davis describes this emphasis as “Methodist zeal gone utilitarian” (11).

²⁶ For example, in Hannah More’s *The Two Shoemakers* the exemplary character of James Stock explains to his apprentice Will Simpson, “Such sentiments as these songs contain, set off by the prettiest music, heightened by liquor and all the noise and spirit of what is called jovial company, all this, I say, not only puts every thing that is right out of the mind, but puts every thing wrong into it.

the Evangelicals elevated the place of music in worship and instruction. Halevy points out that the “new Puritanism of Wesley” represented a transitional point for the place of music in eighteenth century England. “Far from excluding hymnody,” he explains, “the Methodists made hymn-singing a distinctive feature of Evangelical worship. Both Charles Wesley and John Wesley himself were authors of hymns which became classics, and they stimulated an entire literary movement . . .” (491). Indeed, the Evangelical movement, as well as the Methodist movement that preceded it, gained strength through their use of hymns and devotional literature, fine arts that effectively captured the minds, and thus the souls, of countless citizens from high to low. Such forms were employed, however, with a higher purpose in mind. “The Movement placed little emphasis on aesthetics, and less on aesthetic symbolism. It shunned as superficial all ‘art for art’s sake’ theories of thought, expression or conduct” (Bready 296-97). The standards of judgment of the Evangelicals

which paid so little attention to aesthetic values help explain the picture of Evangelicalism we may derive from the novel. The numerous pictures of an Evangelical childhood, where the imagination was starved or forced to find strange and pathetic outlets, were often drawn by those who had only been spurred on to unleash their creative faculties by a resentment of the Evangelical system. Others remained uncritical adherents of a faith which concentrated its energies upon conduct so earnestly as to exclude culture and, in process of time, became imaginatively stunted tutors of a new generation. (Jay 205)

“The reforming zeal that led Hannah More to deplore the excessive time spent by the upper classes on the cultivation of the drawing room arts was in danger of totally undermining Enlightenment values,” yet the Evangelicals were not alone in their preference for “pursuits

Such songs, therefore, as tend to promote levity, thoughtlessness, loose imaginations, false views of life, forgetfulness of death, contempt of whatever is serious, and neglect of whatever is sober, whether they be love songs, or drinking songs, will not, cannot be sung by any man or any woman who makes a serious profession of Christianity” (*Works* i 223).

which nurtured the mind rather than the senses" (Rosman 52). In fact, the Evangelicals reflected the larger Enlightenment culture's emphasis on the rational, as seen in an excerpt from a 1794 edition of the *Evangelical Magazine*: "It deserves our notice that whatever tends to inspire with a contempt for what is frivolous, and to give the mind a taste for rational pursuits, promotes the interests of Christianity" (qtd. in Rosman *Evangelicals and Culture* 53).

With such a priority placed on cultivation of the intellect and on the primacy of reason, activities for the sheer sake of entertainment, naturally, were diminished in value. For the evangelical, recreation "was even more of a moral minefield than the arts" (Bebbington 31). Some, such as Edward Bishop Elliott, viewed culture as "a dangerous, hidden mine, planted by Roman Catholics, whose cause was helped by 'romances, and novels, and works on poetry, history, music, architecture' " (Jay 190). In Hannah More's Cheap Repository tract *The History of Mr. Fantom*, the representative Christian Mr. Trueman explains, "I am more afraid of the temptations of leisure than those of business" (*Works* i 122). "Thus," explains one of More's biographers, "from the first, were Miss More's relaxations and amusements grave, rational, and elegant; and tending to the same object with her most serious labours, the diffusion of piety and virtue" (Thompson 29-30).

Gradually, however, some Evangelicals, including Hannah More, began to recognize in worldly pleasures the possibilities for supplanting them with purer, more pious substitutes. As church activities faced increasing competition with organized leisure activities of a secular -- even atheist -- nature (Bebbington 113), Evangelical suspicion of leisure time entertainments diminished as evangelicals began to recognize the potential value of similar activities in the life and mission of the church (Bebbington 132).

Quinlan's observation that "[l]ike their Puritan ancestors" the Evangelicals "censured most types of amusement, distrusting gaiety, suspecting that levity was a brand of impiety, and associating mirth with sinfulness" (51), is inaccurate unless what is meant by "amusement" is the types of popular activities that so often in this age constituted entertainment:

To the general rabble, as indeed to many of “their betters” the baiting of bulls bears and badgers; the teasing and torture of cats, dogs, rams, cocks, and ducks; the flogging of horses over an “endurance course”; the beastly bludgeonings of prize fighters and local bruisers; together with drunkenness, gambling, and sex immorality [sic] represented the basic elements of “Sport.” Even the school games of children were for the most part, bullying, cruel and crude . . . (Bready 160)

These are undoubtedly amusements that the evangelicals, not to mention many others along with them, hoped to banish from public life.

Like their opposition to the novel (which will be examined below), the Evangelicals’ (and earlier, the Methodists’) opposition to theater was more reflective of a wider cultural view than a distinctive of the movement. For example, even as early as 1715, long before the onset of the Methodist or the Evangelical movement, an anonymous shilling pamphlet circulated in Hannah More’s cultural home of Bristol called *The Consequences of a New Theatre for the City of Bristol*. The writer warned that if the plans to build a new theater in Bristol went forward, all social control over workers, wives, and daughters would be lost (Hopkins 42).

Furthermore, it is impossible to measure how much of the objection was not to the theater per se, but to the frequent targeting of the religious by the dramatists’ satire. Halevy addresses several societal contributions to “the decay of drama” that took place in the late eighteenth century, including statutory limitations (501-03), but ultimately places responsibility with the middle class Evangelicals, who “would no longer tolerate the witticisms at the expense of Methodists and Quakers which were the traditional eighteenth-century method of extracting a laugh from the theatergoer” (503). Clearly, much of the Methodists’ disdain of theater can be attributed to the fact that, as Lyles amply documents, the Methodists -- with whom the Evangelicals would have strongly identified -- were frequently objects of the dramatic satire of the time.

Even John Wesley himself had sympathies for the theater in his younger days, though the Methodist movement was never particularly friendly toward it (Lyles 160). Wesley's later opposition to the theater was "balanced and reasonable," as seen in a letter written by him in 1764 to the Mayor of Bristol in which he based his objections to the theatre on the "present stage entertainments" and the accompanying vices (qtd. in Gill 97). In his writings, Wesley attested to the value he found in diversions that were spiritually and intellectually edifying. Even the theater could meet such requirements. In his journal entry of December 14, 1768, Wesley describes a performance by the students of Westminster school:

I saw the Westminster scholars act the *Adelphi* of Terence, an entertainment not unworthy of a Christian. Oh, how do these heathens shame us. Their very comedies contain both excellent sense, the liveliest pictures of men and manner, and so fine strokes of genuine morality as are seldom found in the writings of Christians. (qtd. in Bready 313)

As with novel reading, the Evangelicals did object to how a stage presentation could shape the thinking of the audience members. In 1807, the *Eclectic Review*, an Evangelical publication, denounced the "grossness" of Shakespeare (Halevy 503n). Even plays written by so acceptable an author as More alarmed some. More's biographer complained that when More's plays *Fatal Falsehood* and *The Inflexible Captive* were brought to the stage, "concession" was made "to an audience which looks only to be pleased or affected." While briefly objecting to some images in the plays that "pass the bounds of strict purity," More's biographer and contemporary, Roberts, most vehemently objected to the plays' inappropriate use of "a Scriptural style of expression" (ii 447). Members of the Clapham Sect "never went to the theatre," and Mrs. Barbauld reported that the Evangelicals would "not enter the doors of a theatre" (Cruse *The Englishman and His Books* 63).

It is more likely, however, that for Wesley and his followers, what was most objectionable in

theater was not what typically took place on stage, but the kinds of activities that often surrounded the play.

Contemporary light literature bears its emphatic testimony to the fact that it was the attractions presented by the saloons of the playhouses (establishments which partook as much of the nature of brothels as they did of taverns) which filled the benches of the theatres with visitors, and the purses of those who kept them with coin of the realm. The existence of these resorts was the chief inducement for hundreds of men, young and old, to resort to Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket Theatres. (Bready 165)

In the *1832 Report of Select Committee on Dramatic Literature* the author remarked, "I think it is a most decided objection to any man carrying his wife or sister to the theatre, when he is compelled to take them through a crowd of notoriously bad characters" (qtd. In Halevy 504n). Even Halevy, no sympathizer with the Evangelicals, acknowledges that in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England, "Nowhere in Europe were the theatres more rowdy" (504).

Thus, most critics agree that the impact of the Evangelicals on the wider culture's view of and support for theater was profound and lasting. "The turn of the eighteenth century witnessed the nadir of the British theatrical life and writing . . . increasingly sentimental moralizing plays by authors like Hannah More gained popularity in the patented playhouses" (Jay 193). And when "the theatre was condemned by members of the Eclectic Society in 1800, they were reflecting the unanimous opinion of the Evangelical community" (Bebbington 130).

Yet, while evangelicals demonstrated an overriding concern for duty above all other things, they did not unanimously rule out all leisure-time pursuits or artful pleasures. There was by no means consensus among the evangelicals concerning how or the extent to which worldly pursuits such as public amusements and the arts could be pursued without harm to one's self or to others. For example, an 1805 edition of the *Christian Observer*, the periodical founded and published by Clapham Sect member Zachary Macauley, denounced as too restrictive one

minister's declaration that the only amusements that were permissible for the Christian were "walking, riding, books on history, biography, and natural philosophy, and music in moderation" (qtd. in Quinlan 189). One contributor to the *Christian Observer* argued against the "excessive scrupulousness indulged in by many religious persons. . . . Straining at gnats is the very best preparation for swallowing camels" (1833: 660). Hannah More, often criticized for her severity, in fact strove for discernment and balance rather than outright dismissal in her approach to more "worldly" pleasures:

I have refused to publish a severe edict against the sin of wearing flowers; which would be ridiculous enough in me who so passionately love them. I find it necessary in some instances to encourage cheerfulness, as austerities are insisted on by some of them, rather of a serious nature. (Letter in Roberts *i* 398)

And, in response to a statement by her contemporary Madame de Stael that religion was necessarily connected with the fine arts, More wrote:

I am a passionate admirer of whatever is beautiful in nature or exquisite in art. These are the gifts of God, but no part of his essence; they proceed from God's goodness, and should kindle our gratitude to him; but I cannot conceive that the most enchanting beauties of nature, or the most splendid productions of the fine arts, have any necessary connexion with religion. . . . I mean the religion of Christ. . . . The most exquisite pictures and statues have been produced in those parts of Europe where pure religion has made the least progress. These decorate religion, but they neither produce nor advance it. They are the enjoyments and refreshments of life, and very compatible with true religion, but they make no part of religion. (Letters in Roberts *ii* 325, 330)

However, even those who did not object to innocent recreation were undeniably pragmatic in their allowance. As Wilberforce observed: "There can be no dispute concerning the

true end of recreations. They are intended to refresh our exhausted bodily or mental powers, and restore us with renewed vigour, to the more serious occupations of life" (qtd. in Rosman 121). Hannah More's journal entry of July 20, 1803, demonstrates a similar pragmatism in her versification, which she viewed as a poor specimen of "good works":

I had hung up my harp on the willows, never more to take it down, as I thought; but importunity on the one hand, and supineness on the part of others, have driven me to write a popular song on the dread of invasion. What a state of things must we be in, when the most immediate way of doing good that occurs is for *me* to *write* a song! (qtd. in Roberts *ii* 106)

Not all occasions were suited to the relative frivolity of the arts, however. Upon being urged to make an elegy out of a tragic drowning of a slave, More refused, stating in a letter to her sister that such an event was "above poetry" (in Roberts *i* 148). For the Evangelical, all employments and pursuits were properly to be put to the service of the larger purpose: to serve God and to bring others into His kingdom.

EVANGELICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD LITERATURE

Literature in general (except the novel, which will be discussed below) received a much higher standing in evangelical esteem than most other art forms. With its emphasis on the individual reading of the word of God in the Bible, the evangelical movement had a natural affinity for the literary arts. The attachment of the evangelical movement to the act of reading can be traced to the seventeenth century and dissenting authors such as John Bunyan and Richard Baxter, who promoted reading for the masses as a means of conversion. Such authors favored the pursuit of unmediated, pure learning over more traditional studies and formal doctrine

(Donoghue 24). Additionally, as Ian Watt points out, those with Puritan or conservative religious backgrounds found reading to be among the most unobjectionable ways of passing one's leisure time (45). Indeed, the Dissenter Isaac Watts, while greatly concerned with the manner in which leisure time was spent, encouraged those under his influence, particularly women, to spend their leisure hours in reading and literary discussions (Watt 45).

Not all reading material, however, was considered edifying or proper. Yet, even though among Evangelicals fiction "was sometimes suspect," it would be incorrect to accuse them of shunning all literature (Bebbington 67). Indeed, an editorial preface to the second volume of the *Eclectic Review* (1806) offers a lament for the growing separation between matters literary and religious:

It is much to be regretted, however, that Religion and Literature should in any degree appear distinct; that their intercourse should ever be formal and distant; that their mutual alienation, wherever it exists, would seem of necessity a growing evil.

The editorial implicitly exhorts writers to attempt a "reconciliation" between the ecclesiastical father "estranged from unhallowed and perverted learning" and the scholar who would tend to regard such a one as "ignorant, enthusiastic, or hypocritical." The kind of writer who could breach such a gap, according to the *Review*, must by necessity "be one whose alliance to both [literature and religion] is intimate and cordial." (Hannah More fit the bill quite nicely.) One year later, the *Eclectic Review* favorably evaluates its own success in reaching the goal set the previous year, which was to "arouse the Christian world to a perception of the important influence which literature possesses, in obstructing, or accelerating, the progress of religious truth and human happiness (Preface to vol. III). Thus the *Eclectic Review*, while offering favorable reviews to secular literature, "regarded itself as the counterpart of the contemporary literary reviews, differing from them in that its values and criteria of judgment were specifically Christian" (Rosman *Evangelicals*

and Culture 166).

Such a clearly articulated view of the compatibility of higher learning and literature with devout religion did not go unheard by the Evangelical movement (as can be seen in the works of Hannah More alone). Evangelicals, in fact, produced at least four-fifths of the popular religious literature in circulation in the latter half of the eighteenth century (Lecky "History of the Evangelical Movement" 281).

Such esteem of literature and reading was rooted, at least in part, in Wesley's own insistence that Christians, particularly the ministers within his Methodist movement, be well-read. Wesley believed that extensive reading was necessary to being a "thorough Christian" (Wesley's *Works* xii 254). "Reading Christians," he wrote in 1776, "will be knowing Christians" (qtd. in Bebbington 68). Even as early as 1735, Wesley described in his *Journal* a typical day on board a ship headed for Georgia, a day that included several hours of reading, both private and collective (see the entry dated October 21, 1735). In their reading, Wesley preachers "were not to confine themselves to the Bible. They were to spend every morning in reading . . . to acquire a taste for reading or return to their trades" (Gill 27). Wesley's followers were expected to spend much of their leisure time reading (Altick 35) and were urged by Wesley to read "useful books" at least five hours a day (Herbert 4). Even Wesley's own literary style contributed to the growth of the reading public. He "consistently set before his followers high sentiments in simple terms. The style was easy and direct" (Gill 36).

Wesley helped to dig the new literary channels. Cheap books, popular magazines, circulating libraries, Sunday schools . . . all these came in largely on the Methodist tide. For Wesley not only popularized religion; he helped considerably to popularize reading and education. He not only built chapels, but set up printing presses from which poured an unending stream of cheap tracts, hymn-books, abridgements of classical works, along with pamphlets, biographies, magazines, and almost every type of miscellaneous literature. (Gill 27)

As a result, the Methodists, numbering 56,000 by 1789, constituted the largest single group of readers among the lower classes (Edwards *After Wesley* qtd. in Altick 143). Granted, there was a pragmatism behind Wesley's promotion of literacy and well-developed reading habits. In delivering literature to the masses, Wesley "was interested in their improvement, but he believed that their religious and moral views counted for more than mere development of their intellect" (Quinlan 32). But whatever the underlying reason, it was Wesley, followed by the Evangelicals, who was in large measure responsible for the high esteem given to literature and reading in the second half of the eighteenth century.

James Lackington, English bookseller and convert to Methodism, provides a good example of one individual who played an important role in the spread of reading among the populace by initiating the practice of selling publishers' overruns at greatly reduced prices, thereby making printed books more widely accessible than ever. Lackington is recognized as probably the first bookseller to begin the practice of buying publishers' leftover books (which were usually destroyed) and selling them cheaply (Gill 104), thus tapping into a new market of readers among the poor. In his memoirs, Lackington states,

I could almost be vain enough to assert that I have thereby been mightily instrumental in diffusing that general desire for reading now so prevalent among the lower orders of society, which certainly, though it may not prove equally instructive to all, keeps them from employing their time and money if not to bad, at least to less rational purposes. (*Confessions* 231-2)

In 1791, Lackington estimated that book sales had quadrupled over the course of the previous twenty years (Quinlan 179). Lackington himself is one example of Methodism's successful promotion of reading in that Lackington attributed his love of reading directly to his early Methodist influence: "The enthusiastic notions which I had imbibed, and the desire I had to be talking about religious mysteries, &c., answered one valuable purpose; as it caused me to

embrace every opportunity to read. . . ." (qtd. in Gill 103). After later renouncing the Methodist religion, Lackington was won back, fittingly, through his reading of books presenting the evidences of the faith (Bebbington 59).

The Evangelicals followed Wesley's example in their esteem of literature and reading (albeit of the proper kind) for the development of both mind and soul. Among the Evangelicals, Wilberforce and More may be considered "unusual in possessing literary expertise, and more significantly the social respect, which alone made feasible a direct appeal to the non-evangelical upper classes" (Rosman *Evangelicals and Culture* 69).

One example of the importance Wilberforce placed on the role of reading in the evangelical lifestyle is that in his so-called "Friends' paper," which he used to note subjects he wished to address during his regular visits to friends, a frequent topic of inquiry concerned the books those he was to visit were reading, along with Wilberforce's own suggested works (Binns 85).

Although her primary purpose as an author was religious, More also helped to create a wider literary audience. More's books have been described as a "long series of works devoted to furthering the Evangelical cause," which provided the author with a new reading public (Quinlan 58). "Throwing herself into the Evangelical cause, Hannah More was to become its most artful and persuasive writer" (Quinlan 49). More emphasized the benefits of intellectual rather than sensual pursuits in both earlier and later works. For example, in her narrative poem *Florio*, the character of that name turns to the more serious reading found in the *Idler* and subsequently finds success in love. So while disdaining some kinds of literature, More nevertheless was a staunch advocate of reading serious, nonheretical, secular works. Even the literature of non-Christian authors had its usefulness. In her *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, More argued:

Those pious persons do not seem to understand the true interests of Christianity, who forbid the study of pagan literature. That it is of little value, comparatively with Christian learning, does not prove it to be altogether without its

usefulness. In the present period of critical investigation, heathen learning seems to be justly appreciated, in the scale of letters... (*Works ii 16*)

More believed that while religion could serve to direct the "ardent passions" of youth, the study of letters served to soften the same. (see *Hints* in *Works ii 12*). Literature, like all learning, served the ultimate purpose of becoming, not learned, but wise (*Hints* in *Works ii 10*). Throughout the tracts, as well as in her essays for the upper classes, More extols the virtues of reading literature. In *A Cure for the Melancholy (Shewing the Way to Do Much Good with Little Money)*, one of More's tracts from the Cheap Repository, included among the good deeds of the character of Mrs. Jones is that she never set out without a few cheap, good books to give away, a most important act of charity (*Works i 168*). In *The Two Wealthy Farmers*, More describes the upbringing the aptly named Mr. Worthy provides for his son: "While he therefore took care that his son should be made an excellent farmer, he filled up his leisure hours in improving his mind: so that the young Worthy had read more good books, and understood them better, than most men in his station" (*Works i 130*). In addition, More chastised those who would limit themselves solely to the Bible for reading. Her pointed and passionate response to a friend who remarked, "No book for me but the book of Christ," was,

The persons in question have little turn for books. Might it not usefully fill many a vacant gap, were they to devote a little of their leisure to rational reading? There is much valuable literature which occupies a large intermediate space between strictly religious and frothy books. History, well chosen travels, select biographical works, -- furnish not only harmless but profitable reading. The study of these would improve their views, and by expanding their minds, furnish them with topicks for general conversation and useful reflection. It would enlarge their charity, by letting them see that many authors are not wicked, though they do not always confine their works to religious discussion. . . . Such books might correct their taste, without deducting any thing from their stock of piety, except perhaps the phrases which disguise it; it would give them a relish for

better society, and thus turn their waste moments to some profit.

(“High Profession and Negligent Practice” in *Works ii* 468)

In paraphrase of a sentiment found in the biblical book of Ecclesiastes (as well as in Seneca and Hippocrates), More complained, “Life is short, and books are long; and of reading, as well as writing many books, there is no end!” (Roberts *i* 284). Such a lament serves to undergird, not to minimize, the importance More perceived in such a time-consuming task.

John Newton was another Evangelical who found himself, like Wilberforce and More, influenced by and able to influence through literature. One of the two books that played an important part in Newton’s spiritual awakening was the biography, *The Life of Colonel James Gardiner* (Davidson 27).²⁷ And, of course Newton became one of the era’s most prolific hymn-writers in collaboration with William Cowper, who, like More, fulfilled the *Eclectic Review’s* qualifications for writers committed equally to religion and to literature. Both Newton and Cowper, in writing the *Olney Hymns*, a collection published in 1779, used direct paraphrases of Scripture passages, “thus implanting the Word of God into the hearts and minds of the largely illiterate, but spiritually and mentally active” population (Davidson 134).

Quinlan names both More and Cowper as “two popular authors who knew how to season didacticism with entertainment” and thus furthered the Evangelical cause; Cowper is described as a poet whose chief purpose as a writer was “to reform and evangelize readers” (52). Cowper is recognized by many critics for his early influence on the sentiments that would produce the romantic literature of the nineteenth century. As an Evangelical, Cowper was typical, centering his poetry on the experience of the individual with God and the world God made. Many of Cowper’s hymns, in a departure from the usual style, were written in the first person (Davidson 129). Cowper loved nature, as seen in his hymns and poems, and like other members of the Evangelical

²⁷ Biography has always held a prominent place in the bookshelf of religion. Puritans as well as Evangelicals found priceless value in spiritual autobiography as a tool of religious instruction and example (see J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim* and George Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*).

movement, he advocated kindness to animals (Davidson 165).

Pre-romantic literature began to emphasize feeling, as reflected in the works of Richardson and Cowper, authors who “became consciously interested in emotion, and were concerned to show their sensibility. . . . Poets and novelists began to give rein to their feelings. (Gill 24)

The Cambridge *History of English Literature* describes Cowper as the poet of a religious sect which “had its share in breaking up the spiritual ice of the age.” When his first volume of poetry was published in 1782, it received “moderate praise” even from most secular reviewers, though some criticized the work for being “too religious” (Davidson 239). Cowper’s poetry represented the “strongest religious influence in general literature” at the end of the eighteenth century (Lecky “History of the Evangelical Movement” 281). Such commentary demonstrates the powerful literary, as well as social, influence of the evangelical movement. The influence of these evangelicals forms perhaps the most significant factor in what has been called the greatest period of hymnody in English history (Greene 28).

The literary accomplishments and artistry of the likes of Cowper and More aside, the inarguable evidence remains that for the Evangelicals in general, the greatest value in literature lay in its usefulness for the intellectual and spiritual growth of the reader. For the evangelicals, the great aim of literature was to lead ultimately to the worship of God, not to the worship of man. This helps to explain the tendency of evangelicals to minimize the importance of artistic form in favor of ideological content in their work. A great part of the religious literature produced by the Evangelicals is seen by some as “almost absolutely destitute of literary merit,” demonstrating “that it owes its success much more to substance than to its form” (Lecky “History of the Evangelical Movement” 282).

Yet, such pragmatism on the part of the Evangelicals was by no means an isolated social and cultural phenomenon. During this time in general, “[m]en’s [secular] interests in books

stemmed from motives strikingly prophetic of nineteenth century utilitarianism. Readers were increasingly concerned to obtain books of practical guidance and information” (Altick 25). The similarity between these two forces, evangelicalism and utilitarianism,

was a curiously ambivalent attitude toward reading. . . . Like their Puritan forbears, the evangelicals, believing as they did in the supreme importance of Scripture, stressed the act of reading as part of the program of the truly enlightened life. They believed that the grace of God could, and did, descend to the individual man and woman through the printed page. The cultivation of the reading habit was therefore as indispensable as a daily program of prayer and observance of a strict moral code. (Altick 99)

Evangelicals often linked literary merits with the more dubious character of the writers of literature. More demonstrated the commonly perceived opposition between being a writer and a person of character when she remarked of one author that he “is a good poet, and a respectable man, an appendage which does not always belong to a good poet” (qtd. in Roberts *i* 139).

More often reflected this “ambivalent attitude toward reading” (as well as writing) as she struggled with the Christian’s call to responsible stewardship of talents, as well as time. She wrote:

[I] am often tempted to think, that I spend too much of that time in measuring of syllables and arranging periods, which ought to be employed to better purposes and more durable ends. Then again, I am reconciled to myself by reflecting that I never engage in them but as a substitute for other amusements . . .”

(Letter by More qtd. in Thompson 29)

In another letter she declared, in a characteristically Evangelical lament, that “the making of verses is not the great business of life” (qtd. in Thompson 56).

THE STATUS OF THE NOVEL IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

In the last half of the eighteenth century “the two chief facts about the novel are its popularity as a form of art and its inferiority as a form of art” (Tompkins 1). In comparison to those opinions found in the general population, from the novel’s earliest beginnings through the rise of the Victorian novel in the nineteenth century, the Evangelical attitude toward the novel varied in degree but not in kind. Following the publication of great novelists such as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding in the middle of the century, two factors influenced the attitude of both Evangelicals and English society in general concerning the novel. Thus the novel withstood simultaneous attacks on two fronts: from literary critics, that it constituted bad art, and from moral critics, that it reflected (and produced) bad morals.

First, while great works such as *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Joseph Andrews* produced countless third-rate imitators, none of these subsequent works contributed significantly to the development of the novel as an art form. Indeed, some have argued that between the publications by “the four great novelists of the mid-eighteenth century” and Austen and Scott of the nineteenth century, “there are no names which posterity has consented to call great” (Tompkins v). Although the works of Richardson had from their first appearance received popular and critical acclaim, by the 1770s the novel “had not yet won a distinguished place in literature” (Blanchard 218); and although the production of novels was voluminous, “prose narrative as a genre was looked down upon” in the latter half of the century (Blanchard 199). “It was largely the means taken to keep the shelves of the circulating library stocked that brought the novel into disrepute” (Tompkins 3). During the 1770s and 1780s, the shelves of the new circulating library were filled with the efforts of hack writers eager to feed the hunger of a new class of readers whose tastes were yet to be developed and refined. According to Ian Watt, “The novel was widely regarded as a typical example of the debased kind of writing by which the booksellers pandered to

the reading public" (54). One journal drew an analogy between the harvest of produce and that of novels, both taking place most abundantly in the fall (*Monthly Review* November 1755). By the 1750s, "the press groaned under the weight of Novels, which sprung up like Mushrooms every year....Every work of merit produced a swarm of imitators, till they became a public evil, and the institution of the Circulating libraries, conveyed them in the cheapest manner to every bodies hand....one source of the vices and follies of our present times" (Reeve *ii* 7). Reeve continues, "The year 1766 was very prolific in the Novel way, and indeed, they seem to have over-run the press, till they became a drug in the terms of trade" (*ii* 38). "Who are those ever multiplying authors that with unparalleled fecundity are overstocking the world with their quick succeeding progeny?" asks Hannah More in her *Strictures on Female Education*. She answers, "They are NOVEL-WRITERS; the easiness of whose productions is at once the cause of their own fruitfulness. . . ." (ch. viii 345).

The second factor influencing the evangelical attitude toward the novel was that the general public's taste in reading had "altered remarkably" around the turn of the nineteenth century, and there "was now a much more censorious attitude toward literature" (Quinlan 180). Social, political, and religious changes in English society, most notably the onset of the Methodist movement followed by that of the Evangelicals, helped to produce a cultural climate that grew increasingly polite, refined, and apt to be scandalized by the crudities of a Fielding, for example. An editorial concerning the readers of the "trash" going by "the title of Novels and Romances" appeared in an 1804 edition of the satiric periodical *The Miniature*. The editor also criticized the Grub Street hacks and the "idle females" who were writing within the dictates of current fashion, remarking that the novel exhibits the same "insipid or sensational character" that it had for the preceding twenty years (qtd. In Rogers 102). Hannah More, in typically understated fashion, described Fielding as "a man not likely to be suspected of over-strictness" (*Strictures on Female Education*, ch. VIII 345n). In noting the "increasing refinement of manners" that was evident by the late 1770s, Blanchard cites the example of More's altered opinion of *Tom Jones* (a novel she

had read and enjoyed as a girl) upon Samuel Johnson's expression of shock that she had read the work. Following this chiding by Johnson for having actually read the "vicious" book *Tom Jones*, More "assured him I thought full as ill of it now as he did," having read it "at an age when I was more subject to be caught by the wit than able to discern the mischief." More went on to declare her "decided abhorrence" of *Joseph Andrews* whereupon Johnson extolled for More the talents and virtues of Samuel Richardson (More, Letter to her sister, 1780s). Blanchard cites More as one of the many influential women writers -- such as Charlotte Smith, Clara Reeve, Mary Brunton, and Jane Porter -- who were "as a rule, of Richardson's party" (Blanchard 272).

At the start of the nineteenth century it was still Richardson, rather than Fielding, "who was on the side of taste and morality" (Blanchard 271) among readers to whom the feasibility of drawing a "profound distinction ... between conduct and character" (271) had not yet occurred. Yet, even Richardson was criticized by the most scrupulous critics and moralists as unfit reading. Because reading aloud as a family activity was an "almost universal habit," the "test of a really good book became, for a number of people, its fitness for being read aloud in the family circle" and this had tremendous influence over the kinds of books that were published (Cruse *The Englishman and his Books* 17). Thus could Sir Walter Scott relate in 1826 an incident involving his great-aunt who, fondly remembering how she had loved reading the novels of Aphra Behn as a girl, requested Scott to find them for her. Scott resisted, but upon his aunt's insistence, obtained them for her.

The next time he saw the old lady she thrust the books into his hands and recommended that he consign Mrs. Behn to the fire . . . and then added reflectively, "[B]ut is it not very odd that I, an old woman of eighty and upwards, sitting alone, feel myself ashamed to read a book which sixty years ago I have heard read aloud for large circles consisting of the first and most creditable society in London?" (qtd. in Quinlan 1)

Reading aloud in a "credible London circle" was not quite the same as reading aloud in the family

circle. Such changes in reading tastes reflected the evolving social and religious values, for example, in judging the fitness of a book by the standards of the family unit rather than by those of the fashionable London circles.

Noting that while the influences of fiction have been weighed and measured since the time of Plato, Warner writes that during the eighteenth century the rapidly growing market of readers “gave this old cultural issue new urgency.” He includes as factors in the novel’s “unprecedented cultural force” the weakening of censorship in England, technological advances that made printed material more widely accessible, the tendency of novels to be published anonymously and thus absent authorial responsibility, and the “disposable” nature of the books. “In short, novels desanctified the book” and were (since often published under the cloak of anonymity and subject to wide and incalculable circulation) “oblivious to their moral effects” (3-4). As a result, novels were considered to hold many dangers for youth, dangers which Clara Reeve elucidates in *The Progress of Romance*:

The seeds of vice and folly are sown in the heart, the passions are awakened, false expectations are raised. A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues, – she expects to be addressed in the style of these books, with the language of flattery and adulation. If a plain man addresses her in rational terms and pays her the greatest of compliments, that of desiring to spend his life with her, she expects to meet a Hero in Romance ... a fine Gentleman in a Novel.....From this kind of reading, young people fancy themselves capable of judging of men and manners, and that they are knowing, while involved in the profoundest of ignorance. They believe themselves wiser than their parents and guardians, whom they treat with contempt and ridicule: Thus armed with ignorance, conceit, and folly, they plunge into the world and its dissipations, and who can wonder if they become its victims? For such as the foundation is, such will be the superstructure. (ii 78-79)

The tendency of novelists to realistically portray vice and profligacy was condemned on the

grounds that it could introduce young readers to crimes and follies “which the moral drawn from them may not prevent being put into practice” (Charles Jenner the Younger in *The Placid Man*, 1770s, qtd. in Reeve ii 89). As Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote of novels in a letter to the Countess of Bute (1755),

All these books have the same fault, which I cannot easily pardon, being very mischievous. They place a merit in extravagant passion, and encourage young people to hope for impossible events, to draw them out of the misery they chose to plunge into, expecting legacies from unknown relations, and generous benefactors to distressed virtue, as much out of nature as fairy treasures.

(qtd. in Whamcliff and Thomas ii 289)

Literary journals, too, joined the outcry against novels, which were said to “have circulated chiefly among the giddy and licentious of both sexes, who read not for the sake of thinking, but for want of thought” (*Monthly Review* xxiv (June 1761): 415). Some novels were called light reading “because they made the borrowers light-headed” (*The New Brighton Guide* 5 qtd. in Taylor 30). Novels were said to be “the powerful engines with which the seducer attacks the female heart, and if we may judge from every day’s experience, his plots are seldom laid in vain” (*Lady’s Magazine* XI Supplement (1780s): 693). Many feared that the two most dramatic developments of the century, women’s rights and the novel, “were assisting each other along the road to corruption” (Taylor 77).

In 1778, Vicesimus Knox, headmaster at the Tunbridge School, warned youth of the dangers of reading fiction in his *Essays Moral and Literary*. Knox attributed some responsibility for the moral decline of the age to the “great multiplication of novels” (qtd. in Gallaway 1042). Objections to the novel were so rampant that any work going by the name of “novel” was suspect, regardless of its contents. For example, when Fanny Burney published the novel *Camilla* in 1796, it was permitted in the household of Maria Edgeworth’s father “only on the strict understanding that it was not a novel or romance” (Cruse *The Englishman and his Books* 31).

Similarly, many critics and readers considered Richardson's works to be novels of a different sort, perhaps even surpassing the designation "novel." For example, Reverend Philip Skelton in his "Hints of Prefaces for *Clarissa*" (circa 1750s), declares that *Clarissa* is not a "mere novel," but a

System of religious and moral Precepts and Examples, planned on an entertaining Story, which stands or goes forward, as the excellent Design of the Author requires; but never stands without pouring in Incidents, Descriptions, Maxims, that keep Attention alive, that engage and mend the Heart, that play with Imagination, while they inform the Understanding.

(qtd. in Bartlett and Sherwood 66)

Much of the novel's checkered reputation emerged from an atmosphere that represented all that the Puritans, Methodists, and Evangelicals sought to eradicate from the church and the culture. The earliest novels, the romances of amorous intrigue such as those by Behn, Manley, and Haywood, were "an integral expression of the culture of the Restoration," and the works were linked with "the zeal of Charles II's court for sexual license, its eschewal of the dour asceticism of the Commonwealth, and its enthusiastic translation of French cultural forms" (Warner 13). The novel was considered merely one of the family of "romances" known for their base rather than artistic appeal. Methodist tracts attempted to prove from Scripture that "God specifically forbade the reading of novels" (Halperin 5). In *Progress of Romance*, Clara Reeve recounts her own version of the history of prose fiction, a history which reflects and amplifies the general opinions of the time (Heidler 154). Reeve set out to, among other things, draw a clear (and at the time, much needed) distinction between "romances" and "novels." Playing the Socratic role in this critical dialogue on literature, the character Euphrasia explains:

The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never

happened nor is likely to happen. The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses of the persons in the story as if they were our own. (i 111)

Euphrasia argues against Hortensius' charge that acceptable authors such as Richardson are nonetheless responsible for the "swarm of paltry novels" that have sprung up in imitation and that "have taught many young girls to wiredraw their language, and to spin away long letters out of nothing" (i 137). Thus, by the close of the eighteenth century, novels were almost unanimously judged on moral grounds alone, and "the feeling against novels as improper reading for young girls had reached a high pitch" (Shepperson 87). Thus, in 1773, the *Sentimental Magazine* could opine:

What was caviar to the last century will promote disgust in this. As we have increased in politeness, we have likewise increased in the chastity of our literary productionsOur ancestors placed their amusement in laughter, we place ours in chastity of sentiment. If they were more witty, they were less modest than us.

The Proclamation of 1787 enjoined the authorities to suppress "all loose and licentious prints, books, and publications dispersing poison to the minds of the young and unwary" (qtd. in Quinlan 58). This was but a continuation of a similar approach seen in the censorship acts of 1538 and 1543, which represented a campaign against works not seen as "serious reading," including plays and romances. Consequently, the number of defenders of the eighteenth century novel was small (Shepperson 84). Gradually, notes Quinlan, some "speech taboos [were] introduced, and many writers had adopted a more circumspect tone than had been customary among authors

earlier in the century" (58).²⁸

It is characteristic of [the eighteenth century] that the dispute should have been placed on moral, rather than artistic, grounds. Novels were seldom regarded as "literature" before the time of Scott, and so it became a question of whether, as a means of amusement, they were harmful, harmless, or helpful to the minds of the young ladies who were always pictured as the principal novel audience.

(Shepperson 84)

Galloway summarizes the prevalent objections to fiction into three basic categories: ethical, moral, and aesthetic. While the refusal to give critical attention to the novel may appear to have had an aesthetic basis, he argues,

. . . since an ethical purpose was taken for granted by most eighteenth century criticism such refusal to take fiction seriously as a "kind" is generally based on the feeling that moral earnestness, not artistic dignity, is lacking. . . . The novel was supposed to tear down the standards of a conservative Christian morality, to unfit the reader for the humdrum monotony of common life; and to consume the time that might be given to more useful reading or to serious thought.

. . . There were only three general artistic flaws to draw any considerable portion of the critics' wrath, and these were only minor matters in a period when moral ire flamed so fiercely. On the rare occasions upon which moral preoccupations could be forgotten novels were accused of triteness, of improbability, and of a ridiculous pursuit of novelty which led to a greater and greater deviation from general truth and normal human conduct. (1048, 1055)

The novel had yet to carve out a distinct literary, artistic niche. Therefore, the only reasonable grounds for critique was content, more specifically, moral content. Johnson himself

²⁸ That certain works "were allowed to circulate shows that neither the law nor public opinion exercised much censorship" (Quinlan 61).

concluded with this approach to criticism of the novel in his famous remark that one should read Richardson “for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment” (Boswell, April 6, 1772).²⁹ Likewise some years later, in the *Guardian of Education*, Sarah Trimmer (who, although not a member of evangelical movement, was clearly religiously motivated) proclaimed that her basis of judgment of literature was the content of its moral and religious views, not its literary merit. Dugald Stewart, a mathematics and moral philosophy professor at Edinburgh University, is considered to have had a significant influence on Scottish thought in general and particularly on such writers as Sir Walter Scott and the founders of the *Edinburgh Review* (Ousby 890 and Drabble 938). Stewart argued that “fiction unfits the mind for assimilation of reality in general” (Gallaway 1048). In its preface to its premier edition of 1793, *The Evangelical Magazine* outlined the subjects and types of literature that would appear in its pages. While these included biography, memoirs, diaries, *authentic* anecdotes [emphasis added], striking providences and the expressions of dying Christians, along with the expected biblical and doctrinal expositions. Fiction of any kind was not included in this menu. Later, *The Evangelical Magazine*, while praising the usefulness of Hannah More’s Cheap Repository tracts, warned against too heavy reliance on fiction for such instruction, arguing:

The narrative pieces are well calculated to excite the attention of children and uneducated people to useful instruction. We would recommend, as much as possible, the adoption of real facts on the ground of these little histories; as we think that danger of some kind usually lurks beneath the flowers of fiction.

(qtd. in Davis 133)

Davis states that many religious readers opposed any type of fiction, even that used for the advancement of religion; “not even the imposing example of Hannah More could make fictitious

²⁹ For a thorough treatment of Samuel Johnson’s criticism of fiction in general (a criticism that certainly represented considerable influence on contemporary thought) see Carey McIntosh’s *The Choice of Life: Samuel Johnson and the World of Fiction*.

narrative acceptable to hard-liners" (133).

If the presses were overrunning with novels of objectionable moral content, then from the contrary view came works just as objectionable (according to the thinking of Clara Reeve and other anti-enthusiasts) for their overly moral approach. By the end of the 1760s, according to Reeve,

some persons whose excellent principles led them to see and lament the decline of virtuous manners, and the passion for desultory reading; endeavouring to stem the torrent [of novels] by making entertaining stories their vehicle to convey to the young and flexible heart, wholesome truths, that is refused to receive under the form of moral precepts and instructions, thus they tempered the utile with the dulce, and under the disguise of Novels, gave examples of virtue rewarded, and vice punished; and if the young mind unawares to itself, was warmed with the love of virtue, or shocked at the punishment of the wicked, this was the reward they wished or expected from their Labours. (*ii* 41)

Among such authors, Reeve cites Wesley's own favorite, Henry Brooke. While Reeve's Euphrasia warmly praises books such as Robinson Crusoe, which are "evidently written to promote the cause of religion and virtue" and "cannot be too strongly recommended, as under the guise of fiction, warm the heart with the love of virtue, and by that means, excite the reader to the practice of it" (*i* 125-126), books by "Enthusiasts" such as Brooke are roundly criticized:

Mr. Brooke was a man of Genius, taste and sensibility, but unhappily these fine talents were overshadowed by a veil of Enthusiasm, that casts a shade upon every object. . . . I shall offer a conjecture of my own, that Mr. Brooke would never have condescended to write Novels, but to make them his vehicles to convey his tenets to the minds of such readers, as were not likely to receive them in any other form. . . . What a pity, that such genius and such taste should be used only to promote a blind and illiberal zeal to make proselytes! (*ii* 41-42, 43)

The same passage then digresses into a brief lament over the "fanaticism" that "is creeping into

every sect among us, nay even into the established national Church!" (ii 44). Apparently English society was not ready to accept the novel as a genuine artistic form, nor was it ready to tolerate it as a vehicle for zealous religious sentiment. The novel's history shows that its rise to artistic legitimacy did not occur without its embrace by the religious for didactic purposes, yet it was some time before the novel's transformation from scurrilous amusement to serious literary work would be complete.

Hindering the novel's elevation in general esteem was a popular idea promoted by a considerable number of respectable persons that a conspiracy existed to overthrow England and organized Christianity. Quinlan describes how the proponents of this growing undercurrent of thought, advanced by the Eclectic Society, believed that the most effective means of combating the conspiracy would be the exercise of more control over literature, thus bolstering the view that reading was a "dangerous occupation" (Quinlan 93-94). The basis of this conspiracy theory is found in two primary works, an English translation of Abbe' Barruel's *Memoirs of Jacobism* (1797) and John Robinson's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1797). These two works proffered the belief that the French Revolution was the result of an intellectual conspiracy fueled by French *philosophes* such as Voltaire and Diderot and *illuminees* and the freemasons. "For several years, writers who believed in the existence of a conspiracy helped to sustain the idea that reading was a dangerous occupation" (Quinlan 94).

Despite such setbacks, the novel succeeded in small, steady gains. Hints along the way are numerous as members of critical, literary, and even religious circles began to see the novel's potential. By the 1770s, Richardson's novels were widely accepted in both religious and educational circles, although the works of such authors as Fielding and Smollett were considered to "desecrate" the library shelves (Blanchard 267). James Mackintosh's *Memoirs* include an essay he wrote as critic for the *Edinburgh Review* in which he argued for the potential and the advancement of the more realistic novels, granting them more influence than the treatise in inculcating morals:

. . . Fictitious narrative, in all its forms – epic poem, tale, tragedy, romance, novel – was one of the grand instruments employed in the moral education of mankind; because it is only delightful when it interests; and to interest is to excite sympathy for the heroes of the fiction; that is, in other words, to teach men the habit of feeling for others. (qtd. in Gallaway 1057)

In his brief history of prose fiction written in 1783, Hugh Blair defended his discussion of such “a very insignificant class of writings” by pointing out how popular such works were with the youth of both sexes as well as their obvious potential as a means of pleasant instruction (qtd. in Heidler 147). A widely used rhetoric textbook published in 1793 described fiction as an art form that was improving and that could be useful and agreeable, with the exception of ordinary novels that promoted “dissipation and idleness” (Gallaway 1056). Reverend Edward Young, an author and an ardent promoter of Richardson’s works, remarked, “Romance will do more good than a body of divinity” (qtd. in Blanchard 127). Richard Graves, the author of *The Spiritual Quixote*, a satire of both the Methodist movement and his old college acquaintance George Whitefield, argued that good fiction was a more effective corrective of vice and folly than volumes of severe, dogmatic treatises (Gallaway 1055).

By the turn of the century, however, even a respectable ladies’ publication was willing to concede a minimal benefit from the reading of fiction: “. . . in the mind idle tales cling to its barren surface: they make, however, a little soil in which better things may grow” (*Ladies Monthly Museum* IV Feb. 1800: 134). Fanny Burney defended the genre of the novel in the preface she wrote to *The Wanderer* (1814), arguing that the novel was, of all literary forms, the best one for “conveying useful precepts” (qtd. in Gallaway 1058). Blanchard notes that it was not until after the appearance of Sir Walter Scott’s novel *Waverly* in 1814 that “reviewers of novels resorted less and less often to apology,” crediting Scott for having “secured for fiction the respect to which it was entitled” (301). As late as 1843, Lord Jeffrey, who in reflecting on his role as a contributor to the

Edinburgh Review, apologized for the harsh treatment to which he subjected the novel in his criticism of earlier years:

It may be worthwhile to inform the present generation that, in my youth, writings of this sort [novels] were rated very low with us -- scarcely allowed indeed to pass as part of the nation's permanent literature -- and generally deemed altogether unworthy of any grave critical notice. (qtd. in Blanchard 301)

Sir Walter Scott himself offers helpful commentary on the issues at stake in the evolution of public and critical perception of the novel from suspicious to receptive:

There are some vices in civilized society so common they are hardly acknowledged as stains upon moral character, the propensity to which is nevertheless carefully concealed, even by those who frequently give way to them. . . . One would almost think novelreading fell under this class of frailties, since among the crowds who read little else, it is not common to find an individual of hardihood sufficient to avow his taste for these frivolous studies. A novel, therefore, is frequently 'bread eaten in secret' . . . yet such is the universal charm of narrative, that the worst novel ever written will find some gentle reader content to yawn over it, rather than to open the page of the historian, moralist, or poet (188). . . . Accordingly, a style of novel has arisen, within the last fifteen or twenty years, differing from the former in the points upon which the interest hinges; neither alarming our credulity nor amusing our imagination by wild variety of incident, or by these pictures of romantic affection and sensibility, which were formerly as certain attributes as fictitious characters as they are of rare occurrence among those who actually live and die. The substitute for these excitements, which had lost much of their poignancy by the repeated and injudicious use of them, was the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him. (*Quarterly Review* XIV 188:188-201)

This improved perception of the novel is attributed not to change in public tastes, but in the evolution of the novel's artistic and literary merit, according to Archbishop Richard Whatley, who wrote in the *Quarterly Review* in 1821:

The times seem to be past when an apology was requisite from reviewers for condescending to notice a novel. . . . We are inclined to attribute this change, not so much to an alteration in the public taste, as in the character of the productions in question. Novels may not, perhaps, display more genius now than formerly, but they contain more solid sense; they may not afford higher gratification, but it is of a nature which men are less disposed to be ashamed avowing . . . a novel, which makes good its pretensions of giving a perfectly correct picture of human life, becomes a far more instructive work than one of equal or superior merit of the other class; it guides the judgment, and supplies a kind of artificial experience. . . . When, therefore, the generality, even of the most approved novels, were of this [romantic] character, (to say nothing of the heavier charges brought, of inflaming the passions of young persons by warm descriptions, weakening their abhorrence of profligacy by exhibiting it in combination with the most engaging qualities, and presenting vice in all its allurements, while setting forth the triumphs of 'virtue rewarded') it is not to be wondered that the grave guardians of youth should have generally stigmatized the whole class as 'serving to fill young people's heads with romantic love stories, and rendering them unfit to mind anything else.' . . . The change, however, which we have already noticed, as having taken place in the character of several modern novels, has operated in a considerable degree to do away this prejudice; and has elevated this species of composition, in some respects at least, into a much higher class. For most of that instruction which used to be presented to the world in the shape of formal dissertations, or shorter and more desultory moral essays, such as those of the *Spectator* and *Rambler*, we may now resort to the pages of the acute and judicious, but not less amusing, novelists who have lately appeared. If their view of the men and manners are no less just than those of the essayists who preceded them, are they to be rated lower because they present to us these views, not in the language of general description, but in the form of well-constructed fictitious narrative? If the practical lessons they inculcate are no less sound and useful, it is surely no diminution of their merit that they are

conveyed by example instead of precept . . .”

(*Quarterly Review* 1821 XXIV 352-376)

From fiction’s one extreme of licentious intrigue to the other of vehicle for unabashed moral instruction and piety, a recognition had clearly emerged that the novel had potential for both artistic and moral development .

EVANGELICALS AND THE NOVEL

It is helpful to recognize that English fiction descends from two distinct lines: one which sought to depict life as it is and another one, rooted in biblical parables and medieval sermons and religious literature, which sought to depict illustrate life as subject to a moral or philosophical outlook. This second lineage of English fiction is the tradition of the “moral fable” (Newell 3). The latter is the tradition that was more highly developed in the eighteenth century and which eventually garnered so much suspicion from evangelicals, moralists, and others. These concerns seem to have for a long time blinded both critics and religious readers to the potential of the “moral fable” to develop into a novel of a different sort. This helps to explain the gap in time between Richardson’s moral novels and later attempts by primarily female authors beginning in the late 1790s³⁰ and succeeding most in Hannah More’s *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* in 1808.

The roots of evangelical opposition to novel reading can be seen in both general objections made by the larger society as well as specifically evangelical, Christian concerns. While both Methodists and Evangelicals were typically voracious readers, they tended to read only what trusted religious leaders recommended, and novels were not generally among those recommendations. Thus, in the *Quarterly Review*, Robert Southey remarked of the religious

³⁰ More about these authors will be said in the next chapter.

conservatives,³¹ “An Index Expurgatorious cannot be published in England, but as their people read nothing but what is recommended to them, an Index Commendatorious answers the same purpose.” Such a selective approach to reading was not confined to the Evangelicals, as documented extensively above. “The public” remarks Quinlan, “had become timorous of literature during the period of the French Revolution and continued to be so for some time afterwards” (181).

Much of the responsibility for this change in public sentiment has been attributed to the Evangelicals. Their active and proactive approaches in their publication, preaching, and political influence point more to their influencing the culture than vice versa. According to one critic, the “campaign against fiction was one of the most strenuous activities” of the Evangelical movement ³² (Halperin 5). Critics are quick, then, to attribute the declining acceptance of the novel to the increasing influence of the Evangelicals.

The spread of evangelical literary prejudices could be measured by systematically studying the declining popularity of the classic eighteenth century novelists. In the first third of the nineteenth century these novelists were still popular enough to warrant their being made the backbone of reprint series designed for the middle class audience. But then as evangelical attitudes affected more and more readers, and as Dickens’ generation of fiction-writers took over, the eighteenth century novel lost ground. (Altick 116-7)

In *The Moral Tradition in English Fiction*, Pickering argues that “evangelical standards became the primary critical yardstick by which English Christian readers measured literature” (vii).

Evangelical concern over the rampant practice and deleterious effects of novel reading were such that Hannah More asserted, “. . . The corruption occasioned by these books has

³¹ *Quarterly Review* iv (Nov. 1810), qtd. in Quinlan 180.

³² The Evangelicals were joined in this effort by the Utilitarian movement.

spread so wide, and descended so low, as to have become one of the most universal, as well as most pernicious sources of corruption among us" (*Strictures on Female Education*, ch. viii in *Works ii* 345). The criticisms most often launched against the novel by More and her fellow Evangelicals generally fell into the following categories:

- Novels too often focused on illicit love and/or unrealistic romantic love and were thought to develop, especially among female readers, unrealistic expectations of suitors, courtship, and domestic life.
- Even the "tamer" novels inculcated the reader with an unnecessary familiarity with the secular world.
- Reading novels made the mind less suitable for more serious reading.
- Many novels denied essential doctrines of the Christian faith, for example the inherently evil nature of man and the exclusivity of Christ as the only means of salvation, as well as undermining such biblical commands as honoring one's parents.
- Novels often portrayed sinful or wicked characters in a sympathetic light by blending negative qualities with attractive ones.
- Christianity and its representatives, particularly members of the clergy, were rarely presented sympathetically or accurately.
- Time spent reading novels was more wisely spent in more industrious or religious pursuits.
- In a carryover of Puritan concerns, novels were objected to because they were not "true" (and therefore linked to the devil, who is described in the Bible as the "father of lies").

Like the majority of their eighteenth century peers, the Evangelicals were concerned about the effects of novel reading on the rapidly expanding population of readers. Such readers had no educational or cultural tradition by which to discriminate and judge works of literature, leaving them open to the titillations and inferior artistry that characterized the vast majority of the countless novels churned out during the latter half of eighteenth century. The increasing number of female readers, especially from the growing middle class, naturally influenced the change in the tone of literature. The development of boarding schools also increased the number of women readers. Because “the boarding school miss particularly enjoyed fiction,” many novels were written for the amusement of this particular audience (Quinlan 64-65). “So long as our British Ladies continue to encourage our hackney Scribes, by reading every Romance that appears, we need not wonder that the Press should swarm with such poor insignificant productions,” complained the *Monthly Review* in 1760.³³ These novels, marketed to a young female audience, tended to portray amorous adventures of an illicit or unrealistically dramatic kind. As early as 1743, *The Lady's Preceptor* described the proper attitude of right-thinking ladies toward novels: “You are neither fond, I know, of Novels or Romances, because you justly judge that both the Fictitious and the Marvelous leave false Notions and Images upon the Mind, which produce nothing advantageous or solid” (qtd. in Fritzer 26). Such works elicited from Hannah More comments such as the following:

General Oglethorpe has long been trying to proselyte me to the old romance; gravely lamenting that the only fault I have is refusing to read the old romances; assuring me it is the only way to acquire *noble sentiments*; but I do confess that hitherto I have never been able to get through a single page of histories which have no approximation to the manners and passions of this world. I must have *men* and *women*, with whom I can have sentiments, affections, and interests in common: I don't care how romantic the story, or how exalted the character,

³³ Review of *The Adventures of Sylvia Hughes*, *Monthly Review* 23 (1760): 523.

provided it be still *probable* adventure, and *possible* perfection.

(Letter in Roberts *i* 193-194)

More recognized exactly what the typical eighteenth-century reader sought in entertainment, and lamented that too many writers were too apt to meet the demand:

The best times to live in are often the worst to write about. In a novel or a comedy, the moment the lovers are settled and happy, they become so insipid that another page of the one, of an additional scene of the other, would be quite surfeiting. If anybody were to write about a good sort of quiet, reasonable, orderly, prosperous people, the audience would not be able to sit out the first act; they would long for the relief of a little distress, and languish for the refreshment of a little misery. (Roberts *i* 298)

Evangelicals such as More, therefore, feared that novel reading made unfit wives and mothers of female readers: "If families are found who are neglected through too much study in the mistress," lamented More, "it will probably be proved to be Hoyle, and not Homer, who has robbed her children of her time and affection" (*Strictures* VIII 165).

Novels were thought not only to spoil women for domestic life, but also to rob children of their motivation and desire for filial respect and obedience. Reading novels "supposedly caused, among other undesirable attitudes, a disregard for the authority of parents" (Taylor 75). Indeed, "A copy will produce an original," remarked one of the members of the Clapham Sect clan, Thomas Babington Macauley (qtd. in Taylor 112). Therefore, the "fear of unduly exciting the imaginative faculties of the young was nowhere more apparent than in the Evangelical attitude to the reading of fiction" (Jay 195).

Even when novels did not depict or produce sinful behaviors, they exposed the reader to a level of worldliness that Evangelicals found unnecessary at best, and downright harmful at worst. Reading novels was "condemned as a hallmark of worldliness" (Rosman "Evangelicalism

and the Novel" 301). In fact, in 1800, the *Evangelical Magazine* published a "Spiritual Barometer" which placed at either end "Death; perdition" and "Glory; dismissal from the body." In between these two possible outcomes for the human soul lay a range of activities placed at various points from 0 to 70. "Indifference" and the omission of "family religion" are placed at 0. "Love of novels" is rated at 40, along with "scepticism" and the total neglect of private prayer. (Theatre and "parties of pleasure" rate not as bad at 30).³⁴ More's tract *The Two Wealthy Farmers* depicts the ill-raised daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Bragwell as spending "the morning in bed, the noon in dressing, the evening at the harpsichord, and the night in reading novels." The girls even employ their father's ploughboy in "trotting backwards and forwards with the most wretched trash the little neighbouring bookshop could furnish" (*Works* i 131). In *The Two Wealthy Farmers*, Mr. Worthy complains:

Those crying sins, ADULTERY, GAMING, DUELS, and SELF-MURDER, are made so familiar, and the wickedness of them is so disguised by fine word and soft descriptions, that even innocent girls get loose to their abhorrence, and talk with complacency, of things which should not be so much as named by them.

(*Works* i 134)

Among the many other faults found with novels and romances in this same passage are: giving a false view of human life, teaching contempt for domestic duties, undermining parental authority, presenting love as the primary business of life, teaching that romantic love is impossible to regulate or restrain, and making every vice appear pleasing while making pity and virtue look ridiculous. The kind of worldliness conveyed by typical novelists is described further by More in *Strictures*:

³⁴ *Evangelical Magazine* viii (December 1800): 26. Quinlan includes a reproduction of the Spiritual Barometer in *Victorian Prelude*, 115.

They solicit the indulgence of the grossest appetites with a sort of coldblooded speculation, and abandon themselves, and debauch the reader, to the most unbounded gratification of the senses. . . . It descants on depravity, and details its grossest acts as frigidly as if its object were to allay the tumult of the passions, while it is letting them loose on mankind, by “plucking off the muzzle” of the present restraint and future accountableness. The system is a dire infusion compounded of bold impiety, brutish sensuality, and exquisite folly, which creeping fatally around the heart checks the moral circulation, and totally stops the pulse of goodness by the extinction of the vital principle.

It is clear from a passage such as this that it was not worldliness in itself that the Evangelicals objected to, but the effects that an emphasis on the material, physical, and sensual would have on the mind and the soul. During this period, when the novel had not yet established its own place in English literature, it was still associated with its French and German origins. French and German literary influences “placed a powerful emphasis on feeling and emotion rather than on reason and principles” (Hole xxxi). And, as is noted below, novels from the continent were characterized by their conveyance of ideas, not just stories. It was the kind of ideas promoted in the typical novel to which the Evangelicals objected and from which they could not separate the form of the novel.

Yet, the form of the novel itself raised concerns as well. Even religious novels might be objected to out of fear that the reader’s interest in the plot would draw him away from the religious truths therein.

Evangelicals believed that religious truth was conceptual, a matter of doctrine and precept. And so they communicated it on the whole through narrative -- through long and sermonic comments and conversations. Too much narrative was regarded as not only inappropriate but also counterproductive. *The Christian Observer* feared that some might read religious fiction for the plot and incidents, vicariously sharing the experiences and emotions described, but skipping the moral lessons and religious observations.

Thus, one evangelical periodical praised More's *Cælebs* (arguing, that "we cannot allow this work to be called a novel"), by noting that "the perceptive parts are not choked with incidents," though More, the reviewer added, "with her lively imagination, must have felt some difficulty in preventing her *Cælebs* from degenerating too much into matters of plot and incident, of which she has admitted only so much as deemed necessary for her higher purpose" (*Christian Observer* 8(1809):109).

Not only were novels thought likely to render young ladies unfit for the realities of what life entailed for the majority of women of the era, but they were also thought to render minds unfit for pursuits more serious than reading tales of amusement. Evangelicals were among those critics of the novel who believed that "novels and romances undermined reason by appealing to the imagination, thereby freeing man from the restraints of conscience" (Pickering *Moral Tradition* 6). Such was not the concern of Evangelicals alone, but of much of the generality of the literary culture of the time:

That much of this amusement was derived from novels which were filled with sensational action and tawdry sentiment has been generally allowed; but whether reading them drew one on to better books by developing a valuable habit or hurled one into a maelstrom of moral degradation became a much-discussed topic of the age. (Taylor 28)

Accordingly, in its review of Robert Bisset's novel *Modern Literature* (1804), the *Eclectic Review* commented: "Convinced that the habit of perusing novels, in general, tends to dissipate, and commonly to mislead the mind, we shall not frequently notice performances of this kind" (60). Besides, some argued, anything that novels might accomplish, other forms of literature could achieve with greater effectiveness and benefit. Hugh Murray, in *Morality in Fiction* (1805), described three kinds of novels and the usefulness of each: the realistic, the didactic, and the

idealistic. Murray argued that biography is better than realistic fiction, that philosophical points cannot be proved through fiction, and that though the last type may be useful for instruction, novels too often corrupt the reader's taste in emphasizing plot over character and sentiment (Galloway 1045). Hannah More, in later life, concurred: "I have long since had much pleasure in serious books, I now willingly read little of which religion is not the subject" (Journal entry Sunday, September 28, 1794, in Roberts *i* 453)

The influential Evangelical poet Cowper (who was among Jane Austen's favorite poets) joined in decrying novels and novelists in his poem *Progress of Error*. Here the focus of the objection is the novel's role in inflaming the fancy and imagination, not necessarily in itself objectionable, but more so in the detrimental effects of rendering the reader's mind incapable of any thinking but that which results in the same kind of "scribbling" produced by the novelist:

Ye writers of what none with safety reads,
Footing it in the dance that fancy leads:
Ye novelists, who mar what ye would mend,
Sniv'ling and driv'ling folly without end,
Whose corresponding misses fill the ream
With sentimental frippery and dream,
Caught in a delicate soft-silken net
By some lewd earl or rake-hell baronet:
Ye pimps, who under virtue's fair pretense,
Steal to the closet of young innocence,
And teach her, inexperienced yet and green
To scribble as you scribbled at fifteen;
Who, kindling a combustion of desire,
With some cold moral think to quench the fire;
Though all your engineering proves in vain,
The dribbling stream ne'er puts it out again . . . (ll 307-22)

Hannah More concurred with Cowper on the dangers of inflaming the imagination, arguing that

such works,

however free from evil in its more gross and palpable shapes, yet from their very nature and constitution they excite a spirit of relaxation, by exhibiting scenes and suggesting ideas which soften the mind and set the fancy at work; they take off wholesome restraints, diminish sober-mindedness, impair the general powers of resistance, and at best feed habits of improper indulgence, and nourish a vain and visionary indolence which lays the mind open to error and the heart to seduction. (*Strictures on Female Education*, ch. viii 344)

In her tract *The History of Mr. Fantom*, More describes this “new fashioned philosopher as having a mind “prey to vain imaginations” (*Works* i 120). And in More’s *The Two Wealthy Farmers*, Mr. Worthy asserts, “I hope then, you will allow, that since it is adultery to look at a woman with even an irregular thought, it follows from the same rule, that . . . all loose songs of novels; and all diversions also which have a like dangerous tendency, are forbidden by the seventh commandment . . .” (*Works* i 138).

Yet works of the imagination were not necessarily dismissed entirely. More, while critical of too much “frivolous reading” for girls, also writes in the same treatise,

I would not however prohibit such works of imagination as suit this early period [of education]. When moderately used they serve to stretch the faculties and expand the mind: but I should prefer works of vigorous genius and pure unmixed fable to many of those tame and more affected moral stories, which are not grounded on Christian principle.

(*Strictures on Female Education*, ch. viii in *Works* i 343)

More demonstrates in this excerpt a judgment of fiction that incorporates both artistic and moral standards, standards for which she strove in her own work and that, as will be demonstrated below, set a pattern for other writers to follow.

Further opposition to the novel lay in its tendency to deny or undermine doctrines of strict Christianity and to negatively portray believers (such as Methodists and Evangelicals) who adhered to those teachings. More liberal Christians such as the Latitudinarians, along with many outside the Christian faith, “stressed the importance of benevolent feelings” rather than the depravity of man, which was the emphasis of Calvinistic thinking. “The spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, brought about by a sympathetic identification with others and leading to good deeds was the hallmark” of the more sentimental, Latitudinarian approach to Christianity (Pickering *Moral Tradition* 3-4), as opposed to the Evangelical view with the stricter doctrinal outlook. Characterized by sentimentality, the earlier novels especially could be objected to on doctrinal grounds. “Stressing objective doctrine, evangelicalism philosophically clashed with sensibility, whose subjective appeal tended toward a secular ethics outside the restraints of religious dogma” (Pickering *Moral Tradition* 10).

For example, Hannah More, in her *Strictures on Female Education*, criticized authors such as Rousseau for their favorable depictions of characters’ generosity absent obedience to scriptural commands or duties. And in his *Practical View of Christianity*, Wilberforce objected to the frequent portrayal in fiction of a belief in man’s inherent goodness:

There is a certain class of publications, of which it is the object to give us exact delineations of life and manners; and when these are written by authors of accurate observation and deep knowledge of human nature, (and many such there have been in our times) they furnish a more faithful picture, than can be obtained any other way, of the prevalent opinions and feelings of mankind. It must be obvious that novels are here alluded to. A careful perusal of the most celebrated of these pieces would furnish a strong confirmation of the apprehension, suggested from other considerations, concerning the very low state of Religion in this country; but they would still more strikingly illustrate the truth of the remark, that the grand peculiarities of Christianity are almost vanished from the view. . . . It is often the author’s intention to represent [clergymen] in a favourable point of view, and accordingly he makes them as well informed, and as

good Christians as he knows how. They are painted amiable, benevolent, and forgiving; but it is not too much to say, that if the peculiarities of Christianity had never existed, or had all been proved to be false, the circumstance above would scarcely create the necessity of altering a single syllable in any of the most celebrated of these performances. (242-43)

Notably, Wilberforce exempted from this charge Samuel Richardson, whom he considered the single exception to this observation. Yet everyone was not so kind as Wilberforce to Richardson, as seen in this excerpt from one of the most conservative of Christian periodicals, the *Eclectic Review*: “We recognize with pleasure,” wrote the editors in 1805, “his [Richardson’s] genius, his morals, and his regard to religion such as he apprehended it to be; but we cannot dissemble that his views of Christianity are general and obscure. . .” (qtd. in Quinlan 191).

A specific doctrine emphasized by Evangelicals and frequently controverted in novels was the belief in the innate depravity of man. In denouncing what he saw as the promotion in many novels of a false view of the nature of man, Wilberforce wrote:

Young people may, without much offence, be inconsiderate and dissipated; the youth of one sex may indulge in licentious excesses; those of the other may be supremely given up to vanity and pleasure: yet provided that they are sweet tempered, and open, and not disobedient to their parents or other superiors, the former are deemed *good hearted* young men, the latter *innocent* young women.

(*Practical View* 270)

Wilberforce’s reference to “good hearted young men” was well understood by his contemporaries as a reference to Fielding’s character Tom Jones (Blanchard 266) and thus a reprimand to the many misguided fans of the fictional hero.

Hannah More, too, expressed concern over the portrayal -- which if not inaccurate was altogether missing -- of Christian doctrine in works of fiction, as well as nonfiction. Upon reading Gibbon’s *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 1782, More expressed concern over what she

viewed as a distortion of the negative characteristics of Christians: "Gibbon is a malignant painter, and though he does give the likeness of depraved Christianity, he magnifies deformities, and takes a profane delight in making the pictures as hideous as he can" (Roberts *i* 138). Remarking on Madame de Stael's *Allemagne*, she wrote:

Her observations are frequently just and acute. She possesses a rare combination of talents . . . there are in it passages of the greatest beauty, flashes of light bursting through the darkness of those dry German metaphysics. . . . But to speak truth, her religion appears to me of a very questionable sort, or rather a non-entity. . . that abominable doctrine of perfectibility, which is the key-stone of her edifice, would do infinite mischief, but that I believe none of the ladies and few of the gentlemen who are in raptures with L'Allemagne can understand it.

(Letter in Roberts *ii* 219)

In a letter to W. W. Pepys, who had encouraged More to read De Stael's *Corinne*, More commented on the author: "She never stumbles so much as when attempts to introduce Christianity, as there is no subject on which she appears so completely ignorant" (Letter in Roberts *ii* 135). Such fault-finding did not preclude, however, More's continued reading and appreciation of de Stael's work: "It would be a satire on my own judgment and feeling not to allow that I am one among innumerable admirers of Madame de Stael. *Corinne*, as an exhibition of genius, is a che-d'œuvre . . ." (Letter in Roberts *ii* 320). Even the novels of Scott, which brought the highest level yet of moral and artistic content to the genre, could fail the Evangelical test. When More discovered from reading reviews that Scott's novels were characterized by "the absence of evil rather than the presence of good" she left the remainder of Scott's novels unfinished after having read a volume and a half (M. G. Jones 224).

Particularly characteristic of evangelical thinking was their objection to novel reading on the grounds that the time spent in doing so could be invested much more prudently in other activities. "In the Evangelical vocabulary," explains Robin Reed Davis, " 'useful' is virtually

synonymous with 'religious' " (134). More's remarks to Reverend D. Wilson on this topic on two separate occasions are illustrative:

Religion certainly has increased much among the higher classes in England, and perhaps still more in Ireland. Yet I will venture to say, even to the religious world, "I have a few things against thee." With no small number of happy exceptions, I cannot help observing the common fault of good people -- the misappropriation of time. I will only instance two particulars, of the evil of which they do not seem to be sufficiently aware, -- music and light reading. . . I pass over the more loose and amatory novels, and take my stand on what is said to be safe ground -- the novels of that unparalleled genius Walter Scott . . . in which his fecundity is as marvellous as his invention. I have read one volume and a half, in which the powers of his vigorous and versatile mind were conspicuous; but from what I have since read in reviews, I rather see the absence of much evil than the presence of much good. I, of all people, ought not to find fault with authors for writing too much; yet I must return to my first position, the misapplication of time. . . . Now I readily grant, that to the mass of readers the reading of these works should not be prohibited. To the gay, the worldly, and the dissipated, it is perhaps as safe, and even more safe, than any of their other pleasurable resources; being often their only intellectual one. . . . My remarks are limited to a certain class of readers, who have made a strict profession of religion. If, indeed, our time is to be accounted for as scrupulously as the other talents committed to us, how will their reckoning stand?

(Letter in Roberts #356)

Your excellent sermon on Temptation was our Sunday night's family reading. I am glad to see you notice, among other dangers, light reading. I have lately reflected much on the alarming increase of this perilous pleasure. I really think it is, at this period, doing more harm than cards, I mean family cards, not gaming. I would the evil were confined to the worldly and the dissipated: the religious world, of whom I am almost as much afraid as the worldly world (if I may use the expression), are falling much into it. . . . of the fashionable reading, if there were no other evil than the immense consumption of time, the mischief would not be small. Thirty volumes of Walter Scott's novels have, in the succession of a very

few years, covered every table. Figure to yourself, in a large family, where every one reads for himself, the thousands of hours that have been thus swallowed up. . . . The evil does not merely consist in the reading itself, but in its disqualifying tendency for that reading which is good. (Letter in Roberts *ii* 343)

It is important to note, however, that stringent concern over the use of one's time was by no means the concern of conservative evangelicals solely. As Carey McIntosh points out, "A distinction between the 'Necessaries' and the 'Superfluities' of life was very much in the air in the eighteenth century" (3). Evangelicals and other moralists merely intensified this more general concern.

The last category of objections to the novel was rooted in a tradition extending back to the Puritans: namely, that fiction, as a narrative that is not true, therefore constitutes a lie. The fairly prolonged insistence by the authors of novels to employ the word "history" in their title demonstrates the widespread influence of this particular objection, one that certainly was not limited to Puritans, Methodists, and Evangelicals. Because "the reading of history was recommended as perfectly safe and useful" (Altick 27), the earliest novels, even the most fantastic, incorporated the word "history" into its title or subtitle. Evangelicals in particular, however, "did not easily 'suspend disbelief', accepting for the duration of their reading the standards and values of the author" (Rosman *Evangelicals and Culture* 168). Even as late as 1832, the *Christian Lady's Magazine* declared that as a publication, it "should not indulge in fictitious narrative," seeking instead to include "specimens of interesting biography" (ii). Ironically, as Pickering demonstrates, the favoring of biography by the Methodists and the Evangelicals actually contributed to the popularity of the novel by their tendency to present the most sensational of biographies, which while based on true, and therefore acceptable, incidents, merely "whetted appetites for novels" (*Moral Tradition* 69). In selecting fictional works for the education of girls, Hannah More was most concerned with maintaining a distinction between truth and fiction. She would have fictional works presented as such, rather than under the guise of

“history”: “I should suggest the use on the one hand of original and acknowledged fictions: and on the other, of accurate and simple facts; so that truth and fable may ever be kept separate and distinct in the mind” (*Strictures on Female Education* ch. viii in *Works* i 343).

While the first generation of Evangelicals clearly articulated an appreciation for literature and a discriminating tolerance for some novels, such attitudes narrowed in the later years of the movement. This more Puritanical view played a significant role in the decline of sensibility celebrated in such previously lauded works as those by Richardson. So while “the Evangelicals proper (the Porteus-More Wilberforce-Macauley sect) were more liberal than the dissenters” (Altick 117), the next generation was marked by greater conservatism. For example, Henry Venn, son of John Venn of the Clapham Sect, “excluded all but one novel from his house” (Bebbington 130). Yet it was during the era of this second generation of Evangelicals that the movement really took hold in English life, culture, and thinking.

In form, if not in name, evangelicalism was slowly replacing latitudinarianism as the most significant religious movement of the century . . . this theological shift had great significance for the reading public and the novel. Modifying the novel and critical poetics for their didactic purposes, religious educators and apologists in the last years of the eighteenth century and first years of the nineteenth century determined not only the expectations of the reading public, which they had educated in Sunday Schools, but also the form and content of the early Victorian novel. (Pickering *Moral Tradition* 9)

Thus,

although the novel had begun to receive more than casual recognition as a literary form and was no longer judged exclusively on moral grounds by reviewers, it encountered the opposition of these rising conservatives who opposed light and extensive reading along with numerous other forms of amusement.

(Taylor 110)

By the time one of the first biographies was written of Hannah More just a few years after her death, the author remarked of Richardson, whose works More had so highly praised,³⁵ that though considered the great moral writer of his day, his morality came to be seen by some as having “little in common with that of the Bible,” and “his illustrations [as] so far from moral that no Christian parent would permit many of them to the eyes of the children” (Thompson 126). This attitude was far removed from that of just decades before when Aaron Hill could say of a novel such as Richardson’s *Pamela* that in it he could find “all the soul of religion, good-breeding, discretion, good nature, wit, fancy, fine thought, and morality” (qtd. in Pickering *Moral Tradition* 5). Reverend John Newton, in writing to More regarding her work, *Strictures on Female Education*, remarked:

. . . I wished the note, vol i page 171, had been omitted. I hoped your just censure of novels would have extended to the postscript of the whole race, without mercy and without exception. Self here will prompt every scribbler to interpret your note in his or her own favor, and to think the author could not mean to condemn him. . . . I am almost ready to judge that *the best are the worst*; for had not some been very well written and admired, it is probable we should not have been pestered with the contemptible small fry that followed. I am not sure that I ever read a novelist of note; but I thought Fielding and Richardson did much harm by forming the prevailing taste for novels. (Letter in Roberts ii 43)

Despite so many objections, the novel’s potential for instructing a wide audience was appreciated, not only by Evangelicals, but also by philosophers and others with a clear ideological agenda. However, it was, ironically, the Evangelical movement that most profoundly influenced the novel’s maturing into the art form that would come to champion the individual and so effectively illuminate how individuals might live in a such a rapidly changing society.

³⁵ “In my youth *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* were the reigning entertainment. Whatever objections may be made to them in certain respects, they contain more maxims of virtue and sound moral principal than half the books called moral” (Letter in Roberts ii 343).

Evangelical novels shared in the general contribution made by the religious novel in developing that strain of introspection fostered by Richardson and the sentimentalists, whilst Evangelical literature, in its wider form of religious biographies, tracts, and newspapers, also exerted an influence upon the secular novel. . . . Evangelicalism, as a philosophy, was therefore calculated to appeal to the novelist since it invited him to contemplate characters who recognized no compulsion to conform to the standards of contemporary society (Jay 2-3, 7).

Colby compares the appropriation of the novel for Christian purposes by writers such as More to the adaption of pagan religious rituals by Christianity (10). This is an apt analogy considering the eventual universal acceptance, even by nonpractitioners, of the Christianized holidays as cultural events, and the parallel acceptance of the novel as a genre.

When in the 1780s he published his abridged version of Henry Brooke's *A Fool of Quality* (1770), John Wesley demonstrated his own belief in the efficacy of the right kind of fiction for moral improvement. This book was an example of "the type of highly emotionalized novel which came between the Age of Reason and the Romantic awakening" (Gill 121), a prototype of the novel as it would become in the nineteenth century. Wesley's value for the book was "frankly utilitarian," and he viewed the book as "an invaluable Evangelical treatise." (Gill 123). Yet, Wesley's promotion of the work constituted a defining point in the development of the English novel:

It indicated the wide possibilities of the novel as a medium, not merely of romance or entertainment, but equally of instruction and propaganda. It combined fiction with realism. It emphasized character, personal motives and ideals. At the same time it laid stress on social duties and responsibilities. It portrayed the community; it related the individual to the world. (Gill 123)

Even those who opposed Wesley's religious ideas shared his conviction concerning the novel's

usefulness. For instance, the anti-Methodist Richard Graves, author of *The Spiritual Quixote*, thought that good fiction was a better antidote to vice and immorality than the “volumes of severe precepts seriously delivered and dogmatically enforced” (qtd. in Gallaway 1055).

The 1790s saw a rash of novels that were primarily political vehicles of both liberal and conservative ideas. These works were produced by authors such as Thomas Holcroft, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Charlotte Smith. The novel had become something entirely new, “the arena of a serious war of ideas” (Tompkins 301). While the novel had long been honed as an ideological tool in countries such as France and Germany, such pragmatism marked a new stage in the development of the English novel. While the French novel had always been characterized by its marriage of narrative with ideas, be they political or philosophical, the English novel was slow to imitate.³⁶ (It was, ironically, the events in France that prompted writers such as More to respond with ideas presented in the guise of fiction.) Authors “frequently purported to have some serious ethical or utilitarian interests, in order to sell their works. Some of them even went so far as frankly to disavow any claim to literary merit, demanding that their works be judged solely upon the soundness of their moral views” (Quinlan 182).

So while the *Christian Observer* was most outspoken in its condemnation of the novel as a dangerous literary form,³⁷ this publication also was among “the first to recognize the metamorphosis of the novel from idle plaything to *roman-a-these*” (Jay 199). Although it did not express a strong position regarding the novel until 1805, the *Christian Observer*, in fact, was at the forefront of sectarian periodicals in articulating critical standards for the novel (Pickering *Moral Tradition* 70, 72). Others quickly joined in exploiting this newly perceived prospect for the novel. Similarly, the introduction to a novel that appeared in 1802 asserted:

³⁶ Tompkins devotes an entire chapter, “Philosophers and Christians,” to the didactic fiction of political and philosophical liberalism in England in *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*.

³⁷ See volumes xiv (1815) 512-7, xvi (1817) 289-301, 371-375, 425-8.

The rage for novels does not decrease; and though I by no means think them the best vehicle for "the words of sound doctrine" yet, while the enemies of our church and state continue to pour their poison into unwary ears through this channel, it behoves the friends of our establishments to convey the antidote by the same course. . . .³⁸

It is important to remember that the largest segment of this new reading public had been educated by, and had its taste cultivated by, the Evangelical movement. These new readers, notes Quinlan, "had few cultural traditions" (182) and required first and foremost of literature that it "have a serious aim" (183). Such an audience clearly reflected the influence of those who had brought them literacy in the first place. "The Methodists and Evangelicals, while yielding to no one in their detestation of current fiction, felt that the intelligent course was not to deprive people of literacy but to make sure they used their gift for the right purposes" (Altick 64). "The ability to read now having turned out to be a two-edged weapon, it remained for the Evangelicals to restore it to the use they had originally in mind" (Altick 73).

Their experience with the Cheap Repository Tracts encouraged the Evangelicals to believe they had found the right formulas. If correct morality and sound religious and political doctrine were embedded in wholesomely entertaining tales and songs, humble readers would accept those principles and the nation would be secure. . . . Equally important, it was through the publication of the Cheap Repository Tracts that the influential middle class Englishmen got their first experience in the mass production and distribution of reading matter. (Altick 76)

Many credit Sir Walter Scott for assuaging the prevailing hostility toward the novel as a form (Galloway 1056). "It was Sir Walter Scott who did most to establish the novel on a moral basis with the reviewers and with the public. The *Waverly* series was received into homes in which no

³⁸ Jane West, *The Infidel Father*, London, 1802. qtd. in Quinlan 182.

other works of fiction had ever been accepted" (Taylor 97). Indeed, "all except the very strictest of the Evangelicals admitted them for family reading" (Cruse *The Englishman and his Books* 76). But even before the novels of Scott appeared, it was Hannah More who broke down the Evangelical inhibition toward novel reading. Her publication of the novel *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* was

an attempt . . . to satisfy the deplorable but apparently determined demand of the younger generation for novels by supplying an article which cunningly took on the outward shape of this worldly invention, but within was pure Evangelicalism. Hannah More once again, as in the case of the tracts, stepped gallantly into the breach. (Cruse *The Englishman and his Books* 76)

"Indeed if some evangelicals were seduced into novel reading by Sir Walter Scott," argues Rosman, "far more were led onto the downward path by Mrs. More and her successors. Unlike the Waverly novels, religious fiction was reviewed in all the evangelical periodicals, and, particularly in its infancy, received considerable approbation" ("Evangelicals and the Novel" 306). More's publication of *Cælebs* led the *Christian Observer* "to take the considered step of reviewing the occasional novel," a development that did not win unanimous support from readers (Jay 198). In response to *Cælebs*, "even those who had doubted the propriety of combining fiction and religion were reconciled to the new technique. Evangelicals welcomed this new and powerful instrument to correct the irreligious tastes and manners of the age" (M. G. Jones 196).

Bebbington argues that among conservatives such as the Evangelicals "there was probably always more opposition in theory than in practice to novel reading" (131). There is ample evidence for this, particularly among the members of the Clapham Sect. Although Thomas Macauley, a leader of the Sect, entirely disapproved of his children reading novels, "he was too kind-hearted to insist on his family giving up what they enjoyed so highly. He only stipulated that there should be no reading of novels or poetry in the mornings, and except during the holidays

this rule was kept" (Cruse *The Englishman and his Books* 75). Zachary Macauley's wife, who had been educated by the Mores in their school, allowed her children to read novels aloud in the evenings and the family became one in which "novels were more read and better remembered than in any household in the United Kingdom" (G. O. Trevelyan qtd. in Davis 147). One of the daughters of Henry Thornton, whose home served as the hub for the Sect, recalled of Hannah More, "She taught me to believe in Tom Thumb nearly as implicitly as in Joseph and his brethren" (M. G. Jones 103). In recognition of More's powerful influence on evangelical attitudes toward the novel, and, in turn, the greater cultural acceptance of the genre, Pickering argues:

Crucial to the novel's respect it had enjoyed during the middle of the eighteenth century was the success of Hannah More's "dramatic sermon," *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*. From *Cœlebs* it was a long literary but short thematic hop to Sir Walter Scott and a skip and a jump to Charles Dickens (*Moral Tradition* vii)

Pickering then elaborates on the influence of the evangelical community on the growth and rise of the novel:

Modifying the novel and critical poetics for their didactic purposes, religious educators and apologists in the last years of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries determined not only the expectations of the reading public, which they had educated in Sunday Schools, but also the form and content of the early Victorian novel. (*Moral Tradition* 10)

Indeed, Pickering argues, by the first years of the nineteenth century, "religious concerns had a greater influence upon popular criticism of the novel than at any time since the appearance of *Pamela*" (66). Eighteenth-century evangelicalism "fostered the emergence of female orators and writers of remarkable authority," such as More, and "shaped social discourse throughout the Victorian period," argues Krueger (3). Thus through the evangelicals' influence and their discovery of the didactic potential of the novel, the general disdain for the genre greatly

diminished during the first decades of the nineteenth century (Rosman "Evangelicals and the Novel" 302). And so the way was paved for the novel to ascend to its zenith of artistic legitimacy and excellence.

CHAPTER THREE:
HANNAH MORE AND THE DIDACTIC TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

Didactic narrative -- whether that found in the courtesy books of the Middle Ages or their successors, the conduct books of the eighteenth century, or in the spiritual autobiographies of the Puritans, or in the social fiction of "minor" writers like Charlotte Tonna, Jane West, Maria Edgeworth, or Hannah More -- has been called the "stepchild" of literary criticism. Yet the term "didactic," on the other hand, might be considered by some a redundancy as applied to any genre of literature, inasmuch as all writing puts forth an underlying message or view. Hannah More adhered to this view, writing in the Preface to her *Collected Works* in 1801:

No book perhaps is perfectly neutral; nor are the effects of any altogether indifferent. From all our reading there will be a bias on the actings of the mind, though with greater or less degree of inclination, according to the degree of impression made, by the nature of the subject, the ability of the writer, and the disposition of the reader. And though . . . the whole may produce no *general* effect, proportionate to the hopes of the author; yet some truth may be picked out from among many that are neglected; some single sentiment may be seized on for present use; some detached principle may be treasured up for future practice.

Such a view does not diminish but enhances the potential of literature by acknowledging its inherent power to touch or even stir the soul of the reader. Such an effect, though tempered, as More points out, by subject matter, ability, and the reader herself, exceeds the capacity of even the author to control.

Still, a distinction can be drawn between a literature whose primary purpose is to instruct and one that has some other aim. Robert Montgomery explains the central propositions generally found in didactic literature:

. . . the main functions of the poetic text are understood to be the teaching of certain kinds of truth, either propositions to be accepted by rational assent or standards of conduct to be grasped and followed. Companion to these is the belief that literature must be pleasing, and pleasure is usually considered the means by which truth is made palatable. (2)

From her earliest writings, Hannah More made clear that instruction was her main concern, and she was just as clearly influenced by a deep and variegated tradition of didactic literature, which includes the periodical essay, the conduct book, the spiritual biography, and didactic fiction.

THE PERIODICAL ESSAY

More's correspondence reveals that the periodical essay formed a significant portion of her reading diet; the influence of this genre on her writing is unmistakable. According to her biographer, Roberts, *The Spectator* was one of the earliest and lasting literary forces in Hannah More's life. Indeed, as one critic has described it, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* "is less a story than a series of essays modeled on those of *The Spectator* and *The Rambler*, over which Hannah had pored in her youth" (Hopkins 229).

The rise of the periodical is closely linked to conduct literature (which will be discussed below) and the place it held in the opening years of the eighteenth century. Although periodicals

-- including newspapers and literary journals -- were published prior to the eighteenth century, they were produced, largely, "by inferior pens" (Graham 13). Conduct books and periodical journals answered similar needs of the growing reading public. As the gap between classes narrowed through greater literacy, so the desire grew to close the gap in manners and morals. Along with conduct books, the periodicals of the eighteenth century met that need.

The spreading popularity of periodicals such as *The London Gazette*; *The Observer*, in *Question and Answer*; and *The Daily Courant* (the first of the daily papers) paralleled the burgeoning patronage of London coffee-houses (Cruse *Shaping of English Literature* 217-19; see also Bond, *Studies in the Early English Periodical*, 12). By 1710, two thousand coffee-houses were doing business in London and Westminster alone (Graham 68n). The coffee-house setting itself stimulated the market for literature about manners and conduct:

The coffee-house was a place where men were bound to behave with some degree of courtesy and consideration for their neighbours, where rough manners would not be tolerated, where each must think of the common good. A man must take care that his personal habits were not unpleasant to those with whom he associated and that his dress came up to the common standard of neatness and cleanliness. The ideal that the coffee-houses set up was not, perhaps, a very high one, but it was high enough to make a real difference for the better in the lives of a large number of middleclass Londoners.

(Cruse *Shaping of English Literature* 220)

In an entry dated January 27, 1664, in his *Diary*, the fashionable Samuel Pepys, a regular coffee-house patron, describes a coffee-house conversation that concerned a conduct book, Osborne's *Advice to a Son* (see Cruse *Shaping of English Literature* 218). Matters of fashion, manners, and conduct were as central to the coffee-house discussions as political and social issues, and the periodicals supplied the fodder for those discussions.

In his exhaustive history of the English literary periodicals, Graham finds that the "impulse to reform" pervades the periodical genre from the very beginnings of the eighteenth century's

“learned” publications (47). Earlier serial publications, such as the *Athenian Mercury* in the seventeenth century (1691-96), overtly presented as entertainment and “common chatt,” had assuaged Puritan concerns about light reading by revealing a serious side as well as its potential as a medium for “virtuous and serious thought” (Graham 36). Interestingly, Samuel Wesley, father of Methodism’s founders, John and Charles, pioneered the publication of the *Athenian Mercury* (Graham 33). The question and answer format of this journal indicates the didactic bent that would characterize even the most literary periodicals of the century to come. Indeed, one of the first imitators of the *Athenian Mercury*, the weekly *Jovial Mercury* (1693), was concerned with reforming manners and morals (Graham 37-38), as were most of the few dozen or so periodicals published at the start of the eighteenth century.

By 1709 the maturing periodical reflected “the rising tide of reform respecting men’s manners and morals” (Graham 55). The earliest essayists and journalists, such as Defoe, Peter Motteux, and John Dunton, popularized reform as the proper focus of the periodical (Graham 69). Thus, a path had been laid for subsequent publications to follow in developing and perfecting the art of the serial essay.

When the first issue of the *Tatler* appeared on April 12, 1709, editor Richard Steele wrote of his didactic purpose in his opening essay: “The general purpose of this paper is to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour.” *The Tatler’s* readers “were more interested in its articles on social matters than in its news, and therefore these articles were allowed to occupy more and more space in the paper”; subsequently, *The Spectator* (1711-1712, 1714) contained no news but focused instead on essays about morals, manners, and literature.³⁹ While popularizing the didactic essay, the *Tatler* played a great role in cultivating an audience and a taste for fiction, which, as Kay points out, “was considered by many readers ‘a

³⁹ Anna Elizabeth Lott asserts in her dissertation that *The Spectator* emerged from the era’s “almost obsessive concern with appropriate female behavior” (15).

dubious, trivial, or at best an unfamiliar form of entertainment" (22). This marriage of fiction and the didactic essay would culminate in later works of social fiction and novels such as More's.

The Spectator's influential role in defining and portraying the tastes, manners, and morals of the age has long been recognized (Kay 1). The fact that *The Spectator* became widely read among both middle and upper classes illustrates the equalizing role of didactic literature for the reading public. *The Spectator* ran 555 issues, only one hundred of which targeted serious, philosophical matters to the exclusion of fiction. The fiction that did so frequently appear ranged in length from a paragraph to several thousand words (Kay 7). Although many kinds of fictional accounts were included in *The Spectator* (such a variety was necessary to maintain a readership long accustomed to didactic exhortation), virtually all made a moral point (Kay 8). In his 1909 seminal work, *The Short Story in English*, Henry Seidel Canby recognizes the didacticism that pervaded the fictional stories in *The Spectator* and finds that the essence of eighteenth century fiction is the criticism of manners and "a graceful realism" (Kay 3). Writes Canby:

. . . very little of this narrative is written for its own sake. The stories are told for what lies behind them, for the application which would be made at London tables, for the thrusts at the errors of society. . . . Nevertheless, these tales are no mere pendants to the essays which they illustrate and adorn. If this had been the case, such miniature fictions could never have established a narrative fashion which ran its course for a good hundred years. In them a subtle transfusion has taken place, a mingling of the spirits of the essay and the narrative, so that, unlike their medieval parallel, the *exemplum* with its independent sermon, the stories . . . embrace the essential qualities of both tale and moral. (qtd. in Kay 4)

Bond portrays the type of fiction in the periodicals, particularly in the *Tatler*, as having uncomplicated plots and characterizations; he notes the fiction for its brevity and more importantly, that most of the plots "simply illuminate a simple theme or moral with a fundamentally simple meaning" (qtd. in Kay 22-23). Seen as rooted in this tradition rather than in the tradition of the romance, didactic fiction like More's can be criticized in a different light, one that recognizes

that the quality of the ideas in a work of didactic fiction has a higher priority than the novelty of the plot.

Yet, from early on, periodicals met and, in turn, cultivated the same desire for amusement that would later be satisfied by the novel. Kay points out Addison's awareness of the power of fiction to "exert a social influence," as seen in *Spectator* IV, No. 512, where Addison states that the fable is an effective vehicle of influence, leading its reader to believe he is advising himself, subtly teaching the reader a moral by surprise (52). Along with this clear moral purpose for the fiction and fables in the periodicals, the tradition of including *dramatis personae* to present a range of views on various topics, such as those found in the *Spectator* and, before that the *Weekly Comedy* (1699), foreshadows More's Cheap Repository Tracts. In seeming anticipation of the characters that filled the pages of the Cheap Repository are those listed at the head of the title page for the *Weekly Comedy*: Snarl, a disbanded Captain; Truck, a merchant; Scribble, a newswriter; All-craft, a turncoat; Cant, a precision; Snap, a sharper; Squabble, a lawyer; Whim, a projector; Log, a marriner [sic]; Plush, a quack; Prim, a beau (qtd. in Graham 52). Periodicals like the *Weekly Comedy* and others "helped to develop the 'character' as a device for securing concreteness" and provided readers "much entertainment in serial form, making more urgent the subsequent necessity for amusing readers" (Graham 55).

In his study of the fiction found in the *Spectator*, Donald Kay traces its history to a literary type known as the character sketch, or Character, which has its origins in classical Greek literature (modeled by Theophrastus) and reached its peak in English literature in the seventeenth century (24-25). Kay quotes Boyce's description of the process through which such a character sketch unfolds: It begins with the naming of a moral quality, which is then defined.

After the definition comes the main development, the list of actions and speeches that are typical of a victim of the quality under consideration. The picture is built up entirely of details of what the man says or does, usually in apparently random order, as seen or heard by an impersonal observer. Although

Theophrastus allows the reader some opportunity to read between the lines, he refrains from explicit statement either of what the character thinks or of what Theophrastus thinks of the character. The language is simple; and almost nothing appears that could be labeled wit. (25)

Such a character, explains Kay, is a type of moral character, developed through the presentation of words and actions suggestive of the moral trait being depicted (26). Kay credits the seventeenth century writer Joseph Hall (*Characters of Vertues and Vices* 1608) with being the greatest literary influence on Addison and Steele in the application of the classical model of the Character to the English literary tradition, particularly for a didactic, religious purpose (26).

The periodical was viewed as an alternative, an antidote even, to the romance. Before the eighteenth century, fiction tended to be either romantic or realistic, but the periodicals fostered an increasingly antiromantic attitude which emphasized both the didactic and the narrative element (Kay 12). Many of the early journals "were suspicious of 'Plays, Satyrs, Romances, and the like'" at the same time fiction formed a regular component of the journals' offerings, notes Kay (14). The trend in such publications toward fictionalizing real events demonstrated the potential in the novel form for instruction (Kay 14).

Thus, the English novel is as much the child of the periodical essay as it is of the romance. That the origins of Richardson's *Pamela* are found in his *Familiar Letters*, a *bona fide* conduct book, is widely recognized. Eighteenth-century discussions of conduct often referred to fictional examples (Marks 34), especially in essays like those in *The Spectator*. The essays in these popular periodicals often addressed many of the issues that had been the concern of conduct books earlier (Marks 39).

Along with Richardson's, Defoe's works demonstrate the link between the periodical and the rise of the novel. His *Weekly Review* (1704-13) had a markedly didactic element entitled "Advice from the Scandalous Club" in which he "printed and answered letters and thrust at a variety of socio-moral evils" (Bond 18) and, in his own words, "censured the actions of men." Eventually, as the popularity of this section grew, it monopolized more and more space in the

Review (Graham 59). Apparently, there was a wider audience for moral advice than that for news and literary reviews. Addressing issues of state, economy, and morality, Defoe's *Review* is considered one of the most important of the essay periodicals to precede the *Tatler*, which itself may be an indirect descendant of Defoe's work (Bond 17, 18). It is no coincidence then that two authors who pioneered the rise of the novel, Richardson and Defoe, also wrote conduct books, even before their novels appeared.⁴⁰ In his critical history, *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt points to Defoe and Richardson as examples of authors who, in successfully carrying moral and religious aims into the secular field of fiction, represent a compromise "between the wits and the less educated, between the belles-lettres and religious instruction," a compromise Watt calls "perhaps the most important trend in eighteenth-century literature" (50). Both Defoe and Richardson, as well as many of their readers, would be somewhat befuddled by modern criticism's sharply drawn distinction between both kinds of works.

The influence that various literary genres have had on the novel has received much critical attention, and specific literary traditions are seen as engendering distinct strains of novels. The robust characters and plots of works such as *Tom Jones* are part of a neoclassical literary tradition, one rooted in epic, comic, and dramatic literature (see the chapter on Fielding in Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel*). On the other hand, being rooted in social change more than in the neoclassical tradition (Watt 239), the domestic novel of manners which would include Jane Austen's work has a closer kinship to the fiction of the early periodicals (see, for example, Robert D. Mayo's *The English Novel in the Magazines*). Indeed, many of the works of fiction that appeared in *The Spectator* seem "to want only slightly more organization to become novels" (Spearman 116). Ian Watt points out that two of the features of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, practical domestic information and improving entertainment, were later embodied in the novel (52). And by 1778 (with the publication of Fanny Burney's *Evelina*), "[T]he *Spectator* attitude to character and

⁴⁰ Richardson's first conduct book, *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum*, appeared in 1733; Defoe's first (of well over a dozen such works) was *The Compleat Mendicant; or Unhappy Beggar*, published in 1699.

manners flowered into a complete novel" (Spearman 116).

The novel is not the only genre with kinship to the early periodicals. The conduct book tradition (to be discussed in further detail below) is closely linked to that of the eighteenth century journals. Publications such as Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator* (published just two years, from April 1744 to May 1746) combined the genres of the essay periodical and the conduct book. Before 1744, courtesy writers primarily addressed the behavior of male readers (Hodges 153), but with the advent of Haywood's journal, women were for the first time the main audience for essays, letters, dialogues, tales, drama, and poetry centering on questions of morality, manners and behavior. The fiction included in the periodical was often mere dramatization of conduct book advice (Mitra 10). Like the courtesy books that preceded it, *The Female Spectator* offered advice "entirely practical in character" and "based not upon any academic theorizing about life but upon a real appreciation of its actual difficulties and problems" (Hodges 154). One significant difference that Hodges notes is that while the courtesy books prior to 1744 tended to focus on behavior after marriage, the *Female Spectator* was concerned more with proper conduct before marriage. This shift may be attributed to sheer marketing motives:

[T]o appeal to a wide audience, Mrs. Haywood needed to ensnare the attention not only of the mothers but of the young ladies as well, who, if this new periodical failed to please, could readily turn to romances and play. Richardson, Fielding, Lillo, and Steele made for strong competition. (Hodges 160)

The journal enjoyed significant success and, thanks to its literary quality, "holds a position of prominence in an age which produced the best essay journals" (Hodges 176).

While the conduct book taught its female readers what kind of women they should aspire to be, women's periodicals like the *Female Spectator* expanded on that role by exemplifying for men what kind of women they should desire (Mitra 53). In blending the forms and uses the periodical and the conduct book, serving as a vehicle for moral instruction, focused on courtship concerns, and providing a diversion from more titillating, but less useful, reading, *The Female*

Spectator provided a model for More's *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*. Indeed, in his search for a wife, the character of Cœlebs seems to have followed Haywood's advice in the *Female Spectator* exactly. Just as Cœlebs spends considerable time in getting to know not only Lucilla, but her family and her manner of upbringing and education, the *Female Spectator* strongly advocated that a man and a woman considering marriage "should make every effort to learn each other thoroughly -- their likes, dislikes, habits, manners, and beliefs . . . [and] the true nature of the marriage partner" (Hodges 161-62).

Periodicals were from early on purveyors of the idea (rejected by Evangelicals such as More) that religion and literature were mutually exclusive pursuits. In his history of the English periodical, Graham differentiates between "social periodicals," which commonly contained criticism but tended not to review literature unless with expressed religious or moral reservation, and "entertainment periodicals," whose task it was "to justify the reading of poetry, fiction, drama, and other forms of light literature" (63). Graham concludes that the periodical tradition in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries "saw the beginnings of what was to be eventually a complete and more or less permanent dissociation of the *belles-lettres* from piety and partisanship" (64), a separation later found regrettable by religious conservatives.⁴¹ Periodicals such as the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*, according to Watt, "tried to make the polite religious and the religious polite"; in Watt's estimate, "their 'wholesome project of making wit useful'⁴² succeeded completely" with a wide reading audience (51).

Yet, the essay form has a particular affinity for the ideals and worldview espoused by the evangelicals. As Beetham explains, the form "is deeply contradictory, simultaneously rooting its readers in the present while pointing them to the future. . . . the promise of self-transformation is endemic in the form" (14). Self-transformation is, of course, the theme of the evangelical message

⁴¹ See, for example, *Literary Panorama* 6(1809): 259-267.

⁴² *Tatler* No. 64 (1709)

of spiritual rebirth through faith in Christ. The essay form was, then, the natural vehicle for More's *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* and *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable*. Indeed, the development of the cheap press, which hastened the growth of periodical literature, owes a great deal to evangelical effort and talents, particularly those of women (Beetham 49).

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, 2,500 journals and periodicals were or had been published (Bond *Studies in the Early English Periodical* 14). In the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century, numerous new middle- and upper-class periodicals appeared which centered on philanthropic activities. These periodicals, such as *Cottagers' Monthly Visitor* (1821-56) were often designed to give both practical advice to those who wished to help the poor as well as didactic fiction intended for dissemination to the poor (Kovacevic 56). Mrs. Sarah Trimmer's monthly *Family Magazine* featured an "Instructive Tale," a didactic short story, in each issue (Pickering "The Cheap Repository Tracts and the Short Story" 15). More's Cheap Repository Tracts provided through the vehicle of fiction both helpful tips and practical advice on domestic concerns as well as loftier religious and philosophical ideals.

More herself provided fodder for the periodical writers. She was the first subject of the *Lady's Museum*, first published in 1798 and considered the forerunner of "the genre of the exemplary female life" (Beetham 22). Another periodical, the *Female Preceptor*, was specifically devoted to More, though its existence was brief, published only in the year 1813 (Beetham 50).

These were fitting turns of events, since the periodical was such a significant influence in More's writing. As a devoted reader of literary men such as Addison and Johnson, More clearly emulated their didactic, persuasive style. Yet, she wished that they would have asserted their influence further. She wrote of Addison and Johnson:

I love and honour these two men in a very high degree . . . [y]et I am persuaded their writings would have done far deeper and wider good, had they not generalized their religion so much. The soundness of Johnson's principles is incontestable, but he scarcely ever enters on any evangelical truth. . . . [Addison]

appears not to have entered into those deep views of evangelical truth. . . . I have endeavored to do justice to those two noble authors, though I thought it would be invidious to say what I have here said, of my regret that they did not dwell more on the doctrines of Christianity, and on what distinguishes it from all other religious systems as a scheme of salvation.

(Letter to William Pepys in Roberts *ii* 182)

Such work was bequeathed by Addison and Johnson to the likes of a Hannah More.

CONDUCT BOOKS

The eighteenth century marks the era of the conduct book, the “improving reading” (Ousby 198) that picked up where the courtesy books of medieval and Renaissance periods left off. The courtesy book, the precursor to the eighteenth century conduct book, has been defined as literature promoting “a code of ethics, aesthetics, or peculiar information for any class-conscious group” (Mason 4). The compiler of the Newberry Library’s collection of conduct books defines these works as:

. . . any work, or significant part of a work, which sets forth for the gentleman (or gentlewoman) first, the qualities or criteria, inherent or acquired, which he must possess; second, his formation (including his various interests, exercises, recreations, and amusements) and his education; and third, his conduct.⁴³

Fritzer notes that in the definition above, conduct itself actually appears third and last in the list, following the qualities and education of the individual (3). Indeed, courtesy and conduct books traditionally covered a range of domestic and social issues, such as: the nature and characteristics of nobility, including the roles of heritage and education; the constitution of duty, religious, moral, and familial; desirable social skills such as dancing, riding, and appreciating music and other arts; the proper approach to dress and fashion; the correct treatment and conduct of

⁴³ qtd. in Marks 42n.

servants. Some conduct books attempted to include a whole range of topics under broader concerns, such as Richard Allestree's *Art of Contentment, By the Author of the Whole Duty of Man, & c.* (1675), while others focused on particular aspects of education or conduct, for example, John Dunton's *The Hazard of a Death-Bed-Repentance* (1708).

While originally written for a more genteel audience, conduct books experienced broader demand as the literate and the middle classes grew. During a time when changes in social mobility, the roles of women, the education of the lower classes, and technological advances were impending, conduct books helped readers to navigate through an increasingly uncertain world. The eighteenth century's preoccupation in these books with manners, in particular, "is widely marked as one of the characteristics of the age" (Hemlow 732).

Yet morality, not just manners, was a primary concern for conduct book writers. Fritzer points out that conduct books were not merely concerned with etiquette, but were "based on morality and inner development rather than on fashion and expedience" (4). Conduct and courtesy books "attempted to establish first principles first [sic], then a code of behavior based on these principles, that is a system of *morals*, and only as a last consideration *manners* inasmuch as they were the visible result or expression of such morality" (Hemlow 733). It was the mark of the eighteenth-century conduct book, however, to promote a more specifically religious view of both manners and morality. While similar to courtesy books in topic, the conduct books that succeeded them differed by approaching those topics through religion, morality, and self-control (Ousby 198). Yet, one can find works in this genre of both religious and secular concern. William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728) was one of the books most read by the Methodists and the Evangelicals, next to the Bible. Other conduct books dealt solely with polite matters of a more secular nature, for example, *The Rules of Civility* by Antoine de Courtin (1671). Some books were concerned with the servant class or poor readers, others with the conduct of a ruling prince. Many address topics of marriage and childrearing.

In addition, conduct books surfaced in virtually every literary form: in familiar letters, such

as John Norris's *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (1695); in the form of dialogue, as in John Constable's *The Conversation of Gentlemen* (1738); in the memoir, such as *Memoirs Illustrating the Manners of the Present Age* by Charles Pineau-Duclos (1755); in drama, as in *The Ladies Visiting-Day, A Comedy* by Charles Burnaby (1701); in poetry, such as *The Art of Preserving Health: A Poem in Four Books*, by John Armstrong, M.D. (1744); and in the essay, as in Henry Wotton's *An Essay on the Education of Children* (1753).⁴⁴

In terms of age and gender, conduct books offered an equal opportunity approach to training in morals, behavior, education, and dress; titles can be found for women, men, and children. Sylvia Kasey Marks' bibliography of approximately 175 conduct books includes as many titles of books addressed to women as to men. Hemlow notes, however, that the rise of the conduct book for female readers followed the popularity of such books for men, calling the years 1760-1820 the age of courtesy books for women (732). Nancy Armstrong agrees, citing a litany of eighteenth century conduct book writers and noting that Hannah More was one author who made her reputation writing such works.

Indeed, in addition to being for women, conduct literature afforded an opportunity for legitimate writing by women. Such works "offered an opportunity for female writers to express their ideas of moral reform and to fulfil [sic] the function assigned to them as refiners and critics of manners" (Hemlow 733). In an age when women held no recognized authority in the public realm, conduct book writers sought to strengthen the moral and social authority of women in the private realm. Furthermore, the renewal of religious life brought about by the evangelical movement increased the spiritual authority of women which, as evidenced by the impact of More's works, uniquely transcended an otherwise well-marked division between public and private concerns.

During this era of the conduct book for women, a way was cleared for female writers such as Hannah More, a singular author who wrote didactic works pertaining to high and low, men and

⁴⁴ Titles have been shortened.

women. And while her religious and moral views were always foremost, More was equally capable of addressing and influencing more secular affairs.

Bradley complains that Evangelicals such as More “bombarded their countrymen with treatises and manuals on the proper conduct for ‘serious’ men and women to adopt” and that the model of behavior promoted by the Evangelicals was widely followed and responsible for the “cult of respectability and conformity” of middle class Victorian England (145). He cites eight Evangelical conduct books published between 1763 and 1829 (which include four works authored by and one work dedicated to Hannah More), which were widely circulated and were the “forerunners of those innumerable books on how to behave” which became so popular during the Victorian era (149).⁴⁵ Together, these conduct books addressed all aspects of life from politics, to education, from the duty of husbands and wives to each other to Sabbath-day conduct and household economy. The overriding principle for every area of life was that of duty. Indeed, Bradley points out, “No word occurs more often in their manuals and treatises on conduct” (153). These Evangelical conduct books and manuals gave birth to the professional associations and societies which arose later in the nineteenth century and set standards of conduct and ethical guidelines for the professions (Bradley 154).

Several factors contributed to the popularity of conduct books in the eighteenth century. Certainly, the gap between rich and poor was narrowed by the burgeoning and literate middle class, and people became more earnest about the fading class distinctions. The conduct books that characterized eighteenth-century English society were written primarily for upper class readers (Rowbotham 2). Since conduct books by definition address “peculiar information for any class-conscious group” (Mason 4), it follows that in a time which was producing an entirely new

⁴⁵ These works are: *Complete Duty of Man* by Henry Venn (1763), *Enquiry Into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society* by Thomas Gisborne (1775), *An Enquiry Into the Duties of the Female Sex* by Thomas Gisborne (1797), *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great to General Society* by Hannah More (1787), *Strictures on Female Education* by Hannah More (1799), *Hints Toward Forming the Character of a Young Princess* by Hannah More (1805), *Christian Morals* by Hannah More (1813), and *Portraiture of a Christian Gentleman* by William Roberts, dedicated to Hannah More (1829).

class, as well as witnessing more class mobility than ever before, class-consciousness would become epidemic. As one's standing in the social hierarchy became less certain, one needed more certain markers of manners and morals. Thus, there existed a natural link between the genres of the conduct book and the novel. For manners and morals, like the novel, center on the individual and that individual's choices regardless of family or social status.

Implicit in the novel is the central assumption that all behavior is the result of the individual's conscious moral choice. No form of determinism (social or psychological), fate or chance, is permitted any influence here. . . . The individual must assume full responsibility for his conduct, for [the novelist] . . . believes above all in the doctrine that man is what he makes himself.

(Freedman qtd. in Fritzer 51)

Nancy Armstrong convincingly argues that conduct books were key in helping to narrow the wide gap between the upper and lower classes by enabling a diverse range of people to identify and share common economic and domestic ideals (71). The conduct book helped to perpetuate common domestic values, those that could be achieved by virtuous moral conduct, which exceeded the bounds of social class. Furthermore, the ideal woman, as represented in the conduct books as well as in More's work, was defined over and against "the excesses of a decadent aristocracy" (Nancy Armstrong 73). The idea of a "principle of domestic duty" being extended beyond the middle class to form the basis of a general social policy is cited by Armstrong as a central piece of Hannah More's platform for reform (90).

Cruse finds characteristic of the age of the conduct book a small, influential class of readers whose interest in literature was confined to "that which was produced within their own circle and which dealt with that absorbing topic – themselves" (*Shaping of English Literature* 226). Thus, this group of influential readers and writers set an example for their lower class contemporaries.

There is no other phase of society in all our history of which we have so complete and detailed a picture, with touches put in by so many hands. We see members of this privileged class governing, intriguing, going into opposition; dancing, flirting, gambling, sojourning at Bath to take the waters . . . trying to outdo one another in richness and variety of decoration; laying out gardens according to the artificial and fantastic style of the period; taking tea at Hampton Court and supping at Vauxhall; writing at great length witty letters to tell their absent friends of all their activities; making verses to celebrate these occupations and the hundred other trifles that filled their days.

(Cruse *Shaping of English Literature* 227)

Ironically, then, one can look back and see a pattern of self-absorption cultivated by the conduct book audience and magnified by the onset of greater technology and literacy that set the stage for didactic works that would attempt to teach against self-absorption and to promote instead service to God and to one's fellow man.

GUIDE LITERATURE AND SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Like the medieval courtesy book, guide literature, popular in the seventeenth century, was a precursor to the eighteenth century conduct book. Like the practical morality promoted by More in her treatises and tracts, guide literature focused on the practical application of religious principles to everyday life. These works served as “the major outlet for practical divinity” during the seventeenth century (Hunter 27-28). Guide books were concerned primarily with the instruction of youth, particularly in the choice of a marriage partner (Hunter 33), which is, of course, the theme of More's *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*.

In the previous chapter on Evangelicals and the novel, the skeptical attitude of the Puritans toward fiction was addressed. Yet, through the use of the pilgrim allegory, seventeenth century Puritans gradually overcame their objections to fiction (which, unlike allegory, lacks a

connection through symbol to actual truth).⁴⁶ Allegories such as those by Defoe “retain the didactic purposes of both the guide tradition, whose method was perceptual, and spiritual biography, whose method was that of exemplum, but their form fuses precept and example” (Hunter 115). Thus, a purely religious, didactic purpose was achieved through a new form, one with artistic possibilities in all likelihood initially unrecognized by both its readers and its creators. That such literature was “a response not to artistic questions but to practical questions of influence on the reader” (Hunter 115) only confirms the primacy of purpose over form; nevertheless, this new form, once authorized and legitimized, was launched into the skilled hands of those writers who would fashion and refine it into the novel.

In *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, Starr examines how the 1708 work *An Account of Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of a Private Gentleman; with Reflections thereon, etc.* (published anonymously but attributed by many to Defoe) demonstrates the transition from guide literature to fiction. And in *The Reluctant Pilgrim*, Hunter shows how Defoe's works form a bridge between the traditional guide book and the novel, arguing that the works of Defoe played an essential role in the progress of the novel inasmuch as it grew out of the guide tradition. For example, in *The Family Instructor*, Defoe combines the typical concerns of the guide book with the drama of a story that unfolds through dialogue (Hunter 44). This literary approach represents a marriage of the Pilgrim guide book to narrative that resulted in the spiritual autobiography, one of the most common forms of guide literature. The spiritual autobiography was emphasized particularly by the Puritans, but was popular among other sects as well. For the Christian, of course, undue focus on one's self was undesirable, but since the Reformation greater importance had been placed on the state of the individual soul; to examine and write about such a subject required no further justification (Starr 4). Indeed, the evangelical movement owes a great debt to the literature of spiritual biography. Wilberforce was converted to Christianity through reading

⁴⁶ One finds such suspicions lingering in the charge made by the author of *Pamela Censured* (1741) against Richardson for being “HALF-EDITOR, HALF-AUTHOR,” which Vallone attributes to Richardson's daring to blur the generic boundaries between fiction and truth (24).

Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion*, and Reverend John Newton was tremendously influenced by reading Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* while journeying upon one of his slave ships (Bradley 52).

Spiritual biography is closely linked to yet another literary genre, that is, the sermon. The religious aspect of *Robinson Crusoe*, argues Spearman, "is introduced through reflections of Crusoe himself and his attempts to teach Friday, which make them a kind of sermon. This is connected with a definite aspect of contemporary culture -- the appetite for sermons." Some of the most important works of English prose from the seventeenth century are sermons, and this appetite grew with the rise of Protestantism into first half of the nineteenth century (Spearman 156). This phenomenon helps explain to the modern reader, perplexed by the immense popularity of More's preachy prose, the appeal of her works to her contemporary audience.

Biography was long the staple of religious periodicals and journals (Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 66). By the end of the eighteenth century, however, when evangelicals perceived a shortage of public lives worthy of emulation, the writers of both sermons and spiritual biography faced a shortage of subjects. In a sermon published in 1802, Reverend B. W. Mathias observed,

Men of honour are the respected personages of the day, and what are these? compounds of the duellist, the gambler, the debauchee, the seducer, the adulterer, and not unfrequently, the intentional suicide. Such are the persons idolized in many circles. (qtd. in Bradley 146)

Thus began an effort by the Evangelicals, an effort which peaked in the mid-nineteenth century, to publish series such as the Great Lives that provided readers with examples of people whose spiritual lives and conduct were those the Evangelicals sought to imitate. So while evangelicals opposed the reading of romances and popular novels, works based on real and imitable lives were seen as extremely beneficial. Starr explains that "the belief that spiritual life varies little from man to man, with its corollary that descriptions of such experience are somewhat interchangeable, enabled every man to measure his own spiritual state by that of others" (18).

Furthermore, as Dale Spender points out in describing the biographical beginnings of narrative fiction (30-46), the line between nonfiction and fiction in biography (particularly in autobiography) is often unclear. Biographies were frequently written for the purpose of family record-keeping, and the motivations for embellishment or rearrangement of the facts were numerous. Many of the critics and publications that proscribed novel reading lauded biographical accounts which, more often than not read like some of the most sensational of romances.

Biography influenced the growing support for fiction in other, subtler ways, as well:

. . . because biography and autobiography incorporate some of the features of fiction -- character, a story, the selection of detail and information, etc. -- the category of real and true stories was being transformed as this new genre was introduced. (Spender 30)

Such an approach to narrative served to reduce the importance in emphasis on events and incidents. As reflected in More's later tracts and tales, the pivotal point of all spiritual autobiography was the individual's conversion. All other incidents in these narratives are seen in terms of before, during, or after that central event (Starr 40). Thus, as the emphasis of such narrative shifted toward the effects, less importance was placed on specific names, dates, and other facts, and readers and writers alike discovered the value of the narrative (Mayo 361). In the spiritual autobiography, instruction and narration are separate elements of the work. Yet, one can find even within the most pious of the spiritual autobiographies an "unseemly relish for sheer narration" and more "circumstantial detail" than necessary for a purely spiritual reflection (Starr 27). Starr argues that it wasn't until Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* that instruction and narration were so ingeniously united. Following this tradition, More's didactic fiction, particularly that written for the Cheap Repository, effectively combines character, incident, and instruction into one seamless narrative. This and similar efforts were written for the purpose, not of mere entertainment, but of transforming the reader's character and conduct. With didacticism now accepted in a variety of forms, including fiction, the conservative, Puritan taboo against fiction per se had been removed.

DIDACTIC FICTION

The representation of social and moral ideals that seemed so naturally occurring in the periodical and the conduct literature was slower to come to the novel; slow indeed, considering that fiction as a didactic medium had a long tradition. Note, for example, the defense offered a couple of centuries earlier by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene's* prefatory "A letter to the Authors" :

The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: which for that I conceived should be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historical fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter than for profit of the ensample.

While initially the novel as a form seemed "unpromising as a medium for the representation of a cultural ideal," conduct books, though unequivocating in their opposition to the reading of "Romances," had carved out a place for a type of fiction that could be acceptable for female readers; at the same time, something was needed to safely fill their increasing leisure time (Mitra 55, 56, 57). What better suited the purpose than fiction that could instruct while it entertained? And who better to fill the need than women themselves.

The late eighteenth-century literary period that has been "seen as a blank space," Margaret Ann Doody has argued, "is precisely that which sees the development of the paradigm for women's fiction of the nineteenth century -- something hardly less than the paradigm of the nineteenth-century novel itself" (267-68). This paradigm must include the didactic genres, such as those represented by the work of Hannah More, whom Myers describes as "[a]rguably the most influential woman of her day" ("Hannah More's Tracts for the Times" 264, 265) and whose influence on the women writers who followed her is widely recognized (Davis 30).

Through the growth of didactic fiction, which in form if not in substance was so similar to

the popular novel of the circulating libraries, the reputation of the novel as a genre was well on the road to redemption. So while in the educational prescription offered in Hannah More's works the reading of popular novels was disallowed, the inclusion of didactic fiction that included periodical essays by Addison and Johnson and abridged Shakespeare was encouraged (Ford 227). Although More's inclusion of didactic fiction and even some kinds of novels (such as *Don Quixote*), represented a much less narrow approach to reading than did some other Evangelicals (Quinlan 146) the possibilities for fiction of offering the reader morality rather than immorality, instruction rather than mere amusement, and edification rather than debasement were clearly being recognized. Thus,

a style of fiction was developed where the intention was to give an illusion of reality through the setting of the story in order to give "verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative" -- or to put it more bluntly, to coat the powder of the moral in the jam of a good narrative. (Rowbotham 4-5)

In her essay "Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books," Hemlow describes the development of a genre she terms the courtesy novel, which includes works by Burney as well as More's *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*. Hemlow's essay presents a convincing case for the courtesy book as the model for Burney's didactic fiction, and More's novel represents a perfect marriage between the conduct book and the novel. Indeed, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* has been called "perhaps the most significant example" of the genre of Evangelical conduct novels for girls (Vallone 172).

Along with its moral purpose and lessons and its use of the conduct book as a model, the courtesy or conduct novel is also distinguished by a plot that is advanced by the conduct of the characters rather than incident, with behavior and deportment comprising the center of the action (Hemlow 760, 761). As in the spiritual biography, then, plot and incident are subordinate to the development of the character through conversion or conduct. Burney herself viewed *Camilla* and

similar works as examples of a new genre and defended them in her Preface to *The Wanderer*:

What is the species of writing that offers fairer opportunities for conveying useful precepts? It is, or ought to be, a picture of supposed, but natural and probable human existence. It holds, therefore, in its hands our best affections; it exercises our imaginations; it points out the path of honor; and gives to juvenile credulity knowledge of the world, without ruin, or repentance; and the lessons of experience without its tears.

Not that Burney's approach was new; Richardson recommended *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Sir Charles Grandison* as conduct books. His work is in the "direct line of descent" of the conduct book (Hombeak 8). So much advice on conduct and proper morals is contained in these works, in fact, that a separate compilation of conduct book-worthy advice taken from the novels was issued in 1755, called *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions and Reflections, Contained in the Histories of Pamela, Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison, Under Proper Heads*.

Later, toward the beginning of the nineteenth century, writers such as Maria Edgeworth began producing conduct books for the young that, rather than being written in essay form, were presented in the guise of entertaining stories (Rowbotham 2-3). And in the first decades of the nineteenth century, so-called "silver-fork" novels served as guides to the newest members of the middle and upper classes (Rowbotham 3). More revolutionary novelists such as William Godwin had a share in this newfound usefulness for the novel. In his preface to the 1794 propagandist novel *Caleb Williams*, Godwin commented on the ability of novels to communicate truth to "persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach." Accordingly, observed Godwin, "if the author shall have taught a valuable lesson, without subtracting from the interest and passion by which a performance of this sort ought to be characterized, he will have reason to congratulate himself upon the vehicle he has chosen" (19-20).

Thus, through the combined influence of the didactic writers and novelists of the

eighteenth century, a new approach to fiction and to moral teaching emerged. Didactic novels, in fact, shared a similar purpose and method with conduct books (Lott 36). Indeed, Mitra argues that, ideologically speaking, “the novel was no different from the conduct books, the periodical literature and educational manuals; formally, the distinctions are often blurred” (6). As this new potential use became clearer, the novel slowly began to emerge from its mired reputation to gain recognition and acceptance by an audience that had been among its fiercest critics. Hannah More played a central role in popularizing this potential for the novel, one that the few critics of this vein of literature generally recognize. For while Fanny Burney’s novels, written with a purpose similar to More’s, outlived More’s works in critical esteem, More’s *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* was vastly more popular in its time and, subsequently, more influential on the taste of readers.

Not surprisingly, critics differ in their interpretations of the causes for this success, as well as its results, some interpreting along gender lines, others according to class concerns. For example, according to Nancy Armstrong, all of More’s works, including *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, participated in what she describes as the sublimation of social (class) conflict through the redirection of such conflict into the domestic realm; by pointing readers toward the same moral and domestic virtues and successfully demonstrating the attainability of such virtues regardless of economic or social class (71-73), society could substitute gender concerns for economic and class concerns. It is this redirection of literary attention that, Armstrong argues, helped to elevate “the most unpromising material of all” (96), the novel, to artistic and social prominence. Thus it was the novel’s didactic potential (and subsequent successful use) that transformed the genre from that viewed as merely vulgar entertainment to that of great literary and artistic esteem.

Krueger, on the other hand, finds the significance of More’s work precisely in how it addresses social and class concerns. Krueger cites More as the first example among “the most widely published social writers” of the nineteenth century and one of the women writers who played a role in “adapting the practices of female preachers to social fiction” (Krueger 4, 14). He further asserts that

More undoubtedly represents the best example in this period of a women [sic] writer whose work insinuated subversion while overtly preaching on behalf of the patriarchy . . . [her] authoritarian, unitary texts give way to alternative perspectives and marginal voices. (14)

Because the novel was the literary form furthest outside the traditional bounds of acceptability among religious conservatives, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, of all More's works, was most significant in achieving this effect. Indeed, More is credited with initiating a literary movement that employed fiction for propagandist purposes and for developing a new public opinion about such literature (Kovacevic 147). Because of her novel, More's "impact on her own generation was sufficiently strong" (150), enough to earn an entire chapter in Kovacevic's study of the social novel, *Fact into Fiction*. Ousby includes *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* in his short list of widely read conduct books of the eighteenth century (199). Furthermore, Krueger reinterprets the works of female social novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot in the context of their literary precursors among women preachers such as More, rather than in relation to Dickens or Disraeli (15). Kestner lists More first in his canon of female social fiction and notes that the "period from the later eighteenth century until the thirties is dominated by More, Edgeworth, Tonna, and the early Martineau" (16, 20). Kestner describes More's tracts *Village Politics* and *The Lancashire Collier Girl* (discussed in further detail below) as "early forms of social fiction" in their establishment of some of the elements of later works in the genre: emphasis on dialogue around conflicting ideologies, centering on characters from the lower classes, the promotion of good works, and "the assumption that the ideology has been illustrated by evidence or is itself sufficiently evidentiary" (23, 25). Themes in More's later works of social fiction include the harmful consequences of rioting, the distress experienced by lower class women in particular and the ill-effects of vice on domestic life (Kestner 23, 29, 30). In tracing the development of the industrial theme in English fiction, Kovacevic places More among the most significant contributors to the rise of social fiction in England's industrial age, crediting her for "truly popularizing the

genre" (49). It is, Kovacevic writes,

to Hannah More that we must turn to study the use of fiction for propagandist purposes; she it was who initiated this important literary trend, and such was her grasp on the psychology of her reading public that she could provide fiction as exactly suited to their tastes as to their pockets. She was a past master of the art of holding their attention while unobtrusively conveying her message. (147)

One of More's biographers concurs:

Thirty years before Disraeli, forty years before Dickens, Hannah More did something to make the two nations known to one another....she had, in the words of a contemporary, made a revelation on thought when, in her Tracts, she let the poor know that the rich had faults. (M. G. Jones 148)

There is merit in both of these schools of critical interpretations of More's work. More was indeed concerned with both social and domestic concerns, and her work reflects this. Yet, because economic and class issues were secondary to her concern with spiritual matters, critics might justifiably find those former issues "sublimated" to her greater concern. More viewed all issues through the eyes of her Evangelical faith, which, by definition, would necessarily influence social and domestic, as well as individual and spiritual, concerns. What is most significant about More's work is how it achieved such a powerful effect -- in both literary and social terms -- on these and other concerns.

Much of this success can be found in the fact that More's didacticism was not solely directed to the irreligious. In upholding the theological and political views she shared with religious conservatives, More spoke in a voice of legitimate and recognized moral authority which empowered her to direct her didacticism to those in her own faith community. More is viewed as participating in a larger "evangelical assault on authoritarian clerical rule" which provided women writers with a rhetoric to condemn any new priesthood -- secular or sacred -- that barred women's access to moral authority" (Kreuger 86). More's works often condemned the prevailing patriarchal

values for failing to uphold Christian ethics and familial and social responsibility (see Kreuger's analysis of More as a political writer). Indeed, it was her Christian faith that empowered More's call for change across the social spectrum. "Christianity," asserts Kreuger, "legitimized women's participation in the political debate while secular philosophy sought to exclude them" (14). If the prevailing doctrine of the conduct literature dictated, as Lott puts it, that women "theatricalize appropriate conduct for the more verbal male sex, teaching by example rather than by precept . . . by providing a 'silent example' of correct behavior, making effective use of . . . 'looks and glances'" (16), then More's precept-based didacticism is daring indeed. Yet, it was clearly More's evangelical Christian beliefs that provided More with the "literary innovations" that made her work so successful. More's work is described as

insisting on the continuity of private and public virtue against the notion of separate spheres; privileging simple, concrete language over the ornate of abstract; imbuing vulgar dialects with authority; and most important, recognizing the political implications of the diffusion of narrative authority in the novel . . . [manipulating] the ideology and rhetoric of evangelicalism to shape social discourse. (Kreuger 14-15, 95)

Undergirded by this moral and religious authority, More, unlike her counterpart Mary Wollstonecraft, survived the reactions of religious conservatives and anti-Jacobites, leaving her work as "an important model for the next generation of female social writers" (Kreuger 95). As a member of both evangelical and literary circles, Hannah More was uniquely positioned to bridge what had become a widening gap between cerebral and celestial concerns. And it was largely because of More that evangelicals overcame the distrust they had shared with those in the Methodist movement of imaginative literature (Davis 19).

MORE AND HER CONTEMPORARIES IN DIDACTIC LITERATURE

Modern criticism generally lacks appreciation for didactic art, and thus works such as, not only More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, but also works like *Sir Charles Grandison* by as canonical an author as Richardson are shelved as anecdotal but uninteresting notches in the timeline of the novel's history. Contemporary readers, however, held a different view. Though it is difficult to understand the appeal of works like these through modern eyes, it seems likely, considering the novel's history of criticism on both moral and literary grounds, that without the didactic use of the novel form, the novel would not likely have risen above the ill reputation that excluded it for so long from the category of polite literature.

The father of all didactic novels, *Sir Charles Grandison*, served as one of the foremost models for later writers of didactic fiction. All of Richardson's novels, in fact, have been referred to as "anti-novels" (Brophy 18) because their moral content and didactic purpose went so drastically against the grain of the romance tradition. Written in the tradition of the *Spectator* essays, *Sir Charles Grandison* was praised for being a complete system of life and manners, even a worthy substitute for a tutor and a school (Marks 34). *Grandison* can fairly be assessed as a lengthy discussion or debate over issues related to conduct, morality, and religion (for example, see Sylvia Kasey Marks, whose critical review of the book is subtitled *The Compleat Conduct Book*). *Grandison* approaches issues of conduct, morals, and manners mainly through dialogue and models for the reader the "continual challenge to discussion of delicate questions of moral discrimination" (R. T. Jones 143). The use of dialogue and discussion is, of course, the same approach used by More in many of her didactic tracts, including her most highly praised one, *Village Politics*. In the tradition of the spiritual biography and the early periodical fiction, didactic works such as *Sir Charles Grandison* and the Cheap Repository Tracts minimize the role of plot and incident in favor of emphasis on how inner thought and character lead to specific kinds of conduct and consequences. As a conduct book, *Sir Charles Grandison* in particular exemplifies how one individual's "private actions not only change lives but begin a chain reaction of benevolence" (Brophy 105). This idea, of course, was central in the literature and programs of the

later evangelical movement.

In addition to his novels' didacticism, Richardson's work helped to establish a place for women novelists such as More, whose writing tended to focus more on the interior lives and domestic concerns popularized by Richardson's characters. Pat Rogers states that Richardson gave women a voice, "both in the direct sense that he had created strong and independent [female] characters at the heart of his works, and also indirectly through the evolution of a novelistic idiom which granted primacy to traditionally 'female' attributes of feeling and domestic virtue" (148).

One of the female novelists to precede Hannah More in the attempt to transform the novel into a didactic medium was Frances Burney. A contemporary of More, Burney also was part of the London literary circle comprised of Johnson, Reynolds, Garrick, and the Bluestockings. Like More, Burney was an admirer of Richardson's work (Wynne-Davies 376), but not a fan of the novel as a genre. Burney insisted to her family that her last book, *Camilla* (1795), was not a "novel," but a "work," and her family expressed satisfaction with its basis in moral lessons and intentions. Upon the publication of *Camilla*, Burney's stepmother predicted, "Novels shall be the books for Parents as well as Children to study, as books of Education" (qtd. in Hemlow 758). Thus, Burney's work forms one more link in the direct connection between conduct books and novels.

Her years spent in London provided More with still other models of didactic art. While Garrick displayed the power of the stage to instruct, More's friendship with Sir Joshua Reynolds inspired her appreciation of the power of the fine arts to direct the mind and elevate the thoughts. "I hope the poets and painters will at last bring the Bible into fashion, and that people will get to like it from taste, though they are insensible to its spirit, and afraid of its doctrines," More wrote home in 1776. "I love this great genius [Sir Joshua Reynolds], for not being ashamed to take his subjects from the most unfashionable of all books" (Letter in Roberts *i* 50).

While More read and admired theological works by the clergy, such as Bishop Lowth's

Isaiah, she found such works “better calculated for scholars than for plain Christians.” Lowth’s *De Sacra Poesi*, on the other hand, a work of both literary and religious value, she praised as “wonderfully entertaining and instructive.” More claims the book taught her “to consider the Divine Book it illustrates under many new and striking points of view; it teaches to appreciate [sic] the distinct and characteristic excellence of the sacred poets and historians, in a manner wonderfully entertaining and instructive” (Letter in Roberts *i* 137). In a letter from More to her fellow bluestocking, Frances Boscawen, the literary influences of such serious writers as Reverend John Newton and Samuel Johnson can be seen. More describes Newton’s *Cardiphonia* (whose author was unknown to More at the time) as “full of vital, experimental religion” and “rational and consistent piety.” More also praises Johnson in his *Life of Addison* for his “exquisite discrimination of character,” “exactness of criticism,” and “moral discernment” (Roberts *i* 111).

The significant influence of William Wilberforce on Hannah More’s life has been previously noted. What is additionally notable is the marker his work provides in the reading audience for didactic religious works. When Wilberforce produced his *Practical View of Christianity* in 1797, his publisher initially “was not anxious to take it, for, though the wit and brilliance of Mrs. Hannah More might create sales, religious works in general had then but a poor audience” (Howse 100). Wilberforce’s work was, however, immediately and remarkably successful, selling 7,500 copies in six months and numerous editions in the years following (Howse 101). Within a few years, the market for religious books had been solidly established; from 1801 to 1835, religious books comprised 22.2 percent of all books published (Patrick Scott 224).

Although More’s literary diet was heavy on dense, prosaic writings (more often than not theological works), her growing appreciation for literature that both pleased and instructed is evident in her correspondence. Of course, from as early as the years of her friendship with the dramatist David Garrick, More recognized the potential power in combining entertainment with

instruction. Indeed, it was “from Garrick that More learned to make her didactic art entertaining,” and she agreed with Garrick that “the theater should instruct as well as please” (Ford 17, 18). This is the sentiment that would eventually lead to the writing of the Cheap Repository Tracts and *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*.

In applying the literary theory of M. H. Abrams to the work of Hannah More, Marlene Hess argues that More’s didacticism represents a “collision” of the pragmatic and the expressive bases of literature, both of which replaced the earlier mimetic purposes for art (3-4). Hess states that an underlying pragmatism that characterized the literary theory of the eighteenth century represented by Samuel Johnson toward the end gave way to an expressive theory that, under the influence of thinkers such as Locke and Hobbes (and I would add Rousseau), placed increasing emphasis on the mind and emotions of the writer and on the writing process (4-6). Thus More’s works, as will be shown below, exhibit both the art of instruction valued by her predecessors as well as the more expressive, sentimental approach that came to characterize the Romantic literature of the nineteenth century. This perhaps explains the critical and popular acclaim of a didacticism that seems so stale and strange today. However, the turn of the eighteenth century was time ripe for a writer with More’s purpose and skill to nurture this newly birthed audience for literature both entertaining and didactic.

HANNAH MORE, THE DIDACTIC WRITER

“No age ever owed more to a female pen than to yours,” wrote the Bishop of London to Hannah More in 1799. “All your exertions tend to the same point -- the cause of virtue and religion; and whether you write for a duchess or Will Chip, you are sure of doing good.” (Roberts *ii* 52). In another letter written some years earlier, the Bishop had lauded More for, in writing *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, daring to use her pen “to disturb the sweet repose and tranquility of the fashionable world,” and stated further:

Your style and manner are so marked, and so confessedly superior to those of any other moral writer of the present age that you will be immediately detected by every one that pretends to any taste in judging of composition, or any skill in discriminating the characteristic excellencies of one author from another. . . . There are but few persons, I will venture to say, in Great Britain, that could write such a book -- that could convey so much sound, evangelical morality, and so much genuine Christianity, in such neat and elegant language.

(qtd. in Roberts *i* 353)

While the Bishop's praise of More's writing style was warm, More herself (along with some others) criticized her skill in writing for its rapidity and lack of revision. "Though rather a careless writer myself, owing to no extreme and blamable rapidity," she once wrote, "I yet think purity of style of no little importance: as far as concerns perspicuity, it is one of the great charms of composition: farther than this I am not fastidious. Style is an excellent garnish, but it is not of itself substantial food" (Letter in Roberts *ii* 406). For More, style always took second place to didactic substance, from her first publication to her last.⁴⁷

More's works were always directed at the spiritual condition of the reader and the social obligations incumbent upon the spiritually aware individual. Such a focus reflects a subtle shift in the didactic tradition, a movement from sublime to more sublunary concerns. While More's ancestors in didactic literature, Dante, for example, viewed "the affective motives of art in the context of the soul's movement towards salvation," More's generation of didacticism "pointed at the consequences of art for moral behavior . . . [and] . . . as an incitement to virtuous conduct in this life" (Montgomery 3). This change in didactic focus parallels a similar shift in genre: the epic

⁴⁷ This doesn't mean that literary style was of no value to More. Her correspondence is filled with commentary, praises, and criticisms of her voluminous reading. In a letter home from London in 1776, More relayed a conversation she had with Samuel Johnson about the writing style of the Dean of Gloucester. Roberts adds his own note to the letter, stating that Hannah had once asked the Dean if he thought it "advisable to polish his style rather more" (*i* 49n). Clearly, writing style, not only substance, was of importance, if only secondary, to More.

poem is highly suitable for directing the reader toward thoughts of things eternal while the essay, tract, and, finally, the novel are more effective messengers for day-to-day social and political concerns. More's didactic style emphasized the way in which both eternal and daily concerns were inextricably connected.

More's first work, a drama titled *The Search After Happiness* and originally written as a recitation exercise for the students in her family's girls' school, was an attempt "to furnish a substitute for the improper custom, which then prevailed, of allowing plays, and those not always of the purest kind, to be acted by young ladies in boarding schools" (Preface to the play in *Works* i 110-11). This play, first published in 1773, employs the "familiar didactic trope of a frustrating search for happiness" (Ford 8) in order to teach that happiness can not be found in fashionable dress, an unprincipled life, or empty learning, but through a deliberated pursuit of a virtuous life. Ford compares the characters of this drama to the travelers in Johnson's *Rasselas*, which More surely would have read, who face their own search for an elusive peace of mind (9). It is interesting to see More take the same approach in this very early work as she does in later years: sufficiently reinforcing traditional roles and ideas about women to gain the support of the majority of her readers, and yet launching ample enough criticism against conventionally held views to make some readers squirm. As Ford points out, in this first didactic piece, More's view of godly women as presented in the play both affirms and questions conventional views (11).

More's next play, and her first public production, was *The Inflexible Captive*, published in 1774. The message of this work, the story of a captured Roman general who refuses to trade his country's sure defeat for his own freedom, was clear. More's ingenious use of a classical setting to promote Christian and conservative values brought her didactic art to greater development than before. As Ford states:

More did not want her dramas to bore "the profane" among the elite, her primary target for edification. . . . In the Advertisement, she appealed to the great's Francophile tendencies. . . . In the prologue, she summarized similarities

between classical and sacred stories, wooing classically educated sophisticates.

(55)

This work clearly demonstrates at an early stage in her writing career More's ability to draw from and weave together disparate facets of her culture -- in this case, classical allusions and contemporary concerns -- in a manner persuasive to a wide audience.

More returned to an English setting for her next drama, her least didactic and most successful work (bolstering, if not proving, the view that art and didacticism make for a difficult mix), the Garrick-assisted production of *Percy* (1777).⁴⁸ The eloquent tragedy of the tale, credited in the first edition as based on a French play (Hopkins 77), possibly overwhelms the play's central message, a warning about the far-reaching and dangerous consequences of vengeance. (This theme on vengeance was later taken up, specifically in the context of duelling, as one of the many social ills the evangelical movement worked to abolish.)

More's most overtly didactic plays appeared in a collection called *Sacred Dramas*, published in 1782. Although the dramas were published in nineteen editions, critical response was moderate (Hopkins 102). Demers argues that four of More's dramas, "Moses in the Bulrushes," "David and Goliath," "Belshazzar," and "Daniel," are undeserving of their usual dismissal as closet dramas, worthy only of reading by the pupils in the More sisters' schools. Rather, Demers states, these blank-verse dramas "demonstrate a unique dramaturgic control and emphasis, all perfectly consonant with More's experience of the London stage, her mentoring by David Garrick, and the thunderous success of her tragedy, *Percy*" (*Heaven Upon Earth* 143). The literary influences found in these dramas include the poets and prophets of the Bible and the epic style of Milton. The characters, while serving as vehicles for More's ideals of piety and virtue, still retain a winsome human appeal. "As a sacred dramatist More does not simply order or expand

⁴⁸ One measure of *Percy's* success is that, after a twenty-one-night run and a quickly sold out first edition of 4,000 copies, the play earned More 600 pounds, in contrast to the 20 guineas Fanny Burney received the same year for her *Evelina* (Davis 41).

upon biblical incident. She concentrates on a dynamic that is at once faith-directed and psychologically complex....entirely absorbed in the contrast between heavenly and worldly ways” (Demers *Heaven Upon Earth* 144, 145). Demers contrasts the biblical dramas of More, which are “polished, dignified, and unremittingly theocentric,” with contemporary sacred plays that are mere “earthbound and sentimental . . . genteel parlor entertainment” (146). Instead, More appropriated a popular form of entertainment and transformed it into a work more characteristic of a great sermon, but disguised so as to captivate what might otherwise be an unreceptive audience. More was greatly pleased to receive the praise from the Bishop of Chester that the work “would do a vast deal of good” (Letter from More in Roberts *i* 138). Yet, More’s attempt to reach the dissolute members of the upper class through her drama was not, by her own measure, successful (Ford 59). She recognized later that “the word ‘sacred’ in the title is a damper to the dramas” (Letter in Roberts *i* 138). The fact, however, that Clara Reeve, who certainly was no sympathizer with purely didactic writers or religious “enthusiasts,” included More’s *Sacred Dramas* and *Search After Happiness* in the list of “Books for Young Ladies” in her *Progress of Romance* demonstrates at least some literary acceptance for the dramas.

Though she eventually renounced the stage, drama was More’s first literary love. Furthermore, her use of drama for didactic purposes was a literary rarity: the tendency for didactic writers to avoid the drama can probably be attributed to the general animus toward the stage by religious conservatives from the Puritans to the evangelicals (Demers 142). Yet, as indicated above, David Garrick believed that the theater should not only entertain, but also instruct, and under the actor’s tutelage, More learned to mix entertainment with didactic art. Even the simplicity of More’s art followed the lead of Garrick, whose natural style of acting featured a notable contrast to the heavier stylizations of the French stage (Ford 18). Still, More eventually gave up on the idea of a didactic stage, believing instead that the “stage promoted rather than diminished pretense and artifice” (Ford 43). What More failed to achieve on the stage, however, found greater success in her verse and, later, her treatises and tracts.

In her volume of *Sacred Dramas* More included the poem *Sensibility*, which received a more positive reception than the plays. Still an attempt to reach the upper class, the poem is a criticism of the popularity among the upper classes of “sensibility,” the ability to demonstrate refined emotions and taste in what More viewed as an absence of true compassion.⁴⁹ The poem was roundly praised by More’s fellow bluestockings for its attack on “that mock-feeling and sensibility which is at once the boast and disgrace of our times” (Letter by More in Roberts i 138).

Even in writings that celebrated her decidedly secular London friends, More developed her thoughts on religion. *Bas Bleu* (1782) and *Florio* (1782) honored the bluestocking circle and Horace Walpole, respectively. *Bas Bleu* received the accolades of Johnson himself, and King George received his own copy, at his request, copied by More’s own hand (M. G. Jones 51). The poem *Florio*, by celebrating “the transformation of a worldly and epicene bachelor similar to Walpole into a godly and married layman” (Ford 77), expressed the universal evangelical hope for even the most carnal individuals of rebirth and renewal.

More’s first overtly political work was also a poem, *The Slave Trade* (1790), written following Parliament’s failure to abolish the slave trade through several bills brought by William Pitt in the last years of the eighteenth century. The anti-slavery efforts of More and her fellow Evangelical abolitionists has been called “one of the earliest propaganda campaigns of modern society” (Kovacevic 148). Ford finds that the poem marks More’s growth from accommodation of the existing culture to advocacy of cultural and social change (92). *The Slave Trade* is characterized by the pathos More evokes for the figure of the African slave, the just but neglected object, according to More’s thinking, of true “sensibility.”

The first of what would be considered More’s purely didactic works, *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*, was produced in 1788. More had begun her years-long friendship with

⁴⁹ For a more detailed explanation of the eighteenth century notion of “sensibility,” see Ford 60-61.

Reverend John Newton the year before⁵⁰ but had yet to come under the full influence of the evangelical movement. However, it is clear from this work (and from her correspondence) that More was by nature, even at this early stage, uncomfortable with the tastes and values represented by the manners of the “great,” whom she viewed as the “patterns” by which the rest of the world would fashion its manners. The theme of this treatise points out the “ridiculousness” in “the zeal we have for doing good at a distance, while we neglect the little, obvious, everyday, domestic duties which should seem to solicit our attention” (*More Works* i 265). More finds these duties to include: allowing hairdressers and other members of the servant class to observe the Sabbath, expecting servants to earn part of their pay through winnings at family card games, instructing servants to lie by saying the master is not at home, holding concerts or engaging in other gaieties on Sunday, and failing to live lives of active goodness and religious piety.

Bishop Porteus wrote to More in 1787, following his reading of the still-unpublished work, “Can we find any one but yourself that can make the ‘fashionable world’ read books of morality and religion, and find improvement when they are only looking for amusement?” (*Roberts* i 273). George Horne had written to More a couple of years previous to the publication of *Thoughts*, “We can tell people their duty from the pulpit; but you have the art to make them desirous of performing it, as their greatest pleasure and amusement” (*Roberts* i 250). He added in a subsequent letter, “. . . go on by your writings and conversation, to entertain and improve the choicest spirits of a learned age. . . .” (*Roberts* i 337).

Indeed, when *Thoughts* was published the next year, its sales were hugely successful, going through a second edition in little more than a week and a third in four hours; seven editions were sold in a few months (Thompson 81). Queen Charlotte loaned her copy to Fanny Burney, and some years later, in 1795, Burney entered into her “Extract Book” a summary of the customs and sins More recommended to be abolished (Hemlow 747). Published anonymously, the book

⁵⁰ According to Hopkins, the friendship between More and Newton commenced with their correspondence, which began in London in 1787 (146-47).

caused excited speculation about its authorship. According to one biographer, people thought the writer “was assuredly a person of education and of such breeding as had given him a chance to investigate in person the abuses he would reform” (Harland 124). Some thought the Bishop of London himself to be the mystery author. The comments offered by James Stephen in a letter to More in 1811, following the publication of *Practical Piety*, help explain the surprising success of a staid, religious work among readers who were, for the most part, anything but:

If you give, as you prepare us to expect, and as the subject indeed implies, little that is substantially new, you give what is more valuable, old and most important truths in a new and interesting dress. To change even the garb of religious instruction and exhortation is not easy, but is highly useful and important. Nor is it a matter of small account that many who too rarely open a religious book will read a work of yours, even on practical piety, lest they should seem to be ignorant of such novelties in the literary world as are sure to engage general attention. (Letter in Roberts ii 175)

More indeed followed a deliberate plan in her brave addresses to the great, writing to her sister in 1788 “. . . all one can do in a promiscuous society is not so much to start religious topics as to extract from common subjects some useful and awful truth, and to counteract the mischief of a popular sentiment by one drawn from religion; and if I do any little good, it is in this way; and this they will in a degree endure” (Roberts i 280).

Two years later, in 1790, More authored the second of her overtly didactic works, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World, by one of the Laity*, which, like the *Thoughts*, was published anonymously. Having begun her criticism of the fashionable world at the more superficial, external level of manners, More in this work drove to the heart of the matter by examining and critiquing “the present state of religion among a great part of the polite and the fashionable” (Introduction to *An Estimate* in *Works* i 275). According to More’s system, this work was the necessary complement to one on manners, for “manners and principles act reciprocally on each other; and are, by turns, cause, and effect” (Introduction to *An Estimate* in *Works* i 278).

Here More expounds the essential evangelical principles: the inadequacy of mere benevolence in forming the whole of religion; the necessity of a reform of the heart to true Christian faith; the need for professing Christians to lead moral, principled lives that set them apart from the rest of society; the importance of Christian education for children and strong examples set for servants; and the recognition that the Christian faith is based on a belief in the divine authority of God, not merely the moral system of man. In slicing deeper into the conscience and mode of the fashionable life, this work was, not surprisingly, less popular with readers than *Thoughts*. Still, it sold five editions in two years (Thompson 127). More importantly, it was part of that continuing cultural shift, heavily influenced by evangelicals like More, that culminated in a Victorian age marked by an emphasis on social and moral consciousness. As Kovacevic argues, “. . . [I]t is no exaggeration to say that her publications designed for the upper levels of society contributed substantially to that revival of interest in religion which was to become such a marked feature of the Victorian period” (148).

In 1799, More published *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, with a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune*, a work in the vein of the more traditional conduct book. This work went through seven editions in the first year and a total of thirteen editions (Thompson 170). It is not the purpose here to provide an in-depth discussion of the particular curriculum set out by More in this work, but it is relevant to note the continuation of More's literary didacticism and its contribution to the world of letters, and how More's works for polite readers “establish[ed] her stature as a moral and literary authority among her peers” (Krueger 96). Thompson claims that upon the publication of *Strictures*, “Congratulations and compliments arrived from almost every name of religious or literary distinction” (170). In addition, the following letter from Mrs. Kennicott is included among More's correspondences:

I really did not think it possible that I could have heard so much said upon the subject of your book, and so few criticisms to have told you of. . . . I calculate that

50,000 persons have read this *little work*, as you call it, for I think one with another, each copy has had ten readers or hearers. . . . I have no doubt that some hundreds are now forming themselves upon a plan derived from this book. . . . A good and sensible woman, who is leading a very solitary life in the country, on being asked what she could do to divert herself, says she, "I have my spinning wheel and Hannah More; when I have spun off one pound of flax I put on another, and when I have finished my book I begin it again, and I want no other amusement." (Roberts *ii* 45-46)

This anecdote provides a fitting metaphor for More's work, juxtaposed with the useful spinning wheel, praised for the entertaining refreshment from work it provides.

More's next major work, *Hints for Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, published in 1805, represents the practical application to a particular case of the principles set forth in *Strictures*; it is squarely within the conduct book tradition. The occasion for the work was the education of Princess Charlotte of Wales, which More (along with much of the nation, including George III) viewed as "the most weighty concern of the Christian West" at that time (Ford 224). More asserts in her introduction to the work that no such conduct book would be needed in the case of a prince; but, as More had been arguing in her works for many years, a proper system for educating females (high or low) was but too rare an occurrence. So, at the acknowledged risk of "not only officiousness, but presumption, that a private individual should thus hazard the obtrusion of unsolicited observations on the proper mode of forming the character of an English princess" (Preface to *Hints* in *Works ii* 5), More produced a work in the tradition of the conduct book that went beyond the bounds of tradition by addressing the education of a female, rather than male, heir to royalty. Ford points out that such a project "presumed a degree of audacity on More's part. A schoolteacher's daughter from Bristol normally did not pontificate on the education of the second in line to the British throne" (224). Nor, it might be added, did the British throne normally receive and praise advice from such a source. But, once again, More's propensity for bridging cultural and social chasms and her diplomatic skill provided unusual opportunities for

propagating her principles and ideas. Thus, her didactic art gained a royal as well as a mass following. While the work was “eminently popular” upon its publication, it went through a mere six editions (Thompson 237), far fewer than More’s preceding works, perhaps in part because of the apparent narrowness of its subject.

While many historians inaccurately criticize the evangelicals for focusing unduly on the reform of the lower and working classes while ignoring the middle and upper classes, Bradley correctly points out that the Evangelicals’ greatest efforts toward reform were directed not at the poor, but at the middle and upper classes. In support of this argument, Bradley quotes More from her *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*: “. . . [T]heir lives [those of the upper class] are naturally regarded as patterns by which the manners of the rest of the world are to be fashioned” (148). Indeed, Bradley observes, “The Evangelicals’ most persistent complaint was about the dominance throughout society of the views and habits of the aristocracy . . . the principle of honor, the cult of fashion, and a penchant for ostentatious and frivolous diversions” (153). Kreuger argues that the prevailing tendency of critics to view More’s tracts for the poor and middle classes and their contribution to the development of the genre of social fiction outside the context of More’s other didactic works has served to diminish the importance and originality of More’s social ideas and her place in the progress of social discourse (95-96). Indeed, the significance of More’s didactic influence is found in her ability to reach readers from all classes. Her efforts at reform among the lower classes began with *Village Politics* and culminated with the Cheap Repository Tracts.

The first of More’s tracts, entitled *Village Politicks; by Will Chip, a Country Carpenter*, was published in 1792 after

letters poured in upon Hannah More, by every post, from persons of eminence, earnestly calling upon her to produce some little popular tract which might serve as a counteraction to [the writings of French revolutionaries]. The sound part of the community cast their eyes upon

her as one who had shown an intimate knowledge of human nature, and had studied it successfully in all its varieties, from the highest to the lowest classes, and the clear and lively style of whose writings had been found so generally attractive. (Roberts i 413)

The resulting tract, written in the form of a dialogue between a blacksmith named Jack Anvil and a mason named Tom Hod, manages “by plain and irresistible arguments, expressed in language pure and universally intelligible [to expose] the folly and atrocity of the revolutionary doctrines” of the French Revolution (Thompson 135-36). These revolutionary doctrines had been recently popularized by Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* (the first part of which had been published in 1791, followed by the second in 1792). Published anonymously, *Village Politics* represented to More, at first, “a sort of writing repugnant to my nature” (Roberts i 431), or rather “un-Johnsonian language,” as Hopkins puts it (205). Repugnant or not, the tract was immensely successful, its circulation “incalculable” (Thompson 136). Hester Thrale Piozzi paid to have the tract translated into Welsh for distribution in her homeland; translations also were made into French and Italian (Hopkins 209). Thousands were purchased by both the poor and the wealthy, and thousands more by the government for free distribution. “Its success was a revelation of how powerful a weapon the cheap tract might be,” as it was designed to “supplant” the Jacobinical tracts so popular and accessible at the time (Howse 102).

The success of *Village Politics* encouraged More to venture on an even more extensive undertaking. This was to produce regularly, every month, three tracts which would consist of

stories, ballads, and Sunday readings, written in a lively and popular manner; by these means she hoped to circulate religious knowledge as well as innocent entertainment, by way of counteraction to the poison which was continually flowing through the channel of vulgar, licentious, and seditious publications.

(Roberts i 455)

The project grew out of a recognition that such literature was already being effectively employed -- by More's ideological opponents. As More explained in a letter to fellow evangelical and Claphamite Zachary Macauley: "Vulgar and indecent penny books were always common, but speculative infidelity, brought down to the pockets and capacities of the poor, forms a new era in our history. This requires strong counteraction" (Roberts *i* 473). More's old friend Horace Walpole was among the first to offer to underwrite the project (Newell 15).

Although religious and moral tracts had been around a long time, writers had not tried to entertain their readers with the instruction contained in the tracts (Quinlan 84). Hannah More was the pioneer in exploiting an idea advanced by her predecessor in the Sunday School movement, Sarah Trimmer: "to reject the expository style of older tracts in favor of narrative and verse (Quinlan 85). There is little doubt that More is under obligation to Trimmer and her *Family Magazine* which served as a model for the Cheap Repository Tract (see Thompson 150-51). Yet it is equally clear that by adopting stories and songs as well as the format of the chap-book and the broad-sheet, More "broke new ground" in popular literature (M. G. Jones 139).

Part of the success of the tracts can be attributed to More's deliberate pricing, which put their cost to the reader under that of the Jacobean tracts (Thompson 152) and those of Sarah Trimmer, which had fetched several shillings apiece (Brown 123). More's biographer explains, "As she proposed to undersell the trash she meant to oppose, she found that the expense would prevent the possibility of carrying on the scheme without a subscription, and she no sooner published proposals of her plan than it was warmly taken up by the wisest and best characters in the country" (Roberts *i* 456).

The greatest obstacle More faced in the project, though, was not in circulation or popularity. In fact, there was already a high demand for works of fiction among lower class readers (Quinlan 88). As one of her contemporaries perceived it, there was a greater risk than success in More's undertaking:

The most difficult task, however, was that of introducing the evidences of Christianity to the uneducated, to the perversion of whom the arts of the revolutionists were especially directed. . . . Something was wanted which might at once instruct the poor, and put them on their guard; which would enter into their habits of argument; something which would come home to their feelings, by which they are much more influenced than by even the simplest and clearest reasoning; something which would, in their minds, dispose of the whole question; something which would anticipate the enemy on his ground, and rescue the poor on their own principles. . . . Songs and tracts had been to a great extent influential in the corruption of the lower orders of France, and the same machinery was now worked by the revolutionists of England. It seemed therefore wise to employ this kind of weapon against the cause it had hitherto been principally instrumental to support. (Thompson 149-150, 151)

To use the very weapons being directed against all that More and her sympathizers believed: no less than this formed the basis of More's project. Surely to most conservative minds, ample ammunition could be found among more conventional devices such as sermons and scriptures. Yet, Roberts explains, More recognized the potential of a newer vehicle for her didacticism:

Being aware that sermons, catechisms, and other articles of preceptive piety were abundantly furnished by the excellent institutions already formed, she preferred what was novel and striking to what was merely didactic. As the school of Paine had been labouring to undermine, not only religious establishments, but good government, by the alluring vehicles of novels, stories, and songs, she thought it right to fight them with their own weapons. (i 455)

More recognized what had been a huge gap in the literary offerings of her youth. There was little between the two extremes of pure and fanciful romance and the straightforward prose of the periodical. "[A]dverting to the multitude of improving and entertaining books which were daily issuing from the press, for the use of children and young persons, [More] added, 'In my early youth there was scarcely any thing between 'Cinderella' and the 'Spectator.'" (Roberts ii 317).

Certainly, More recognized that like the biblical Esther, “for such a time as this,” a time of increased literacy and leisure time, she was in a position to take her pen in an altogether new direction from the highly stylized verse and essays of her earlier years.

In an offering entitled *The Sunday School*, More reveals her purpose for writing the tracts. In this tale, a thinly disguised account of More’s own efforts to establish her Sunday Schools, the central character of Mrs. Jones explains to one of the parish farmers why such schools are so necessary:

And I, farmer, think that to teach good principles to the lower classes, is the most likely way to save the country. Now, in order to do this, we must teach them to read. [The farmer objects that teaching the poor to read may cause more harm than good.] So it may, said Mrs. Jones, if you only teach them to read, and then turn them adrift to find out books for themselves.

(The Works of Hannah More i 74)

More adds the following footnote to the preceding statement by Mrs. Jones:

It was this consideration chiefly, which stimulated the conductors of the Cheap Repository to send forth that variety of little books so peculiarly suited to the young. They considered that by means of the Sunday schools, multitudes were now taught to read, who would be exposed to be corrupted by all the ribaldry and profaneness of loose songs, vicious stories, and especially by the new influx of corruption arising from jacobinical and atheistical pamphlets, and that it was a bounden duty to counteract such temptations. *(The Works of Hannah More i 74n)*

Additionally, More wrote to Bishop Beadon in 1801: “To teach the poor to read, without providing them with *safe* books, has always appeared to me an improper measure; and this induced me to the laborious undertaking of the Cheap Repository Tracts” (Roberts *ii* 73).

Over the course of 1792 to 1798, approximately one hundred tracts were produced for the Cheap Repository, about half of these written by More herself (Myers “Tracts for the Times”

266) and many others by her sisters. More's contribution went beyond sheer quantity, however; it was her pen that added "sparkle and brilliance" to the effort (Howse 103). M.G. Jones finds the literary value of the tracts to "rank high," stating, "Most of them are vivid, picturesque, and dramatic stories written in simple, forceful, unpretentious English" (148). Indeed, More has been judged the "most successful of all the pamphleteers" (Quinlan 74-75). In the first year of the Cheap Repository alone, around two million tracts were sold (Thompson 171). Myers describes this as "an astonishing record" that had never been seen in the history of English literature ("Tracts for the Times" 266). More also has been credited with being one of the first authors to serialize fiction in the "to be continued . . ." mode (Pickering "The First Part-Issue of Fiction"). No wonder, then, that the first publication of the tracts can be viewed as "a signal event in the history of popular literature" (Rosman *Evangelicals and Culture* 20).

One year after More began publishing her tracts, a new periodical publication emerged called the *Evangelical Magazine*. The very reasoning More and her collaborators used can be detected in the Preface of the first edition (1793) of this newest organ of the Evangelical movement:

On account of their extensive circulation, periodical publications have obtained a high degree of importance in the republic of letters ... we may venture to affirm, that half the wisdom or folly of the present generation was imbibed through these channels. A periodical pamphlet exhibits a mode of instruction with which the world was formerly unacquainted; but since it has been adopted, it has produced a surprising revolution in sentiments and manners. . . . Thousands read a Magazine, who have neither money to purchase, nor leisure to peruse, large volumes. It is therefore a powerful engine in the moral world, and may, by skilful management, be directed to the accomplishment of the most salutary or destructive purposes. (1)

The success of the tracts lay largely in More's accommodation of the style of the racier chapbooks and romances so popular with her readers, employed for her didactic purposes. As

her biographer M. G. Jones describes it, More made a “personal investigation” into the ballads, chapbooks, and broadsheets so popular among her target audience, “dirty and indecent stuff”⁵¹ (140). Modeled on these by-products of the cheap press, More’s tracts are characterized by:

- the simple language of the kind of works popular with More’s targeted audience
- lifelike characters that included not only positive examples, but racier (and therefore more interesting), negative examples
- inexpensive prices (which undercut the chapbooks More was attempting to replace in her readers’ diet)
- local color in the form of tavern settings, snippets of popular songs that would be familiar to her readers, characters often based on real people, and other elements in the tales with which readers would easily identify
- practical advice that, at least ostensibly, could actually be of use to the readers (such as recipes, tips on household economy, etc.)

More maintained a tight control on the content of the Cheap Repository tales. Anything that did not fit in with the well-defined purpose of the project or anything deemed too excessive was not accepted for publication in the Repository. More wrote to her sister in 1795 concerning the offerings of several ballads for the Repository, “I was obliged to reject three because they had too much of politics, and another because there was too much love” (Roberts *i* 459). Her strict standards were noted even by her closest friends, such as this remark from Horace Walpole (Lord Orford): “Lord Orford rallied [sic] me yesterday, for what he called the ill-natured strictness of my tracts; and talked foolishly enough of the cruelty of making the poor spend so much time in reading books, and depriving them of their pleasure on Sundays” (Letter in Roberts *i* 461).

More took seriously her own admonition that “Dry morality will not answer the end, for we

⁵¹These are Jones’ words, not More’s!

must bear in mind that it is a pleasant poison to which we must find an antidote” (qtd. In M. G. Jones 139). One of More’s own contemporaries, Hester Chapone, told her, “You most successfully practise the art of pleasing and entertaining, while you instruct, and even while you rebuke; and I hope better things of the world than one lady predicted, who said, ‘Everybody will read her, everybody admire her, and nobody mind her’” (Roberts *ii* 371). Likewise, Reverend James Bean acknowledged “. . . the cause in which we are engaged was served, by means of those tracts, in places we [the clergy] cannot approach” (Roberts *ii* 51).

Not everyone so approvingly applauded More’s appropriation of the vulgar, even for didactic ends. Mrs. Sherwood included a veiled criticism of More by describing her own (Sherwood’s) tract-writing as “the first narrative allowing anything like correct writing or refined sentiments, expressed without vulgarisms, ever prepared for the poor, and having religion for its object” (qtd. in Davis 61-62). Years later, when the Religious Tract Society reprinted some of More’s tracts in 1863, the tracts were edited to conform to the standards of the society, which evidently, were stricter than those of Hannah More! (Davis 62).

More’s tracts went against the evangelical tide not only in the realism of their language of the common man, but also in their fictitious nature. Fiction was still suspect within much of the evangelical community, particularly within the tract societies (Davis 148). The writer Erasmus Darwin, as late as 1798, found fiction to “give a distaste to more useful knowledge” and to cause readers to “return to the common duties of life with regret” (qtd. in Nancy Armstrong 106). The *Evangelical Magazine* urged the writers and supporters of the Cheap Repository to rely on facts as the basis for the tales told in the tracts and thus to avoid the dangers found “beneath the flowers of fiction” (qtd. in Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 66). Contemporary writers such as Charlotte Tonna charged that fiction, even that written for the cause of religion, was “not wholly consistent with Christian sincerity and truth” (qtd. in Davis 148). Even non-evangelicals such as Dr. Christopher Wordsworth, brother of William and Master of Trinity, objected to the tracts, particularly *Black Giles the Poacher*, as “novelish and exciting” (Harland 177-78). Thus More’s theory of

fiction seems, in this context, quite progressive and deliberate, particularly as seen in this “apology” offered by the narrator of part two of the tale of Black Giles:

If I pretend to speak about people at all, I must tell the truth. I am sure, if folks would but turn about and mend, it would be a thousand times pleasanter to me to write their histories; for it is no comfort to tell of anybody’s faults. (*Works* i 254).

More’s grappling with the role and rightful use of fiction is the same struggle faced by generations of didactic writers. After all, who more than the sheerly didactic writer is obliged to maintain strict adherence to the “truth”? “For the didactic theorist,” therefore, “the need to explain the positive use of un-truth becomes a matter of some urgency” (Montgomery 14). More, however, was one of the first didactic writers to take on that struggle and win such widespread success.

One year after the Cheap Repository’s end in 1799, the Religious Tract Society, writing in “An Address to Christians on the Distribution of Religious Tracts,” acknowledged the acceptability of fiction for didactic purposes:

A plain didactic essay on a religious subject may be read by a Christian with much pleasure; but the persons for whom these tracts are chiefly designed will fall asleep over it. . . . There must be something to allure the listless to read, and this can only be done by blending entertainment with instruction. Where *narrative* can be made a medium of conveying truth, it is eagerly to be embraced.

(qtd. in Pickering “The Cheap Repository and the Short Story” 19)

This is a relatively glowing evaluation of didactic fiction considering the traditional suspicion, already documented here, with which the religious community had greeted fiction for some centuries. Thus, the tract as it took shape in the hands of authors such as Hannah More has been rightly called the “forerunner of the religious novel” (Davis 134), as well as the model for the short story genre (Pickering “The Cheap Repository Tracts and the Short Story”); at the same time, it shared a purpose and readership with tracts rooted in opposition to all that fiction and novels

represented.

The earlier efforts of the Clapham Sect, beginning in 1787 with Wilberforce's establishment of the Society for the Reformation of Manners in 1787, to circulate didactic tracts were "spasmodic and ephemeral compared with the Cheap Repository Tracts" (Howse 102), which sold nearly two million copies the first year alone (Thompson 171, Howse 102, Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 27).⁵² Bishop Porteus asserted to More in 1797 that he had heard of the Cheap Repository Tracts "from every quarter of the globe" (Roberts *ii* 4). Myers finds the tracts to be "one of the great success stories in eighteenth-century female authorship" ("Tracts for the Times" 266). The Cheap Repository "became a favourite with high and low, with educated and unlearned. It was soon necessary to bring it out in two forms; one for the hawkers, and a superior style of print and paper for the higher classes," according to More's biographer Thompson (158). Marketing the tracts, written for the poor, to the wealthier was a brilliant and successful strategy on the part of More:

. . . . We purpose next month to begin to print two different editions of the same tract, one of a handsome appearance for the rich, the other on coarser paper, but so excessively cheap by wholesale as fully to meet the hawkers on their own ground. . . .Vulgar and indecent penny books were always common, but speculative infidelity, brought down to the pockets and capacities of the poor, forms a new era in our history. (Roberts *i* 473)

As she did throughout her life, More, in this effort, too, acted to bridge the chasm between people, in this case an economic and social gap. She has been recognized in the current period for being one of the first to produce a literature that spoke to England's "two nations" (Myers "Tracts for the Times" 267); her efforts and their successes did not go unrecognized in her own day. The *Evangelical Magazine* wrote in 1809 that to Hannah More's pen "the world, in its different ranks, owes perhaps greater obligation than to any other living

⁵² According to A. G. Newell, the first batch of tracts appeared on March 3, 1795; 300,000 had been sold by April 18; 700,000 by July; by March of the next year, 2,000,000 (15).

author" (qtd. in Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 35).

The Cheap Repository Tracts' "phenomenal success" demonstrated "in an extraordinary way how eager and how wide a market was now ready for cheap religious literature" (Howse 103). The Religious Tract Society, a few years following the launching of the Cheap Repository, remarked:

The general extension of education also renders it an imperative duty upon Christians to be more active than they have hitherto been, lest the talent of reading, which they have communicated as a blessing, should be abused and rendered a curse. (qtd. in Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 27)

The Cheap Repository was "the begetter of hordes of imitators" (Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 61), including the Religious Tract Society. The Repository proved so profitable that its publisher continued on even after More's association with the project ended in 1798 (Kovacevic 149-150).

Of course, more significant than their monetary success is the literary influence of the tracts, which had "a monumental effect" on the early nineteenth century's reading audience (Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 27). Bradley asserts that this medium "owed its origin to the determination of Hannah More" (42). No sympathizer with More or her fellow Evangelicals, even Brown deems More "the world's leading practitioner in this kind of art" (124). Significantly, the publication of the Cheap Repository Tracts marked the first project ever in England to involve the mass production and distribution of written material (Bradley 42). The cheap tract, a tool refined and popularized by the evangelicals, was, according to historian Ian Bradley, "destined to become the greatest single medium of mass communication in the nineteenth century" (42). In fact, the evangelicals soon came to rely almost solely upon tracts in producing reading material for the lower classes (Cruse *Englishman and His Books* 68). In exploiting the potential of the broadside sheet as the medium for her didactic purposes, More influenced the popular publishing well into the nineteenth century (Bettham 50).

Moreover, the pamphlets produced by writers such as More in response to the ideas of

Paine “gradually established a tradition that was to form the point of departure for subsequent writers who were to make a deliberate, highly organized use of fiction for the purpose of disseminating political and social ideas” (Kovacevic 136). In reluctant praise of the tracts, Brown suggests, “With the possible exception of some basic religious, moral and political concepts, which cannot, unfortunately, be abstracted from these tales and leave much behind, everything in them is above criticism” (137). The tracts are “wholly authentic in every part and respect, of Evangelical views on all pertinent moral, social, political, and religious topics” (Brown 124).

The form in which these views are presented, however, has significant value in the development of English literature. As Myers points out, several traditions for didactic, or “purposive,” fiction interconnect in More’s formula. These are the Puritan tradition of realistic religious narrative, the educational tales for youth, the philosophic novel of doctrine, regional chronicles of the laboring classes, and the later Victorian social problem novel (“Tracts for the Times” 267). More’s influence can be found in innumerable literary efforts, from the subsequent Religious Tract Society to other contemporary novelists to various periodicals; indeed, one critic finds that the chapter of Anne Bronte’s *Agnes Grey* called “The Cottagers” “might well have formed the substance of a tract by Hannah More” (Jay 179). Pickering contrasts the two literary traditions of authorial intrusion that emerged in the nineteenth century: one, in the tradition of *Tristram Shandy*, existed in order to call attention to the narrator and thus the art of the narrative, while the other tradition – that of religious writers such as More -- employed intrusive narrators in order to call attention to the didactic purpose of the work (*The Moral Tradition* 58). So, although for purposes other than artistic ones, More’s narrative techniques nevertheless contributed significantly to the art of narrative fiction as it developed into the nineteenth century.

Surely, Hannah More’s sympathetic but pointed portrayals of realistic characters taken from the lowest echelons of society, with which she was intimately familiar through her work in the schools, are as “Dickensian” as Dickens himself. Indeed, many of the tracts “are little more than a narrative of facts” based on real people and situations (Thompson 153). One of the scenes most

illustrative of this, as well as one of the most quoted, from the Cheap Repository comes from *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* :

. . . He wished to take the family by surprise; and walking gently up to the house he stood awhile to listen. The door being half open he saw the shepherd who (looked so respectable in his Sunday coat that he should hardly have known him) [sic] his wife, and their numerous young family, drawing round their little table, which was covered with a clean, though very coarse cloth. There stood on it a large dish of potatoes, a brown pitcher, and a piece of coarse loaf. The wife and children stood in silent attention, while the shepherd, with uplifted hands and eyes, devoutly begged the blessing of heaven on their homely fare. . . .

The good woman began, as some very neat people are rather apt to do, with making many apologies that her house was not cleaner, and that things were not in a fitter order to receive such a gentleman. Mr. Johnson, however, on looking round, could discover nothing but the most perfect neatness. The trenchers on which they were eating, were almost as white as their linen; and notwithstanding the number and smallness of the children, there was not the least appearance of dirt or litter. The furniture was very simple and poor, hardly indeed amounting to bare necessaries. It consisted of four brown wooden chairs, which by constant rubbing, were become as bright as a looking-glass; an iron pot and kettle; a poor old grate, which scarcely held a handful of coal, and out of which the little fire that had been in it appeared to have been taken, as soon as it had answered the end for which it had been lighted -- that of boiling their potatoes. . . . (in *Works* i 195, 196)

Brown, no fan of More or the evangelicals, calls *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* a “work of sustained and unequalled greatness,” saying,

With *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* she rose to a lonely level, for it has no competitor. The greatest of Mrs. More’s tracts and of all tracts, it towers over similar works like another *Agamemnon*, a flawless masterpiece perfect in conception and in execution, likely to remain forever peerless on a height the

moral tale will not reach again. (Brown 144)

Attesting to the longevity of popularity and respect for the tracts, William Wilberforce remarked some thirty years after the publication of *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* that he would rather “render his account at the last day” with it in hand than with all the works of Sir Walter Scott, despite their genius (qtd. in Brown 151 and Harland 184-85).

The introduction to the Woodstock Books facsimile of More’s *Village Politics* and *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* compares More and Wordsworth in their similar attempts to capture the simplicity and elegance of the laboring class; and More is found to have surpassed Wordsworth. “*The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*,” states the Introduction, “stands out because, like Wordsworth’s *Michael*, it embodies in a comparatively straightforward way the author’s belief in abiding human values.”

Another tract distinguished for similar qualities is *The Lancashire Collier Girl*, a tale concerning a young girl whose “strong insistence on the spirit of self-help in this story anticipates themes and attitudes that were to prevail later on” and whose active benevolence to the poor foreshadows, again, some of the works of Dickens (Kovacevic 152, 154). This tract is now recognized as one of the first fictionalized accounts of social changes wrought by the industrial age (Kovacevic 154) and as such, is an important precursor to the industrial novels that appeared later in the nineteenth century. The tract is not an original account. When the true story of the collier girl first appeared in *The Gentlemen’s Magazine* of 1795, its author included an implicit invitation for Hannah More specifically to pick up the story and write her own version. “Could our collier-girl,” the author wrote, “have had the advantages of a Sterne, or a Hannah More, who takes the poor under her protection, she would justly appear in the first line of characters” (qtd. in Kestner 24). Twenty years after More’s publication of *The Lancashire Collier Girl*, clergyman James Plumbtre revived the story in a new version called *Kendrew, or the Coal Mine* (1818) and dedicated it to Hannah More (Kovacevic 153).

More’s contemporaries claimed that the Cheap Repository Tracts produced not only

political and religious benefits, but also profited poor readers in practical and economic ways (Thompson 157). For example, tracts such as *The Cottage Cook* contain frugal recipes as well as “friendly hints,” such as, “If you turn your meat into broth it will go much farther than if you roast or bake it,” and “If the money spent on tea were spent on home brewed beer, the wife would be better fed, the husband better pleased, and both would be healthier.” Yet, More’s efforts to instruct the laboring poor were condemned; “in her own words she stood charged with ‘sedition, disaffection, and a general aim to corrupt the principles of the community’” (Altick 73).

Still, many attributed to the tracts, rather than to England’s conservative domestic policies, the prevention of a revolution in England like the one in France (Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 35). Referring to authors identified with the “low mimetic,” such as Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Rabelais, and just as aptly describing More’s Cheap Repository, Karl states:

In the main, [these authors] reject the kind of anarchy implicit in a society always becoming. . . . The true concerns of these writers, despite their juggling of contrary notions, was the maintenance of a given society on its traditional lines so as to support personal fulfillment rather than to frustrate it. (38-39)

Because the launching of the Cheap Repository through the publication of *Village Politics* was so directly linked to a political motivation, many have mistakenly seen in the Cheap Repository a primarily political purpose. Pedersen, however, effectively argues for the inadequacy of the traditional political explanations for the purpose of the Cheap Repository (offered by critics such as Ford K. Brown) by pointing out the overt religious and moral concerns expressed by More and her supporters in the project. In the tracts’ demonstration of the “subordination of secular to religious life” (95), the purpose of the tracts clearly was “to integrate religion into daily life, and, for the most part, the message of the tracts was moral, not social” (94). In addition, the tracts were an attempt at “shifting relations between elite and popular culture” (88) in their “explicit bid for upper-class leadership in the moral reform of the poor” (87). As Lott aptly notes, the values More “taught her ‘poor’ pupils -- piety and hard work -- were identical to the

values she taught the more elite portions of society” (153). Pedersen’s essay successfully argues that the tracts were a “deliberate assault” on a popular culture distinct from elite culture in favor of “the construction of a new, universal Christian culture” (106). In locating More’s works in the context of a culture war over morality and its social meaning, Ford, too, recognizes this distinction between the cultural and the purely political. He places More’s works squarely within a larger cultural phenomenon:

The prints of William Hogarth, the productions of David Garrick, the essays of Samuel Johnson, and the works of Hannah More juxtaposed their English simplicity, sincerity, pity, and morality with the French extravagance, duplicity, blasphemy, and promiscuity followed by the fashionable. (1)

That the tracts appeared in the guise of popular literature such as chapbooks is central to their success in readership and in cultural impact. The tracts’ “attack on popular recreations and communal life was concealed in a product that was not, at first glance, distinguishable from a chapbook” (Pedersen 106). “With the wisdom of the serpent, she produced her Tracts not only similar in size and general appearance to the chapman’s wares, but illustrated with the crude and lively woodcuts and written in the simple and clear language to which the poor were accustomed” (Jones 141). Yet, the kind of simple, “vulgar” language consciously employed by More in the writing of the tracts was open to the mockeries of authors such as Thackeray, who wrote for a far more sophisticated audience (Jay 152).

While the number of readers among the rural laborers was probably quite large, no measurable influence on them can be proved (Ford 169), though More’s biographer attributed “many important moral results” directly to the Cheap Repository (Thompson 158). For example, following the publication in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* of the story of the collier girl (upon which More’s *Lancashire Collier Girl* was based), the letters to the editor that followed indicated a significant change in attitude concerning the plight of the poor (Kovacevic 152). Yet, some modern critics, such as Pedersen, find that the Repository did not notably succeed in reforming

popular culture, at least among the lower classes (110). "The real success of More's tracts," argues Pedersen, "is to be found less in their conversion of the poor than in their effective recruitment of the upper class to the role of moral arbiters of popular culture" (109). For example, some historians have found that the increase in the nineteenth century of the proportion of landowners who inhabited their estates year round and took greater care of their laborers can be attributed, in part, to the influence of Evangelical sermons and tracts (Ford 169n).

More was "the most widely read literary woman of her century" and "both by her writings and her philanthropic achievements, was . . . exercising an influence accurately described as 'nation-wide' " (Bready 58). Davis describes More as having achieved the status of "cult figure," even in her own lifetime, citing an account retold in *The Life and Times of Mrs. Sherwood* of a pupil of More's who "made it a point of reading portions of Mrs. Hannah More's books aloud to her children every day" (qtd. in Davis 22). "Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that her books and pamphlets, more than any others, paved the higher road to Victorianism" (Quinlan 49).

More differed from many of the evangelicals who came before and after her in ability and her desire to balance her work and her life between faithfulness in religion and effectiveness in the world. While nonreligious writers ignored religious audiences altogether and most religious writers overlooked their potential readers among the nonreligious, Hannah More "addressed the world at large" (Davis 89). And much of the world, at least for a while, became her audience. Brown credits More with being "the leading practitioner in this kind of art" and calls her "Evangelicalism's greatest publicist" (124, 11); Mary Waldron deems her the "chief literary proponent" of the Evangelical movement ("*Mansfield Park* and the Evangelical Movement" 263). And thus More justly deserves the appellation, "mother of the Victorians" (Ford 77). The voluminous sales of all of More's works

point to a serious reading public extending beyond the time of her death. How can we doubt that they helped to create that public? From the first years of the century Mrs. More looms high and more high, a towering figure of the moral

world. . . . The claims of Mrs. More's friends that her writings were a permanent part of English religious literature seem to have been wrong; but the Evangelicals' belief that in her field she was peerless, England's foremost religious and moral writer for the people, was sound. (Brown 396)

CHAPTER FOUR:
CŒLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE AND THE READING PUBLIC

ORIGINS OF A RELIGIOUS NOVEL

The Cheap Repository Tracts had been an enormously successful experiment in appropriating a form of popular literature for didactic purposes and disseminating it to one of the widest audiences English literature had seen. This feat led Hannah More to try her hand at producing a novel -- the very genre she had warned readers about in her educational treatises -- for the same purpose. More had received encouragement for such a project as far back as 1802 when William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton had appealed to her to "write some religious and moral novels, stories, tales, call 'em what you will. . . . The Cheap Repository tales, a little raised in their subjects, are the very things. . . ." (qtd. in Howse 107).

More's novel seems to have been inspired, at least in part, by a book authored by her friend and correspondent Madame de Stael, *Corinne*, published in 1807. More was dismayed at the irreligion of an otherwise appreciable novel. In Robin Reed Davis's comparison of *Corinne* and *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, Davis argues that *Cœlebs* should be viewed as "a reply not just to romantic novels in general, but to *Corinne* in particular" (71). References to *Corinne* are numerous in More's correspondence; this example explains what More found laudable and what she found objectionable in this and in works of fiction in general:

[Madame de Stael] supposes me to be so strict that I disapprove the lighter parts of her book; so far from it, that I delight in narrative, in anecdote, and in traits of character. It is only on the more serious passages that I took the liberty to animadvert. I should not have offered a remark on the omission of religion; it is only on what appeared to me to be mistakes in religion that I presumed to speak.

(Roberts *ii* 325)

At this time, novels were still disdained by polite audiences and literary critics, in part because of the increasing influence of the conservatism of the evangelical movement on all aspects of life. Accordingly, popular criticism of the novel at the turn of the century was under the greatest influence of religious concerns since the publication of *Pamela* (Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 66). Many religious publications refused even to grant the status of "literature" to the novel by reviewing them. Indeed, by 1800, "the reputation of novels was so low that the *Scots* and *Gentleman's* magazines gave them scant attention, while in the following year the *British Critic* said that it was ceasing to review novels till it found something 'truly worthy of report' " (Ann H. Jones 2).

Sexism was another factor contributing to the novel's continued failure to ascend to the class of true literature: most of the novels of this period were written by women. Given the superficial educational programs (so decried by Hannah More and others) under which even privileged women were schooled, it is no wonder that many of the novels produced by a female pen were but so much drivel. An editorial concerning the readers of the "trash" going by "the title of Novels and Romances" appeared in an 1804 edition of the satiric periodical *The Miniature*. The editorial roundly criticizes the Grub Street hacks and "idle females" writing within the dictates of the current fashion and complains that the novel exhibits the same "insipid or sensational character" that it has for the preceding twenty years (qtd. in Rogers 102).

No wonder, then, that her biographer described More's publication of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* as "an experiment upon which she did not venture without much anxious hesitation" (Roberts *ii* 147). Like most of her other works, *Cœlebs* was published anonymously. This time,

however, More dared not to entrust her secret even to her usual confidants (Roberts *ii* 147). More did not reveal herself as the author until after the publication of several editions and expressed genuine surprise that her friends so easily detected “a disguise which I thought impenetrable ” (Roberts *ii* 168). Reviewers who failed to detect the author assumed it to be a man; some even suspected one of the clergy. But More’s writing style and her views were too well known among her peers for the secret to remain so for long. “When I tell you that I was delighted and edified with *Cœlebs*, I say no more than the truth,” declares Sir William Pepys in a letter to Hannah a few months following the novel’s publication. “The discrimination of character and the good tendency of the work would themselves make it worthy of any writer; but the beauty of the language, and the brilliancy of such frequent and always consistent metaphors, stamp it for your own” (Roberts *ii* 158).

In a letter to Sir William Pepys written about one year following the publication of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, More explains her purpose in writing her first (and what proved to be her last) novel:

I wrote it to amuse the languor of disease. I thought there were already good books enough in the world for good people, but that there was a larger class of readers whose wants had not been attended to, -- the subscribers to the circulating library. A little to raise the tone of that mart of mischief, and to counteract its corruptions, I thought was an object worth attempting .

(Roberts *ii* 168)

Later, in the publication of her collected works, More waxed more philosophical in examining the writer’s obligation to fulfill the reader’s desire for novelty:

In the progress of ages, and after the gradual accumulation of literary productions, the human mind -- I speak not of the scholar, or the philosopher, but of the multitude -- the human mind, Athenian in this one propensity, the desire to hear and to tell some new thing, will reject, or overlook, or grow weary even of the

standard works of the most established authors; while it will peruse with interest the current volume or pamphlet of the day. This hunger after novelty, by the way, is an instrument of inconceivable importance placed by Providence in the hands of every writer; and should strike him forcibly with the duty of turning this sharp appetite to good account. (Preface to *More's Works*)

Here, concession is at last made to the universal human delight in novelty, as well as a recognition that such a propensity on the part of readers need not be contained; the novel provided an acceptable, perhaps ideal, vehicle for satisfying the desire for novelty in the service of moral instruction.

SALES OF *CŒLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE*

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife was first published by Cadell in December of 1808 in two octavo volumes. The bookseller had been prepared to publish a second edition within a few days of the first, but the first was out of print before the next could be put to press. Within two weeks, "booksellers, all over the country, became clamorous for copies," and ten more impressions were sold in the first six months, twelve in the first year (Roberts ii 147, 168). By 1817, More was called upon for a corrected copy for the fifteenth edition (Roberts ii 264). In America, thirty editions were printed before More's death. Records seem to show that the novel had more editions and brought in more profits than Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly* and apparently had larger sales in America as well (Brown 395, 396n). According to Davis, *Cœlebs* was second only to the Cheap Repository in success for More; the novel's commercial success, in fact, was "unprecedented in the annals of English literature" (71). Historian Ian Bradley describes *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* as one of More's most popular and influential works (124). Ann H. Jones asserts that it may have been the most popular novel of the first two decades of the nineteenth century (10). "From all indications," states Robert Colby, "*Cœlebs* was the most widely read novel of the first quarter of the nineteenth century" (80). Her book brought More £2,000 in profit in the first year (Hamilton 94).

Though she produced perhaps the most successful didactic novel of the period, More was not the first to make such an attempt. In 1802, More's contemporary, Jane West, wrote in the preface to her didactic novel, *The Infidel Father*: "While the enemies of our church and state continue to pour their poison into unwary ears through this channel, it behoves [sic] the friends of our establishments to convey an antidote by the same course" (qtd. in Ann Jones 10). Further understanding of the significant sales of More's work can be gained by a comparison to the sales of and income from works by other contemporary female novelists:

- In 1778, Fanny Burney received the significant sum of £2,000 for her first work, *Evelina* (Murch 39), a sale she considered to be "a prodigious reward" (Hamilton 202).
- Elizabeth Inchbald received £100 for each volume of her 1791 novel, *A Simple Story* (Hamilton 37).
- In the early 1780s, Sophia Lee published what can be considered the first historical romance in the English language, *The Recess: A Tale of Other Times*, which was in its fifth edition by 1804 (Murch 134-35).
- In 1795, Ann Radcliffe received the "unprecedented price" of £500 for her work *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Murch 142). Her next novel, *The Italian*, brought her £800 (Hamilton 154).
- Amelia Opie held interests similar to those of Hannah More, particularly the abolition of slavery and the promotion of the Bible Society. Insisting her work was not a novel, but a moral tale, she published *The Father and Daughter* in 1801; it was "enthusiastically" received, going rapidly through three editions and reaching its eighth by 1819 (Hamilton 183, Ann Jones 52).
- Jane Porter was one of the most highly esteemed historical novelists of the first decade of the eighteenth century (Ann Jones 132). Her first novel, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803), concerned with the exemplary Christian life, was the "book of the year," and, including wide sales throughout Europe, went through twenty-five editions by the

1880s (Ann Jones 119). Porter's second novel, *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810), was printed in at least twenty-five editions by 1882. Her third novel, *The Pastor's Fireside* (1817), went quickly into a second printing and another thirteen by 1892 (Ann Jones 136).

- Another "fairly successful commercial novelist" (Ann Jones 185) of the early nineteenth century was Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan). Her third novel, the "exceedingly popular" *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), went through seven editions in two years (Murch 146).
- Elizabeth Hamilton, who was called a "respectable Writer" by Jane Austen (*Letters* 372, November 6, 1813), acknowledged More's influence in the preface to her 1808 novel *Glenburnie* (1808), which was in its fifth edition by 1813 (Ann Jones 20, 285n).
- Inspired by the success of More's novel, Mary Balfour Brunton anonymously published *Self-Control* in 1811, a work which has been described as, like *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, "another attempt at fictionalizing the ideals of Evangelicalism" (Waldron "Mansfield Park and the Evangelical Movement" 265). The first edition of *Self-Control* sold out in one month and reached a fourth by 1812 (Ann Jones 80).
- Jane Austen's contemporary audience was minuscule compared with that of More's. *Pride and Prejudice* had the most editions, which was three (Vallone 218n). *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* received publication notices in the *British Critic* and the *Critical Review*, while *Mansfield Park* received no reviews upon publication of the first edition (Sutherland xxxvi). In terms of income, Austen received £150 for *Sense and Sensibility* when it was published in 1811 (Murch 21).

This brief survey of novels contemporary with More's highlights two important developments: not only was *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* one of the most successful novels of its time in terms of income and sales, but it helped to cultivate a significant number of imitators⁵³ as

⁵³ The *Monthly Magazine* 27 (1809) notes, "Miss Moore's [sic] novel, as might have been expected, has given rise to some imitations, such as *Celia in Search of a Husband*, &c, &c, but like the generality of imitations, they are much inferior to the original" (667). In further support of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife's* "phenomenal vogue," Colby cites (80) the following imitations and unauthorized sequels: *Celia in Search of a Husband*; *Cœlibia Chusing a Husband*; *Caroline*

well as their incumbent audience of readers. However, there is nowhere better to turn than to contemporary reviews of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* in order to see the significance of More's novel in these respects, and more.

PERIODICAL REVIEWS OF *CŒLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE*

Upon its publication, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* received reviews in more than a dozen major periodicals. The overall critical response to the novel can be roughly divided into three categories: those expressing the belief that using the novel as a vehicle for promoting religion degrades religion, those charging that too much religion (particularly More's brand of evangelicalism) spoils the novel, and those recognizing that More's admixture of faith and fiction benefits both religion and the novel.

Critical Review 16 (1809): 252-64

The *Critical Review*, a publication supporting the Church and the Tories, offers a review that is among those that find the novel to be an inappropriate vehicle for religious ideas. The review evaluates *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* first on its merits as a novel and favorably critiques its depictions of characters and scenes. Figures such as Mrs. Fentham are found to be "drawn with considerable discrimination and force" (257), and Lucilla forms "the portrait of a very amiable character" (261). Like several other reviews, this one finds the language of the novel "often inelegant and sometimes inaccurate" (264).

Upon concluding its ten-page summary and evaluation of the novel, the review states, "This work is not so much a regular story as a series of conversations, in which the object of the

Ormsby; or, the Real Lucilla; Cœlebs Married; Cœlebs Suited; of The Opinions and Part of the Life of Caleb Cœlebs, Esq. A.G. Newell (7) adds *Cœlebs Deceived*, *Cœlebs in Search of a Cook*, *Cœlebs Married* and *The Laws and Practice of Whist, by Cœlebs, M.A.* (which, first published in 1851, attests to the longevity and impact of More's novel). There was also at least one parody: *Cœlebs in Search of a Mistress*.

author is to recommend his [sic] own theological opinions,” which, it points out, are far from “orthodox” (261). This review, like that of the *Monthly Magazine* (below), objects to the use of a novel to convey religious ideas. However, it is not only the novel, but the entire context of informal discourse,⁵⁴ that is judged to be incompatible with such lofty and inexpressible ideas as religious ones:

We have no objection to see religious topics gravely and seriously discussed; but as the true repository of religion is the heart, we are apt to think that when religion makes the sole or principal subject of discussion, it is apt to degenerate into a mere jargon of words. . . . We do not believe that any of the interests of religion will ever be much advanced by being made, as they appear to be too often in this novel of *Cœlebs*, the topic of colloquial debate. (262-63)

However, while quibbling over some “trivial” theological tenets, the review concedes in conclusion that “the meaning of the author is so good, and the design is so evident to promote the interests of piety and virtue, that we should think ourselves highly culpable if we made any speculative errors or incongruities a subject of severe animadversion” (264).

***Monthly Magazine* 27 (1809): 663-67**

This edition of the *Monthly Magazine*, the organ of radicals such as Godwin and Malthus, devotes nearly all of the four pages it reserves for the category of “Novels” to *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, saving but one dismissive paragraph at the end for the mention of two other recently published works.

This review also finds religion too high a subject for the lowly form of the novel. It acknowledges that *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is the “most popular work in this class [the novel], which has appeared since our last Supplement,” and that it “has acquired a temporary degree of celebrity.” In a lengthy essay containing several representative excerpts of the novel, the review

⁵⁴ Later this chapter will address how this view differs from the evangelical view.

states, "The story is simple, and the characters that are introduced, are not numerous, but they are well and skilfully drawn" (664). Indeed, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* "is not to be considered so much as a fictitious tale, as a vehicle for conveying those sentiments, principles, and observations" promoted by More in her earlier works (663).

But the novel's lack of merit as a work of fiction is not the most serious objection found here. The review sniffs that the work is "of a methodistical cast" and objects that "surely, there is something incongruous, in making a novel a medium for conveying to the world disquisitions on controversial divinity. . . . Such topics . . . are unsuitable to the place where she has introduced them" (663-64).

***Scots Magazine* 71 (1809): 435-41**

Like the *Monthly Magazine* and the *Critical Review*, the *Scots Magazine* fears that religious sentiment is tainted by the novel. The review distinguishes among various kinds of readers, many of whom might be drawn to the novel expecting one thing, only to be disappointed because *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* "is certainly presented to the public somewhat in disguise" (438). For example, the title of the work seems to have drawn some readers who had hoped for,

another of those soft, senseless, and effeminate romances, which are so instrumental, thro' the medium of the circulating libraries, in perverting the morals and the taste of the rising generation. Instead of this, they have found it to contain an illustration of certain rules for the regulation of human opinions and conduct, incorporated with a very interesting story. (437)

Others, who "expected to be gratified with an entertaining novel . . . meet with little else than religion from beginning to end" (437).

Employing the metaphor of the physician providing sweetened medicine for the ill, the review applauds More's method:

. . . [W]e desire to give the author of the present work full credit for the motive with which we conceive it to have been undertaken; that of introducing into circles, where probably it never would otherwise have found its way, a fair, candid, and complete view of some of the most important views of Christianity, and of the happiness of human beings, when they become the great and leading principles of their daily conduct. (438)

The review praises the art of More's fiction by comparing it to her previous works: "Formerly, she *described* her personages. Here she has *displayed* them" (441). Despite its modest praise, however, the *Scots Magazine* expresses an outweighing concern over "mixing up religion" with such incongruent material as the novel. It is, charges the review, "an experiment attended with considerable hazard":

. . . [I]s there not some risk, we would ask, that these religious truths will be bandied about amongst them in a manner which but ill accords with their solemn and important nature? . . . There are certain feelings of solemn and devout reverence with which all religious concerns ought ever to be connected, and from which it is of peculiar importance that they should on no occasion be separated in the young mind. (438-39)

***Universal Magazine* 11 (1809): 327-36, 515-24**

Among the second category of reviews -- those that find too much religion spoils the pleasure of the novel -- is this one by the *Universal Magazine*. It is among the lengthiest and most detailed of all the reviews. The two-part piece hastens to attribute *Cælebs* to Hannah More, based on report and the corroboration of "internal evidence," which includes "defects of language," "copiousness of thought," and "profusion of scriptural applications" (327).

The review declares that "whatever moral end the writer had in expectation . . . from these volumes, will not be accomplished," for the "fancy-invested heroine towers too loftily above human prerogative to stimulate followers" (328).

The review questions the classification of *Cælebs* as a novel (or "work of fiction"): "The

narrative, indeed, is not connected with much skill: and it is evident, that *Cœlebs* is a mere work of shreds and patches; a vehicle for desultory observations upon different topics" (328). In addition, the review finds the picture of the Stanley family too "Utopian," far beyond "the usual exaggerations of fiction" (328). Indeed, the novel presents "a designed and inartificial contrast of evangelical goodness and worldly wickedness" (331).

The second part of the review opens with an interesting engagement in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife's* discussion about novels and the role of the novelist:

Consistently with the avowed object of these volumes, we find in Chapter XXVII, a reprobation of Fielding and Smollett for having drawn the clerical character, uninvested with those qualities which ought, but which do not, always belong to it. The censure, however, is misapplied. The aim of these writers was to delineate life; and if an *Adams* or *Thwackum* do exist in society, why should they not be exhibited? *Cœlebs* will reply, because it tends to degrade an order, whose influence and respectability rest greatly upon opinion: but we would reply, let that order purge and purify itself, and furnish, neither to the novelist nor to the satirist, models for them to delineate. The impunity of vices is its greatest protection; while its exposure serves as a beacon by which to avoid its shoals and quicksands. (515)

While the review concedes "some pleasure in viewing human nature embellished by fiction," it finds some of the novel's characterizations to be "nonsense" (517). The portrait of Lucilla is faulted for being "unnatural, not amiable, or lively," and elevated "above the frailty of human nature" (333). She is "the wife whom *Cœlebs* sought and *Cœlebs* found; the wife whom no one else *can* find, and whom few would *wish* to find" (515). Still, the review finds "many of the characters are well drawn" in addition to many of the conversations being "well managed" (523). Some of More's stylistic and grammatical flaws are quoted as well.

As the first part of the review concludes with the criticism "There is too much of religious cant in these volumes" (336), the second part, grows more severe on this point: "The sentiments

which are inculcated throughout the whole work are those of methodism, with all its vile cant, and all its holy perversion" (517). The review takes a few more stabs at methodists and finally offers an explanation for the popularity of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*:

. . . [I]ts extraordinary sale may be accounted for upon the same principle as that of the Evangelical Magazine, or any antinomian tract. It finds purchasers among those the majority of whom would discard with pious indignation a Shakespeare or a Milton from their shelves. The esprit du corps explains the matter. (523)

***Edinburgh Review* 14 (April 1809): 145-51**

Like that of the *Universal Magazine*, the *Edinburgh Review's* critique (written by Reverend Sydney Smith) finds in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* that the art of the novel has been sacrificed to religious sentiment. Even "making every allowance for the difficulty of the task which Mrs. More has prescribed to herself," states Smith, "the book abounds with negligence and want of skill" (146-47). "There are some scenes . . . extremely well-painted, and which evince that Mrs. More could amuse, in no common degree, if amusement was her object" (147). The review finds *Cœlebs* to be too didactic and dry, merely a "dramatic sermon" (though, interestingly enough, it praises Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* as a novel that "teaches religion and morality" to readers who might not be taught through other means) (146).

Smith finds little good to say about this novel, however, and even less about its alleged promotion of "the trash and folly of Methodism" (151). The fact that *Cœlebs* and Lucilla never dance or attend the theater is counted as "too severe" (148), along with the exclusion of cards and assemblies from the Stanley household. Instead, laments the *Edinburgh Review*, Hannah More "wants to see men chatting together upon the Pelagian heresy -- to hear, in the afternoon, the theological rumours of the day -- and to gleam polemical tittle-tattle at a tea-table rout" (150). The review advises, "If instead of belonging to a trumpery gospel faction, [More] had only watched over those great points of religion in which the hearts of every sect of Christians are interested,

she would have been one of the most useful and valuable writers of her day" (151).

***Satirist* 4 (1809): 384-90**

A good review from the *Satirist* was bad news for its subject. It's clear that the *Satirist* finds More's mix of religion and fiction dissatisfying on all counts. The review opens with the foreboding remark "This is a novel of a very superior class." An equally "high" opinion of the public's reading taste is revealed when the review continues, ". . . [I]ts rapid advance to a third edition we hail as a pleasing demonstration and proof both of the intrinsic worth of the work and of the strong good sense of the public" (384). The review closes "by recommending its perusal to every virtuous family in the British empire" (389).

***European Magazine* 56 (1809): 196-201**

This review takes more interest than any of the others in evaluating the work from within the context of literary history and the ongoing development of the novel. The *European Magazine* places *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* squarely in the tradition of religious fiction in the vein of Bunyan. The review finds nothing groundbreaking or scandalous in More's mixing the novel with religion. However, before beginning its own review of *Cœlebs*, the *European* takes the time to issue an apparent retort to the *Edinburgh Review* :

It is a circumstance certainly indicative of a light and inconsiderate mind, that in criticising a work, *sect* should, in the ideas of the *reviewer*, have a stronger operation than the system: and that his *first* object should be to determine whether the writer goes to the *meeting* or to the *church* This is so evidently the case respecting *Cœlebs*, and a critique upon it, as it appears in a *northern* review, that we have deemed it not only necessary to take some notice of the subject, but indeed to endeavour to *correct* the opinions. . . (196-97)

The most interesting and useful aspect of this review, however, is its detailed placement of

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife within the broader context of the history of the novel. This history of the form is told using the metaphor of a tree, which begins with “black seeds,” then develops “flourishing shoots,” “leaves,” and branches.” Religious novels, the highest example of which is Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, are considered the leaves.

which, we must observe, that though it has neither been so flourishing nor so productive as many others, it has yet displayed, at different periods, a variety of fruit, which has, in most instances, suited the taste of a great number of readers.

(198)

This review attributes the “religious superstructure” of Defoe’s work by which he ingeniously produced “works more to the level of common life” to a foundation laid by John Bunyan (198). Richardson (introduced, notably, as “the author of *Grandison*”) is said, in contrast to Defoe, “to entangle his story with all the intricacies of art” (198). *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* “only bears a distant resemblance” to one of these works, *Sir Charles Grandison*, but “in sentiments and system it has a very considerable affinity to them all” (198). The review also traces the roots of More’s novel to Addison’s essays, whose subjects “become excellent materials in the hands of a novelist” (198).

The actual criticism of the work is minimal here. The review focuses instead, as shown above, on situating the book within the larger literary scheme. Lengthy passages from the novel are excerpted, and the reviewer defers, finally, to the public’s taste:

Criticism with respect to a work which in the progress of a few months has flown through ten editions, might well be spared; the public has ten times stamped it with approbation; and we are not the persons to enter our caveat against a sanction so often repeated: indeed, there are many parts of it extremely well written, many characters admirably drawn . . . (199)

Monthly Review 58 (1809): 128-36

Among those reviews which find that the infusion of religion elevates the novel is that of the *Monthly Review*. While expressing admiration for More's use of fiction to promote religion, the *Monthly Review* finds that in the case of this novel, however, too much attempted results in too much lost.

This review of *Cælebs* is the second article of this volume and comprises a substantial nine-page essay. Here, More's novel is placed within a larger criticism of the ills wrought by female education and circulating libraries. "It is," asserts the *Monthly Review*, "the commendable object of the writer of the volumes before us to counteract the poison of novels by something which assumes the form of a novel" (128). Still, the review finds that the novel "consists more of delineations of character and of discussions than of surprising incidents" (129).

The character of Lucilla is found "not drawn according to the truth of nature," portrayed with "an almost impracticable degree of excellence . . . more likely to discourage than to excite reformation" (129). The review concedes, however, that as "the character of the heroine develops itself, no person can refrain from admiring it" (131), though lamenting that a character presented as the model of female perfection exhibits a humility that borders on "self-abasement" (132).

The novel, "though it displays the reading and talents of a male writer, bespeaks in the nature of its plan the ideas and system of a female." One can assume by the remainder of the review that this latter trait is not viewed as a positive one. For one thing, the novel's suggested "scheme" is "too spiritual to be adopted by man in his present social state." Besides, wonder the reviewers, "We are forced to question whether the best mode of counteracting the modern rage for ornamental accomplishments is by converting our misses into petticoat-polemics, and our young men of fashion into zealous clergymen in brown coats" (130). The review concludes:

It will suffice to remark that the motive of the writer is not more commendable than the skill, the discrimination, and the general taste with which the whole is

executed. We cannot, however, avoid the conjecture that, had less been attempted in the way of female reformation, more probably would have been accomplished; that the young people will be repulsed instead of attracted to imitation by the character of Lucilla; that the cause of Methodism, though such is evidently not the intention, will be rather promoted than retarded by the religious dialogues contained in these volumes; and that many professors will be led to adopt the cant of humility for humility itself. (136)

***Gentleman's Magazine* 79 (1809): 151**

The *Gentleman's Magazine* finds the addition of religious sentiment to the novel can improve both the novel and the reader. Its stance on More's novel is not surprising considering the publication's influence by Johnson, who was also a regular contributor. The text of this brief review is quoted here in its entirety:

Though we are ignorant who may be the author of *Cœlebs*, we have not the least hesitation in asserting that it is the production of no unskilful hand; and we earnestly recommend an attentive, impartial perusal of it, both to parents and young people. When pure, sound morality and unaffected benevolence are so pleasingly illustrated, it is sufficient to make us in love with virtue. In the many and various families Cœlebs visits, "in search of a wife," the display of character is so happily delineated, that it is absolutely holding the mirror up to Nature. We are aware that to a certain class of Readers the discussions upon religious topicks may appear dry, and uninteresting; for our won part, we can only wish that in these awful, momentous times, such subjects were more seriously considered.

***British Critic* 33 (1809): 481-94**

This review notes with apparent but pleased surprise that a novel that lacks the more typical "encouragement to prejudice or vice" has "reached a fourth edition in the short space of three months" (481). The *British Critic's* review is particularly appreciative of More's use of the

novel for higher purposes:

The author, probably imagining, or perhaps knowing from experience, that those who stand most in need of instruction on this most momentous subject would not have patience to read didactic essays, has contrived to deliver her sentiments in the form of a tale, to which she has given a title calculated to attract the attention of the readers of novels. (481)

Surely, More found pleasing this invocation of Johnson in this review's approval of her work:

This honest, or, as Johnson would have called it, holy artifice, was extremely judicious; for even the follies of fashionable education are not greater enemies to conjugal happiness than the sentiments which, in early life, are imbibed from novels. (481)

The rest of this lengthy essay consists of extracts and summaries of the novel, generously praised, with particular commentary on the questions of religious doctrine raised by the novel's characters. "On the whole," the review asserts, "we have not read a work which combines the *utile cum ducile* more completely than *Cœlebs*" (490).

***The Evangelical Magazine* 17 (1809): 289**

This review is among those that can't resist invoking a common metaphor for the novels and antinovels that were provoking so much discussion and cause for concern:

. . . [W]herever the Poison-tree grows, its antidote grows very near it. . . .
The groves of Literature have, within the last 50 years, been poisoned with infidel and licentious novels and romances; but in this and a few similar works, we behold the antidote to such dangerous publications. Here, with at least equal interest and entertainment, the reader will find the wisest of maxims of life and conduct, and even the holy principles of religion. . . .

Interestingly, even a review that faults the typical “romance” for being “licentious” and “dangerous” wishes to find a bit more excitement in the “antidote” provided by *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*:

. . . Considered in a literary view, it certainly possesses much merits; but if among its excellencies we might be permitted to mark defects, we think there is a want of incident in the narrative, and a little too much formality in the dialogue. It is a work, however, which deserves to be universally perused; and if it be without advantage, the reader should blame himself, and not the author.

***Literary Panorama* 6 (1809): 259-67**

This review is one of the few that expresses both understanding and appreciation of More’s project to produce a literary work that would bridge the chasm that separating religion and taste. The review observes that *Cœlebs* “is favourable at once to religion and taste; and we are the better pleased with it because we fear that many religionists are enemies to taste, (without any just reason that we could ever discover) and many men of taste are enemies to religion . . .” (260).

The characters are found to be “pretty close copies of characters not unknown to our observation” (262), although More is deemed to have “indulged her imagination at the expense of judgment” in the case of Lucilla, “a young lady so very, very good” (261).

One reader in this reviewing corps, having looked about for a third volume, expresses the wish that “the ingenious authoress will relieve his disappointment” (263-64) by producing another.

***Poetical Magazine* 1 (1809): 307-08**

A forty-three-line poem in this publication pays tribute “To the unknown Author of *Cœlebs*.” The piece praises Hannah More for her project of employing the novel for the cause of religion against the backdrop of “a giddy age” (32). The poem opens by decrying the prevailing “false but specious taste” (1) cultivated by the British press and public libraries. Members of all

social classes “procure the floating novels of the day, imbibe their principle, and learn their way” (13-14). Even authors concerned with morals and manners “Wrote for the body, but forgot the soul” (20).

Then, turning to address the unknown author, the poem declares, “’Twas left for thee to form the grand design, to make a NOVEL speak of truths divine” (23-24). Again, the medicinal metaphor is used to describe the task of the religious novelist: “As doctors oft, to cure their patients’ ill / Are forc’d to cheat them with a gilded pill” (33-34). The closing tercet pleads with the author to shed the veil of anonymity:

Oh! then, no longer seek to hide thy name,
But in the temporary of terrestrial Fame
Let Time enroll it with the world’s acclaim. (41-43)

***Christian Observer* 8 (1809): 109-21**

Cælebs in Search of a Wife was the first novel to be reviewed by the *Christian Observer*, the periodical developed by More’s colleagues in the Clapham Sect. The boldness of this step is mitigated, however, by the *Observer’s* insistence (not an entirely unjustifiable one) in the opening line of the review, that the work in question can not really be considered a novel:

It may be very true that novels are mischievous, but we cannot allow this work to be called a novel. . . . The work now under review is of a different kind. The object of the writer evidently was, not to construct an interesting fable, but to communicate a variety of religious, moral, and economical truths, in an easy and agreeable manner. . . . A narrative affords facilities which cannot otherwise be secured; and for this reason, and for this reason only, it seems to have been adopted. It is merely a framework for better things. (109)

The review praises the work for containing a story that “is perfectly in nature” and taken from “the

very best model" (111) and for the skill and justness with which some of the characters are drawn.

The essay notes with appreciation the ingenuity of More's mixture of fiction and religion: "Divinity is an odd ingredient in a work of imagination; yet the author of these volumes has ventured on this novelty. . . ." The review praises the novel's theology for being "drawn immediately from the Scriptures; not loose and general, like the creed of the world . . . but pure, just, elevated, and comprehensive; without bigotry, without enthusiasm" (115).

Ironically, the faults found in *Cœlebs* by this review (like those found by the *Evangelical Magazine*) are those that implicitly detract from its novel-ness: The reviewers "should have liked a little more fire at four-and-twenty" in the character of Cœlebs (111); Lucilla "wants a little of her father's self-possession" (112) and will likely be found by male readers to be "insipid" (113). The characters "talk as if sentences, cut into lengths, had been delivered out to them from a magazine" (120). Objections are made to the inclusion of a few vulgar words and phrases (a criticism that prompted an indignant letter from More to editor and friend Zachary Macauley). The criticism with the most significant implications for this project of combining didactic religion with the entertaining novel, particularly as it comes from More's Evangelical peers, is this point:

The author's dread of romance, though just and salutary, has made him, we think, incline a little to an opposite fault. The young lover is not merely steady, but has a drawling gravity about him that is tiresome. . . . Even the angel Lucilla might have had more play of fancy and features, without losing any thing of her dignity.

(120-21)

Thus, the very aspects the *Observer* finds lacking in *Cœlebs* are the ones that would have improved its accomplishments as a novel -- the literary category the *Observer* refuses, on moral not literary grounds, to place precisely because it does not cross the *Observer's* boundary into the classification of "novel":

A little more complication of incident, a little more intensity of passion and feeling,

would have completely ruined the project. The work would have been a novel; a mere novel; -- interesting, and useless. . . . We felt bound, therefore, to render this author high praise for his discriminating judgement in the conduct of a very delicate and difficult enterprize. He has succeeded. His work is both interesting and instructive. Yet we would caution others not to enter rashly on the same project -- to be quite sure they possess his genius before they imitate his example. (115)

OTHER CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES TO *CÆLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE*

By reviewing *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, the *Christian Observer* "had crossed a critical Rubicon" (Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 83). By publication of the December issue of 1809, the periodical was reviewing its next novel, Maria Edgeworth's *Tales of Fashionable Life*. Here editor Zachary Macauley "corrected the embarrassing effusiveness of the *Cælebs* review and in doing so, put the *Observer's* critical shift from enmity to toleration of and even appreciation of the novel on a firmer basis" (Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 83). Now the *Christian Observer* was ready to concede the usefulness of the novel to a moral and religious purpose:

If the danger of all writings of imagination or sentiment be objected to by us; and if it be affirmed, that to criticise is to tolerate them; we answer, that it forms no part of our creed that all such works should be transferred from the shelves to the fire of the library. If we think them mischievous to the young, to the weaker sex, to the frivolous, and to the sanguine; we yet conceive that minds of a solid texture, and of established principles, may occasionally read them, if not with benefit, at least without injury. The vice of the present age is not, let it be remembered, too much romance, but too much coldness and selfishness. We are not in danger of becoming a nation of crusaders, but of merchants. Now a suitable remedy for this, under the regulation of Christian principles, is an infusion of sentiment into the general system. (viii 781)

It is difficult to imagine a more inviting call to innovative religious authors to take up the challenge of developing a new form of religious art. Conservative critics, too, were now offered a new philosophical and moral basis for including novels among the literary works worthy of attention. While the journalism of the periodicals in the earlier half of the eighteenth century had “brought many new recruits for secular literature into the reading public,” argues Ian Watt, “that public’s taste for informative, impracticable, improving, entertaining and easy reading had not as yet found an appropriate fictional form” (52). More’s novel, while not the first to employ this “appropriate fictional form,” was the first to gain such widespread attention and acclaim that it generated a new recognition of the appropriateness of the novel for improving reading.

As a contributor to the *Edinburgh Review*, the young Evangelical James Stephen (who was about twenty years old when *Cœlebs* was published) was one of those who saw the great potential for the advancement of religion in More’s prototype. From among More’s friends and correspondents, Stephen offered one of the most insightful of critical responses. Having received confirmation from William Wilberforce of the identity of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*’s anonymous author, Stephen wrote More a warm, but not entirely uncritical, assessment of her project and subsequent encouragement to continue in this vein of writing. Although lengthy, excerpts of Stephen’s critique are worthy of inclusion:

I cannot conclude without expressing a warm and sincere approbation of the general plan of your work in point of religious utility. It has long appeared to me that well-planned and wellwritten works of the novel kind might be powerful instruments in correcting the irreligious taste and manners of the age, especially in the fashionable world, and among the rising generation. I might, indeed, for the fashionable world, substitute all ranks above the lowest; for in which of them are not novels read with avidity, and in how great a degree do they form the moral sentiments and judgments of the young? The stage, in my opinion, has not a tenth part of their influence; and though that must unavoidably be left in the hands of the many at present, and is from its very constitution in a much greater degree the slave than the master of the public manners and opinions; not so with

novels; if a fertile invention, sound judgment, and correct religious principle were employed in composing them, I doubt not that a sufficient interest might be given, without admitting any thing that the strictest purity could justly condemn. Indeed, you have proven this . . . (Roberts *ii* 157)

Stephen expresses here both the old conservative concerns about the novel and one of the first recognitions from among the conservative Evangelicals of the potential power for good the form could wield in the right hands. In a later letter, Stephen states his hope that More's novel would not be her last, as well as a strengthened conviction about the religious utility of the novel as a literary form:

. . . [Y]ou have happily begun to proscribe for us in the more palatable way, and in such a way as has multiplied your patients: the laboratory at Barley Wood may prepare the medicine as before, but as you have found the way of giving it in comfits and preserves, the taste of the day is material. I speak in hope that "Cœlebs" will not always be left like a pilgrim in an African forest, to be followed and surrounded by monkey imitators, without a companion from the same rational stock to support him in his pious enterprise, and mark out more clearly to genuine followers the path he has happily opened. The opinion I gave of the probable utility of that work has since been abundantly confirmed . . . and it is, I think, impossible to doubt that the good produced by it bears a more than ordinary proportion to the number of readers; most of whom "Cœlebs" has withdrawn from the trash of the circulating library. . . . Sermons and didactic works in religion in general, if they could impress like pictures of living individual piety, are rarely read by those who most want their assistance. . . . We translate the Scriptures for the Welch and Hindoos, and why not translate practical religion into polished life, for the poor sons and daughters of fashion, and the lovers of romances and novels?

(Roberts *ii* 165-166)

Stephen clearly had high hopes for the future of the novel in the hands of an author such as More, though any plan to see her repeat the effort was disappointed. In 1813, Stephen wrote to More, "I feel angry with those who dissuaded you from bribing us with another novel" (Roberts *ii*

199); much to Stephen's dismay, More's first novel was also her last.

Although one critic has deemed More's attempt "a valiant but vain effort to raise the moral tone of the circulating libraries" (Gallaway 1044), many evidences exist of More's success in reaching her intended audience -- the largely middle class readers of the circulating library -- with her moral novel.

Many of More's correspondents shared the positive effects the novel had had on readers from all classes. For example, after citing in his correspondence to her an example of the effectiveness of one of More's tracts within one poor family, Reverend Venn wrote,

I am also happy to find that "CŒLEBS" is equally beneficial in the higher circles. The aunt of a lady in this neighbourhood, whose excellent niece suffered much restraint and hardship (I must not call it persecution) in consequence of her seriousness, is now, from having read "CŒLEBS," no longer prejudiced, and herself reads the books which her niece recommends. . . . I can truly declare that I look upon it as one of the most useful works which was ever written, for the purpose it was intended to answer. (qtd. in Bradley 52)

Another correspondent related his gauge of the novel's success: ". . . the sentiments in CŒLEBS have made an impression on many minds, to which they would have had no access if they had been introduced under a more formal garb. . . ." (Roberts *ii* 177).

Another letter to More conveyed the popularity of her works, including *Cœlebs*, around the globe: "I have been pleased to learn from a gentleman who has made the tour of Northern Europe, that he found 'Cœlebs' and 'Practical Piety' much read in Sweden, and the latter in Iceland. They had American editions." More's biographer Roberts adds that these were "read with great apparent profit and general estimation" (*ii* 268). More confessed to having been "much amused" by the French reviews of *Cœlebs* (including one by her friend Madame de Stael), which she found to be "written with great gravity and friendliness." (Roberts *ii* 263). She had even better hopes from the German reviews though she was unable to read the German translation of

Cœlebs she obtained (Murch 119).

While More's professed purpose in writing a didactic novel was to provide more wholesome reading for the already-existing audience of the novel, the more significant result was the novel's luring of the traditionally non novel reading-audience. More's contemporary, Charlotte Yonge, remarked on this success, "To those more seriously disposed persons who barely tolerated fiction of any sort, *Cœlebs*, with its really able sketches of character and epigrammatic turns, was genuinely entertaining and delightful" (Roberts *ii* 178). Even the clergy could be found in this newly developed audience of novel readers. In 1810, the Bishop of Lincoln wrote to More, praising both her writing and her purpose:

CŒLEBS afforded me the highest satisfaction: not merely the pleasure of reading a book written in very superior style, with an interesting story, and a just delineation of character; but as I went along, I could not but feel a strong conviction that a work, so excellent in its principles, and so entertaining in its nature, must be in an eminent degree useful, to a class of readers in particular who seldom take up a book but to derive mischief from it.

(Roberts *ii* 174)

THE LITERARY INFLUENCE OF *CŒLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE*

Any study of the preeminent literary genre of the nineteenth century must include an examination of the role the evangelical movement and its literature played in the transformation of the novel from the entertaining but inconsequential romance into the medium that best expressed the anxieties and aspirations of the individual soul. The years between 1789 and 1818 have been identified as those of the "great flowering of evangelical creative writing" (Newell 4). Essays, poetry, and treatises abounded; Hannah More was herself among the foremost evangelical contributors to these literary genres. Undertaking to write an explicitly Christian novel, however, was "breaking new ground" (Newell 8).

Hannah More's ambitious object in writing *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* was to regenerate the genre, to transform what had become an instrument of evil into an instrument of good. The novel, which had seduced the unwary into accepting the false doctrines of radical politics and romantic love, could just as easily be employed to present the truths of vital Christianity in a favorable light. Instead of inciting the passions and undermining the morals of impressionable young women, the novel, in responsible hands, could teach them to govern their conduct according to Gospel principles and provide them with noble, feminine models of Christian usefulness to emulate. (Davis 76-77)

Ann H. Jones also argues for the tremendous influence of the evangelical movement on the novel. The movement's influence had reached the height of its activity during this period and constituted so great a force that in a relatively brief time period, "it affected the way of life of the whole nation" (7). Jones' study of the bestsellers of this age shows that the period of 1800 to 1820 included a number of widely read and greatly esteemed authors who have been forgotten today. Not coincidentally, it was also during this period that the novel as a genre experienced a "transformation of its reputation and respectability," following its nadir in the 1790s (Jones 1-2). While the novel's elevation in stature is generally attributed to Scott (for example, see the *Quarterly Review* 34:377), with some credit allowed to Maria Edgeworth (see Tillotson 15-16), novelists such as More were key to the novel's rise in respectability,⁵⁵ and the evangelical influence on the novel proved, overall, to be "beneficial" (Ann H. Jones 14).

Robin Reed Davis argues that inasmuch as the life of Hannah More "provided a type of the ideal Christian woman of letters," an example followed by a succeeding generation of women writers, any study of evangelicalism's impact on nineteenth-century feminine literature must begin

⁵⁵ Eight such authors included in Ann Jones's study are: Mary Brunton, Charlotte Dacre, Elizabeth Hamilton, Sydney Morgan, Amelia Opie, Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), Anna Maria Porter, and Jane Porter. "No less than five of the eight authors discussed are found to have been strongly influenced by the Evangelicals, and in the works of two others Evangelical ideas feature," states Jones (7).

with an examination of the work of More (31). By the end of the eighteenth century, women were no longer writing popular novels primarily to be read by other women, but

began to write novels with a skill and authority which commanded the respect of both sexes, and over the next fifty years, they colonised the medium and made it their own. They took over the novel in England, gave it a new shape, structure and unity of intention which was to have a lasting impact to this day. If there is such a thing as the classical novel in English literature . . . then women were responsible for defining and refining it. (Figes 1)

More's influence in helping to give both a new form and a new function to the novel is immeasurable but certain. Particularly influential was More's use of the language of the periodic essay, marked by rational, reasonable and disciplined modes of thought and expression. More's influence can be seen among many minor, particularly female, writers of the first decades of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1819, Evangelical Mary Brunton praised the novel for its potential as a moral art:

Why should an epic or a tragedy be supposed to hold such an exalted place in composition while a novel is almost a nickname for a book? Does not a novel admit of as noble sentiments -- as lively description -- as natural character -- as perfect unity of action -- and a moral as irresistible as either of them? I protest, I think -- a fiction containing a just representation of human beings and of their actions -- a connected, interesting, and probable story, conducting to a useful and impressive moral lesson -- might be one of the greatest efforts of human genius. Let the admirable construction of fable in Tom Jones be employed to unfold characters like Miss Edgeworth's -- let it lead to a moral like Richardson's -- let it be told with the eloquence of Rousseau, and with the simplicity of Goldsmith -- let it be all of this, and Milton need not be ashamed of the work.

(qtd. in Davis 143)

Similarly, the June 1812 edition of the *Eclectic Review*, while professing to discover no lively

characters in *Cælebs*, found that to be a minor fault outweighed by the “force of the moral lesson” in the novel (609-609). Such views represent a complete reversal of the contempt with which evangelicals, along with many others, viewed the novel at the turn of the century.

As noted in a previous chapter, Clara Reeve is one writer from the period who expressed concerns about the “novel” in her *Progress of Romance* (1785). Many reputable authors shared these concerns. Indeed, antinovel sentiment was so strong that it was customary for eighteenth-century novels to be called “histories” in their titles. For example, Fanny Burney, both in *Evelina* (1778) and in *Camilla* (1796), disdains the use of the term “novel,” referring to herself in *Evelina* as “editor.” Likewise, Maria Edgeworth refuses to use the term in her “Advertisement” to *Belinda* (1801):

Every author has a right to give what appellation he may think proper to his works. The public also have a right to accept or refuse the classification that is presented.

The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale – the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel. (qtd. in Litz 54)

In *The Heroine, or Adventures of Cherubina* (1813) by Eaton Stannard Barrett, the author parodies the current fiction, including the “absurd and sentimental aspects” of writers such as Richardson, Rousseau, Burney, and More (Winfield Rogers 105). Yet, the author does not condemn all novels. In fact, he allows the character of Stuart to voice his true opinion of novels (as compared to “Romances”) and *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* is one of the works recommended to the heroine by her lover to combat her romance-induced lapse of sanity.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ In another of Barrett’s works, *The Hero; or, the Adventures of a Night* (published in 1817), the main character is “threatened” with being forced to read the second part of *Cælebs* unless he agrees never to read novels other than those by Fielding, Smollett, Edgeworth, and Austen, among others. Rather than submit to the reading, the hero signs the agreement.

I do not protest against the perusal of fictitious biography altogether; for many works of this kind may be read without injury, and some with advantage. Novels such as the *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Cecilia*, *O'Donnel*, *The Fashionable Tales*, and *Cælebs*, which draw man as he is, imperfect, instead of man as he cannot be, superhuman, are both instructive and entertaining. (qtd. in Winfield Rogers 107)

Winfield Rogers argues that works such as *The Heroine* had considerable influence in “turning the course of fiction” (108). Certainly, such sentiments joined the growing tide of belief in the novel’s potential to transcend the morally and artistically questionable aspects of its history.

Evangelical publications had always had a wider audience than merely those who held to evangelical doctrines (Jay 9), and this was particularly true of *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*. After its publication, “it became difficult for any but the most puritanical to object to all novels” (Ann H. Jones 12). Contributing to this new acceptability of the novel was the characteristic the form shared in common with evangelicalism: an emphasis on individual experience. As Jay argues, evangelical novels contributed to the development of the novel as a form by recapturing the same emphasis on introspection that characterized the works of Richardson and the sentimentalists (2). The evangelical philosophy of the individual that spread to the culture at large provided a fertile environment which enabled the novel to develop into the artistic medium of an age characterized by an emphasis on the life of the individual.

By 1816, Thomas Macauley, son of Claphamite Zachary Macauley, exhibited evangelicalism’s increasing tolerance toward the novel. In response to continued criticisms of the novel, Macauley argued in the *Christian Observer*⁵⁷ that only some novels were bad. He then classified novels into four ascending categories: the harmless and entertaining, such as Scott’s *Waverly*; the highly instructive, such as the works of Fielding and Smollet; moral novels such as those by Maria Edgeworth; and the religious novels like More’s *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* which, Macauley argued, *should* be read.

⁵⁷ 15 (December 1816): 785-786

While there is no direct evidence of Jane Austen's having read *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, she was certainly aware of its existence and its tremendous popularity; at one point, Austen expressed her reluctance to read *Cœlebs* in a letter to her sister, saying that she found More's Latin spelling of the name "Caleb" to denote "pedantry & affectation." "Is it written only to Classical scholars?" she asked (*Letters* 259). But, she later conceded, "Of course, I shall be delighted, when I read it, like other people" (*Letters* 256). Austen did indicate that she had read at least twice another evangelical novel, Mary Balfour Brunton's *Self-Control* (*Letters* 344), a work in which the author acknowledged her own indebtedness to Hannah More. Austen also included a reference to *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* in a later revision of *Catherine*, an unfinished work from her *Juvenilia*. Tellingly, the reference to *Cœlebs* replaced a reference to a bishop's commentary on the Catechism in Austen's original version (Litz 174). The reference occurs when the heroine Catherine is berated by the aunt who had raised her, Mrs. Percival (whose educational philosophy is somewhat of a caricature of the kind promoted by More), after Catherine is seen in an indecorous circumstance with a male suitor:

All I wished for, was to breed you up virtuously; I never wanted you to play upon the harpsichord, or draw better than anyone else; but I had hoped to see you respectable and good; to see you able and willing to give an example of modesty and virtue to the young people hereabouts. I bought you Blair's *Sermons*, and *Cœlebs' In Search of a Wife* [sic], I gave you the key to my own library, and borrowed a great many books of my neighbours for you, all to this purpose. But I might have spared myself the trouble.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ This excerpt is taken from pages 50-51 of the Phoenix Paperback edition, published by Orion Books Ltd., London.

A number of critics have examined More's influence in Austen's writings. Mary Waldron finds enough allusions in Austen's work to be certain that Austen must have eventually read *Cœlebs* ("Mansfield Park and the Evangelical Movement" 268n). Another critic asserts, "The shadow of the dedicated author of *Cœlebs* hovers over virtually all of the serious fiction read by Jane Austen and her contemporaries" (Colby 86). Even the "measured, generalized idiom of the eighteenth century essayists" that describes Austen's writing style (Litz 49) is just as apt a description of More's style.

In none of Austen's works is the influence of Hannah More more evident than in *Mansfield Park*. *Mansfield Park* is widely acknowledged to be Jane Austen's most Evangelical as well as her most complicated work. Most critics attribute the artistic and ideological shifts in *Mansfield Park* to Austen's influence by evangelicalism and, particularly, the brand of evangelicalism promoted by the work of Hannah More (see Figs 95, Butler 242). *Mansfield Park* has been described as "the most consciously schematic and 'evangelical' novel she ever wrote, the most devoted to Christian and conservative values" (Figs 95).⁵⁹

The nineteenth century critic and contemporary of Austen, Richard Whatley, saw a natural comparison of Austen's work to More's. In his comparison, published in the January 1821 edition of the *Quarterly Review*, Whatley found that Austen

has the merit (in our judgment most essential) of being evidently a Christian writer: a merit which is much enhanced, both on the score of good taste, and of practical utility, by her religion being not at all obtrusive. She might defy the most fastidious critic to call any of her novels, (as *Cœlebs* was designated, we will not say altogether without reason,) a 'dramatic sermon'. (370)

Whatley found Austen to be more successful than More in "combining, in an eminent degree,

⁵⁹ Austen's disavowal of and subsequent reversal of opinion regarding "the Evangelicals," as evident from her correspondence, has received sufficient recognition to warrant mere mention here.

instruction with amusement” in a manner less “obtrusive” (359). Still, he clearly places Austen in the same camp as More and other authors -- that of conservative Christian moral writers.

Austen seems conscious, however, that in writing her novels she was attempting something different. She was one of the first of her class of writers who refused to reject the labels “novel” and “novelist,” and this was clearly a deliberate choice; Austen wrote in her *Letters* of being raised in a family who were “great Novelreaders & not being ashamed of being so” (December 18, 1798). While contemporary female writers such as Clara Reeve, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Ann Radcliffe avoided, or denounced even, association with those terms, Jane Austen satirized such views (Litz 53-57). Indeed, as Litz points out, much of Austen’s project was to demonstrate how “morality gets into fiction” (57) and thus, like Hannah More, to acknowledge and explore the moral power of art.

Significantly, while much of the preliminary composition of her works occurred in the years 1788 - 1805, Austen’s serious preparations for publication of her work didn’t begin until 1809,⁶⁰ when her interest in seeking publication of her works was renewed following several years of inactivity. While her journal entries (cited above) indicate that she had no immediate interest in reading *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* for herself, Austen was familiar with the novel’s enthusiastic reception, particularly among a wide audience of traditionally non-novel readers. It seems safe to venture that the success of Hannah More’s novel was at least a factor in Austen’s renewed efforts at having her novels published, as well as in the success of those efforts, beginning with the publication of her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, in 1811. If it is true that Austen “had to react vigorously against the accepted notions of the novel’s artistic merit, and against the popular belief in its pernicious moral influence” (Litz 53), then certainly the success of Hannah More persuaded Austen that such a “quiet revolution in narrative method” (Litz 53) was indeed possible.

At the time of their publication, Austen’s novels were easily categorized together with

⁶⁰ This chronology is based on that by A. Walton Litz in the Appendix of *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (see works cited).

those of other contemporary female novelists such as More because the subject matter was essentially the same: female education and conduct and domestic manners and morals. Indeed, contemporary readers would have seen little of remarkable difference in Austen's novel. The lack of marked critical or popular reception of Austen's work by her contemporary readers indicates that what that audience did see was found to be largely unremarkable. Despite, or perhaps because, of the similar content in Austen's novels and that of other female novelists of the time, contemporary critics seemed not to recognize the subtlety and tact of Austen's didactic art -- the very characteristic that now sets her work apart from that of most of her contemporaries. A reading of *Mansfield Park* in the context of the success and widespread influence of *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, along with Austen's own knowledge of the book, points to significant parallels between the two novels but, more importantly, demonstrates marked progress by Austen in the art of didactic fiction. Indeed, sufficient evidence exists to suggest that *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* may have served as a jumping off point for Austen in writing *Mansfield Park*, a point from which the progress of Austen's work, and its success, can be measured.

In her Introduction to *Mansfield Park*, Kathryn Sutherland places the work within the context of "an ongoing dialogue among female educationalists of the period," among whom she includes Catherine Macauley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Hester Chapone, and Hannah More. Like all of More's work, *Mansfield Park* has as its central concern "the relationship between education, manners, and moral judgement" (xiv).

Like most of Austen's works, *Mansfield Park* shares another theme with *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*: the search for the right marriage partner. Colby argues that many of *Mansfield Park*'s first readers were likely to have seen Austen's character of Edmund Bertram as just one more of many other variants patterned after the character of Cælebs, and that indeed many of the characters in *Mansfield Park* would have felt at home in the setting of *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (81, 82). Following his lengthy and detailed description of the similarities between the two novels, Colby concludes that "however repelled she may have been by the Evangelical temperament,

Miss Austen shares Miss More's ethical views -- including the necessity of an extended period of courtship and a rational approach to marriage" (85). Fanny's and Cœlebs's similar approaches to this question forms the driving force in the plots of their respective narratives. Both authors, More and Austen, themselves held the high views of marriage conveyed in their novels, just as each found enough dissatisfaction with contemporary marital arrangements and expectations to make the subject a predominant theme of their work and, ultimately, to fail in finding marriage partners suitable for fulfilling these high views.

One conduct book theme illustrated by *Mansfield Park* is the traditional conduct book's contention that regardless of one's class or circumstances, one is responsible for one's own manners and behavior (Fritzer 52). This is a theme that developed in the novel as a genre and in evangelicalism as a religious, social, and political force. By taking a character such as Fanny out of a rude and impoverished environment, placing her alongside the privileged Maria and Julia Bertram to undergo the same program of education, and having her then excel them both, Austen thus confirms in this novel the essence of More's educational philosophy.

Mansfield Park reinforces the centrality of conversation for proper socialization and education seen in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*. In *Cœlebs* "rational, animated conversation" was "the one recreation permitted and encouraged" (M. G. Jones 195). More believed that "conversation and mingling in society were of equal value with reading, if not more valuable, as a source of knowledge about human nature. Fanny Price's education, significantly, includes frequent opportunities to observe and discuss the people she meets" (Colby 76). In both *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* and *Mansfield Park*, conversation brings to light clashes in belief systems; while in *Cœlebs* conversation sometimes has the power to turn these clashes into transformative experiences for the characters, in *Mansfield Park* it fails to do so. Rather, in her various conversations with unseeing or unyielding characters, Fanny's own conviction is strengthened.

Both *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* and *Mansfield Park* go beyond the standard fare of

conduct book material to promulgate more specifically evangelical views. One such aspect of evangelical belief central to *Mansfield Park* is the importance of reading and interpretation. As Sutherland states,

Central to the Evangelical concept of the Good Life, as expounded by Hannah More and others, was the institutional power of reading itself. A revisionist Eve and angelical, Fanny is the heroine of a text which takes literary models and the reading of literature as morally influential and socially determining . . . and Fanny herself is a resistant reader of its essentialized agenda of whom Hannah More might be proud. (xxx)

Richard C. Altick's seminal study, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900*, examines the considerable influence of evangelicalism on attitudes toward reading:

Like their Puritan forebears, the evangelicals, believing as they did in the supreme importance of Scripture, stressed the act of reading as part of the program of the truly enlightened life. They believed that the grace of God could, and did, descend to the individual man and woman through the printed page. The cultivation of the reading habit was therefore as indispensable as a daily program of prayer and observance of a strict moral code. (99)

Notably, then, Fanny spends much of her frequent solitude at Mansfield Park reading in an extra room that has become her own study.

Yet, it is not merely reading, but the mode of interpretation of that reading -- one that is autonomous and unmediated -- that characterizes the evangelical perspective. This kind of interpretive approach forms the basis for the evangelical faith and for the action in *Mansfield Park*. Once the Bertrams and their guests have chosen a play to enact in their makeshift home theater, the "first use [Fanny] made of her solitude was to take up the volume which had been left on the table, and began to acquaint herself with the play of which she had heard so much" (vol I, ch. 14).

Fanny's interpretation of the play, in turn, influences her view of her companions who wish to act it out, an interpretation which precipitates the turning point of the novel. Indeed, as Butler points out, Fanny is the only one among her friends who actually reads the play and responds to it as a whole (230), while the others accept the choice of the play merely on the authority of recommendation. Here, as in the evangelical system, an individual's independent reading of a text (such as the Bible), rather than the interpretation handed down by a mediated authority, becomes the basis for interpreting, ordering, and acting upon the world. As Fanny applies her reading of *Lovers' Vows* to her peers and finds their actions questionable, she faces a moral dilemma of her own in deciding how to respond according to her principles of belief.

Significantly, the young people's decision to put on a private play -- the axis upon which the story of *Mansfield Park* turns -- is a detailed exploration of a topic suggested in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*. The morality of theater in general and the popular pastime of home theatricals in particular was a concern addressed by the evangelicals and, as we have already seen, an issue with which More herself grappled. David Spring has shown that by the early years of the nineteenth century, the Evangelical movement had successfully established the view that private theatricals among the upper classes were an influence in immorality. This question is merely hinted at in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* when Cœlebs wrongly suspects that Lucilla and her sisters may be participants in "private theatricals" at Stanley Grove (167). This suspicion is prompted by a remark by Lucilla's younger sister Phoebe that during the Christmas month "our labours are suspended, and then we have so much pleasure that we want no business; such in-door festivities and diversions, that that dull month is with us the gayest in the year" (165). Such a rapt description of sheer pleasure leaves Cœlebs unable to imagine any wholesome diversion, so he fears that his beloved Lucilla may be guilty of inconsistency in her character and choice of amusements. He learns from the housekeeper, however, that the in-door festivities and diversions" consist, not of private play-acting, but acts of public charity. In *Mansfield Park* this issue receives a full examination. The question of whether or not the party of young people at the

Bertrams should put on their private production of *Lover's Vows* develops a pivotal crisis in the novel as well as in the life of Fanny. The prospect of young people acting out the roles of illegitimate son, seducer, and crossed-lovers is a scandal Fanny struggles, unsuccessfully, to avert. In so doing, she demonstrates a like-mindedness, if not a similar strength of mind, with the character of Cœlebs.

The party's selection of the play *Lover's Vows* is itself significant. The message of *Lovers' Vows*, by the German playwright Kotzebue, a name familiar to the English audience of the time (Butler 233), was the antithesis of evangelical belief. By promoting belief in the inherent goodness of man and the authority of his own conscience as a guide to behavior, *Lovers' Vows* contradicts the evangelicals' belief in the innate depravity of man and the corruption of his mind and conscience, and the incumbent need for God as the ultimate and external source of authority. Although depicting a character who experiences anxiety over the morally compromising positions her friends put themselves into by acting out the sex-charged roles of the play, Austen chooses a play whose ideas are directly opposed to evangelical belief and which will serve as the backdrop to the narrative's working out of evangelical versus secular ideas. And with the unexpected, climactic arrival home of Mr. Bertram (the father who may in fact represent the Father), the project of the play comes to an end, as does the first volume of the novel and Fanny's naivete about her peers in Mansfield Park.

Another area in which More's brand of evangelicalism can be seen in *Mansfield Park* is in the prominence of Milton and his figure of Eve in *Paradise Lost*. While the centrality of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* will be examined in the next chapter, it is important to note here the significance of the work in *Mansfield Park* as well. John Wesley had been "intensely interested" in Milton, having annotated *Paradise Lost* while at Oxford and published *An Extract from Milton's Paradise Lost with Notes* in 1763 (Gill 58); this renewed interest in Milton carried over with significant force to the evangelical movement, and the Milton revival resulted in the publication of over one hundred editions of *Paradise Lost* between 1705 and 1800 (Gill 59).

During the first half of the nineteenth century the figure of Eve as portrayed by Milton regained popularity among female readers and writers, and some have attributed this resurgence of interest directly to Hannah More and *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (Davis 27). The influence of this Milton revival on Jane Austen is clearly evident in *Mansfield Park*, particularly in the portrayal of Fanny, a depiction which Sutherland describes as a “distinctly feminized alignment of Christian and conservative values, a historically specific revision of Milton’s interpretation of the temptation scene” (xxx). Henry Crawford, Fanny’s eventual (but spurned) suitor, quotes *Paradise Lost* (Book 5,19) when he speaks of marriage as “Heaven’s *last* best gift” (vol. 1, ch. 4). While Henry’s reference is meant to be ironic, as his sister Mary points out, the ultimate irony is that it is Fanny who causes Henry to consider and then pursue her hand in marriage.

Another of Hannah More’s favorite poets that also appears in *Mansfield Park* is the Evangelical poet William Cowper. Both *Mansfield Park* and More’s novel “seem to have been intended to confirm Cowper’s pronouncement that ‘God made the country; man made the town’” (Colby 70-71). Fanny’s responses to nature are a certain reflection of this evangelical view, as can be seen in these two passages which describe Fanny’s sensations upon returning from a visit to her own family’s city home to her adopted home in Mansfield Park:

She had not known before, how much the beginnings and process of vegetation had delighted her. --What animation both of body and mind, she had derived from watching the advance of that season which cannot, in spite of its capriciousness, be unlovely, and seeing its increasing beauties, from the earliest flowers, in the warmest divisions of her aunt’s garden, to the opening of leaves of her uncle’s plantations, to the glory of his woods. (vol. iii, ch xiv)

. . . when they entered the Park, her perceptions and her pleasures were of the keenest sort. . . . Her eye fell every where on lawns and plantations of the freshest green; and the trees, though not fully clothed, were in that delightful state, when farther beauty is known to be at hand, and when, while much is actually given to the sight, more yet remains for the imagination. (vol iii, ch. xv)

Fanny's impressions of Mansfield Park are similar to (if more subjective than) Cœlebs's descriptions of Stanley Grove which includes "a fine old wood" and a park "richly clothed with the most picturesque oaks I ever saw, interspersed with stately beeches." Cœlebs quotes a line from Cowper's *The Task* in describing his first view of the home of his father's dear friend: "The grounds were laid out in good taste; but though the hand of modern improvement was visible, the owner had in one instance spared 'The obsolete prolixity of shade' for which the most interesting of poets so pathetically pleads" (59).

By featuring static figures as their central characters, both *Mansfield Park* and *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* "deliberately rejected the principle of growth and change which animates most of English fiction" (Litz 129). Fanny, like Cœlebs, is based on the figure of the "thoughtful bystander" which gained prominence in the eighteenth century through such creations as the "philosopher" of Gibbon (Butler 228), a writer More comments on substantially in her correspondence. The remainder of characters in both novels are, as Butler says specifically of *Mansfield Park*, illustrations or actings-out of their belief and value systems (227) rather than reflective observers. This character of the "thoughtful bystander" is the most obvious manifestation of the Christian hero or heroine, the "alien in a strange land" spoken of in the Old Testament and carried over into the New Testament.⁶¹

There is a wide range of views concerning whether or not *Mansfield Park* affirms or questions the evangelical belief system. A number of critics (see Kathryn Sutherland and Marilyn Butler, for example) have shown how the characters of Fanny and Edmund promote the ideology of Evangelical Anglicans. Many critics recognize in Fanny an Evangelical heroine who espouses the Evangelical virtues of humility, a visible and active faith, and a serviceable and contemplative life (see Butler in particular). For example, the practice of self-examination so important in the evangelical philosophy is seen in Fanny's deep and repeated self-consciousness of her own

⁶¹ Exodus 18:3; Philippians 3:20

human weakness to the extent that “she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples” (vol. I, ch. 16). Similarly, as mentioned elsewhere, Lucilla’s scrupulousness in *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* causes her to regulate her time even in such innocent pleasures as gardening. On the other hand, critics such as Claudia Johnson, Kathryn Sutherland, and Mary Waldron lean toward an interpretation that finds the ending “calamitous,” an “almost unmitigated disaster” (Waldron “*Mansfield Park* and the Evangelical Movement” 266, 267) and therefore a condemnation by Austen of the evangelical ideal, particularly those certainties promoted by the work of Hannah More. Others such as Gene Koppel and Avrom Fleishman leave room for uncertainty in the ending. In arguing that *Mansfield Park* fails to support Evangelicalism’s beliefs about the family and the social order, Waldron says that the message of Austen’s book

is that the brand of “goodness” embodied in Fanny, Edmund, and to some extent, Sir Thomas has not prevailed. It exists, but has been impotent. The power of example, as proffered in the work of Hannah More, has, in this realist novel, failed, because it has largely rescued those who were never really in danger. In *Cælebs*, a dissolute neighbour of Lucilla’s father, Mr. Carlton, is tamed from his evil ways by the visible piety of his wife (2:258-63). *Mansfield Park* deliberately rejects this stereotype; good example fails to avert a shipwreck. . . .

(267)

I do not find, as others do, enough evidence to justify a rereading of *Mansfield Park* as Austen’s deconstruction of the evangelical system of belief. Whether or not *Mansfield Park* is ultimately viewed as upholding or subverting the Evangelical ideal hinges on how one interprets the ambiguity of the ending. I believe that what we encounter in this work is indeed a depiction, an approving one at that, of an individual whose world is ordered by evangelical ideals. The reason those ideals fail to sustain the order in the lives of those around Fanny lies in the most central presupposition of evangelical belief; that is, the belief in each individual’s need for a personal and individual conversion experience. Just as, on a spiritual level, Fanny’s faith can save only herself

and no one else, so that same faith cannot avert physical or emotional disaster for those around her. Such a portrayal is entirely consistent with the evangelical belief system. Accordingly, it is also a subtler working out of the individual scenarios of nonbelievers depicted in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*.

The failure or breakdown of the evangelical system that some see in the ending of *Mansfield Park* is the same failure of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, though to a lesser degree in Austen's novel. As Butler describes it, "The fault . . . lies in the incongruity of the old absolutes to the novel, a form which historically is individualistic and morally relative" (248). Yet, Austen was considerably successful in employing a traditionally "morally relative" form to narrate the story of an individual who adheres to moral absolutes. The dearth of successful similar endeavors (including *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*) merely points to the difficulty of the task. Thus it might be said that in *Mansfield Park*, Austen "created the one masterpiece of a dead early nineteenth-century genre -- the Christian didactic novel" (Colby 100), a genre shared by *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, which failed to reach the same masterpiece status. Yet, like Hannah More, Austen seems in *Mansfield Park* "to be endeavoring to justify fiction by proving that it can be at once edifying and diverting" (Colby 100). Both More and Austen, the former quite explicitly, the latter more subtly, clearly express in their respective novels that "the values of art are not the ultimate ones" (Litz 130).

CRITICISM OF THE LATER NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Both contemporary and later responses to Hannah More and her novel reflect the sentiments of the two generations of two different centuries. "Intellectually she belonged to a generation already past so that . . . [More] carried the age of Johnson over into the time of Shelley and Byron" (Hopkins 108). Critical and literary attention to *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* shows that its reputation lasted well into the Victorian era. In 1856, another edition of More's collected works was issued, and references to the novel can be found in other novels as late as 1881 (see Colby

318).

On the other hand, the overlapping of the two ages, that symbolized Johnson and that by Shelley and Byron, resulted in dismissals of More's novel by some even while others exulted in its success. In the year of Hannah More's death, 1833, *The Athenaeum* of November 16 published an essay tracing the development of imaginative prose literature called "British Novels and Romances." The greatest significance in the development of the novel is attributed to Sir Walter Scott, but many now-forgotten female novelists are included as well, including More. Her novel is placed in the category of the "religious romance" which includes John Bunyan but is found failing to reach the artistic height of that work. The review states that although More sometimes succeeded in employing drama and character to influence religious feeling, "she has never succeeded in communicating that life or variety which brings popularity, and scatters works of fiction from the palace to the hovel" -- a greatly mistaken claim. The review concludes, "We are no admirers of religious romances. We listen with reverence to speculations from the pulpit, but with impatience to all lay-lectures" such as those of Hannah More (777).

As soon as 1838, her first biographer wrote of *Cœlebs* that it "labours under the disadvantage of appearing heavy to the mere novel-reader, while its novel-like exterior produces a prejudice in minds of another cast" (Thompson 243). Even earlier, when Lord Byron was composing *Don Juan* (from 1818 to 1824), a new literary and aesthetic generation was colliding with the age represented by More. Stanza 16 of Canto the First in *Don Juan* includes in the description of Don Juan's mother a deprecatory view of the works of More and like-minded female novelists:

In short, she was a walking calculation,
Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their covers,
Or Mrs. Trimmer's books on education,
Or "Cœlebs' Wife" set out in quest of lovers,
Morality's prim personification,
In which not Envy's self a flaw discovers;

To others' share let "female errors fall,"
For she had not even one -- the worst of all.

Anna Katherine Elwood's 1843 collection of the biographies of twenty-nine English literary women -- from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Emma Roberts -- includes a sympathetic, if unenlightening, portrayal of Hannah More. In her twenty-five page biographical sketch of the author, Elwood has little of literary interest to say of any of More's works but describes *Cœlebs* as a "deservedly popular" work that "had a great sale" (276).

Writing in 1877 of *Mrs Barbauld and her Contemporaries*, Jerom Murch laments the insufficient recognition given to women such as Hannah More in their contributions to English literature (1). He calls More and her fellow bluestocking Mrs. Barbauld "the most eminent women of their time, . . . in their order of mind and train of thought without rivals" (13n), and More is his first subject in this study of literary women of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Murch writes of More: "What she did, how high was her ideal of Christian duty, her life and writings testify. Of the women of the time England owes to her more perhaps than to any" (19).

Fellow novelist and conservative Charlotte Yonge wrote a biography of More which was published in 1888. Yonge demonstrates a more than superficial appreciation of the pioneering aspects of More's fiction, particularly that of the Cheap Repository Tracts, in cultivating and shaping the tastes of a new reading audience. Yonge notes the strategic importance of underselling the revolutionary tracts that More's attempted to combat (130) and how More improved on Sarah Trimmer's "Instructive Tales" both artistically and economically. Most significantly, Yonge notes the success of the tracts in banishing "mischievous publications" from many of the small shops that formerly had supplied reading material for the lower classes. She reports that the tracts were pronounced too "novelish and exciting" for some tastes and attributes this to More's affinity for the tragic and her inclination "to dispose of her worst characters by suicide" (143). Into *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, Yonge contributes less insight, perhaps because much of what she might have said about More's novel she had already remarked of the tracts. She

describes the character of *Cœlebs* as “a peg upon which to hang numerous sketches of society and character” (171) and deems More “utterly unable to construct an interesting story” (177). Still, Yonge recognizes the importance of the novel’s effects on the reading audience when she writes, “To those more seriously disposed persons who barely tolerated fiction of any sort, *Cœlebs*, with its really able sketches of character and epigrammatic turns, was genuinely entertaining and delightful” (178).

In a history of the English novel written in 1892, Masson counts twenty novelists who published between the years 1789 and 1814, among whom he names Hannah More.⁶² (184-85). Masson characterizes More’s novel as among those that were, like the earlier novelists of the eighteenth century, “mere painters of life and manners, and more or less of ethical purpose.” He cites Austen and Edgeworth as the “first in talent” but claims the novelists of this period all resemble Richardson “in minuteness of observation, in good sense, and in clear moral aim” (194-95).

Another literary history published in 1892 is Catherine Hamilton’s *Women Writers: Their Works and Ways*. Hannah More is included among sixteen female authors who wrote in the period of the late eighteenth to middle nineteenth centuries. Half a century after her death, writes Hamilton,

The name of Hannah More seems to bring with it an atmosphere of Puritanism and austerity. If we think of her at all, we imagine her to have been a mixture of a blue-stocking and a bore, a stern moralist and a positive bug-bear to the rising generation of her time. (82)

Hamilton attempts to dispel this image, however, by describing More as a vital and influential woman. *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, she states, “has a great deal of shrewdness and caustic wit about it. It was *the* book of its year, and was quoted everywhere” (94). “It is easy for us to criticise

⁶² Masson also notes that fourteen of the twenty novelists he includes were women.

her writings,” concedes Hamilton. “Had she lived in the present day, she would probably have been a better writer; for her faults of composition belonged to the age in which she lived, while her merits were all her own” (89).

Also published in 1892, L. B. Walford’s *Twelve English Authoresses* places Hannah More first in the survey, with her portrait on the frontispiece. In limiting the scope of the survey to twelve female writers, Walford confines the subjects “solely to a list of authors whose reputation is world-wide” (4). More is listed here as “one of the most remarkable women in England at the close of the last and beginning of the present century” (3). Walford recognizes the innovation in More’s attempt at a religious novel, remarking, “We must remember that Hannah More lived when books, as a rule, were either distinctly religious or distinctly vicious,” and More’s work pioneered the way for “an era of pure-minded fiction with a high moral tone” (15).

In the late 1890s, Professor William Minto delivered a series of lectures later published in a collection by William Knight called *The Literature of the Georgian Era*. In his lecture on “Novelists from Mrs. Radcliffe to Bulwer Lytton,” Minto includes *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* among novels written with a moral purpose. The other novelists who share company with More in this lecture include Sterne, Edgeworth, Austen, Scott, and Shelley. In comparing More’s novel to those of Maria Edgeworth, Minto finds the moral purpose in *Cœlebs* to be “constantly obtruded,” while the reader “is preached at from beginning to end of the excellent work.” Though More is judged “far from being a dull writer,” *Cœlebs* “is not a story, but a string of journalistic social articles on the minor and higher morals” (238).

In a biography of Hannah More published in 1900, Marion Harland takes particular notice of the fact that *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* attracted a new audience of novel readers: “The plot is slender and the motif trite, but the story took amazingly with evangelical people who had scruples as to reading the average romance of the day” (201). This is one of the very few critics to note this important aspect of the novel’s success.

In a 1919 study *The Women Novelists* by R. Brimley Johnson, we can see the beginning

of a shift in what was to become More's legacy as her literary standing gave way to her social and political accomplishments. Johnson opens his section on Hannah More by acknowledging that his readers probably know less of her than of Maria Edgeworth. More's writing "can only claim notice in this place on account of the energy with which she followed Miss Edgeworth's lead in didactic fiction." Echoing Sydney Smith's comments on *Cœlebs* in the *Edinburgh Review*, Johnson states, "It is, in fact, no more than a 'dramatic sermon,' and a sermon, moreover, in support of narrow-minded sectarianism." Here, More's mark is deemed most notable in her work on behalf of the poor and her "development of women's work," rather than in her literary accomplishments (63-65).

George Saintsbury's *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature*, published in 1927, makes minimal mention of More, though he states that she "deserves somewhat longer notice" than his preceding reference to Mrs. Radcliffe. Saintsbury describes More as "once a substantially famous person in literature" who is now remembered primarily for her associations with literary men. *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is described, simply, as a "once famous novel." Like Catherine Hamilton, Saintsbury attributes More's failings as a writer to her times, as she lived "just before the days when it became possible for a lady to be decent in literature without becoming dull" (45). Such an assessment regrettably ignores the important role More played in ushering in that era.

The 1936 reference book *British Authors of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Stanley J. Kunitz, includes more than two columns on More, as well as a portrait (447-48). More is described as "poet, playwright, and religious writer, the 'laureate of the bluestockings'." *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is deemed the author's "nearest approach to a novel," while the character of Cœlebs is described as an "odiously pious hero." The entry then concludes:

The pious effusions of Miss More are likely to amuse rather than repel the rising generation. Her forceful, spirited style and telling character sketches are grounds for regret that she chose the evangelical road to self-expression.

Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners 1700-1830, written by Maurice J. Quinlan and published in 1941, includes a lengthy chapter on Hannah More. More and poet William Cowper are said here to be the “two popular authors who knew how to season didacticism with entertainment” and thereby assisted the Evangelical cause’s influence within the larger culture (52). The most significant literary contribution by More shown by Quinlan’s history is her pioneering in writing fiction that was both entertaining and instructive. While others had made similar attempts, “it was Hannah More who really exploited the idea” and whose skill succeeded in appealing to various reading audiences (85).

In 1947, Mary Alden Hopkins published a literary history of More titled *Hannah More and Her Circle*, one of the few book-length works devoted to More in this century. This work makes a thorough and favorable presentation of More but breaks no new ground in either the literary or historical aspects of More’s life and works. Hopkins sees *Cœlebs* merely as “less a story than a series of essays modeled on those of *The Spectator* and *The Rambler* over which Hannah had pored in her youth” (229).

Perhaps to counteract the kind of portrayal given in Hopkins’ biography, M. G. Jones published her own biography, *Hannah More*, in 1952. Jones takes issue with much of the previous writing on More and her work, distrusting, perhaps rightfully so, any source who shared More’s Evangelical views (such as her biographer William Roberts) or who clearly opposed her work (such as biographer Reverend William Shaw). Jones’ interest in More rests greatly in the relationships More cultivated among all classes and what those relationships tell us about the social and religious context of English society at the time. Accordingly, Jones’ insight into the significance of More’s written works in these areas is keener than that of most previous studies. Of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, Jones states:

It presented a “calumniated religion” as the religion of the home in an easy and attractive guise and thus contributed to the growing popularity of Evangelicalism. At the same time, it offered to its readers among the middle class, anxious for

instruction in “decorous conduct,” a valued guide to feminine propriety written by a woman of recognized religious and social position. (193)

Jones also recognizes the significance *Cælebs* had in winning newfound support for the novel among conservative readers by pointing out that “those who had doubted the propriety of combining fiction and religion were reconciled to the new technique. Evangelicals welcomed this new and powerful instrument to correct the irreligious tastes and manners of the age” (196).

A 1966 essay on Evangelical fiction in the *Evangelical Quarterly* -- presumably the most sympathetic of critics for a writer such as Hannah More -- places *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* among the works that “are probably the most important and influential narratives from a historical point of view and the most interesting and valuable intrinsically” (Newell 5). Still, the value of *Cælebs* as a novel and its sustainability through the test of time is candidly and justly questioned: “Today *Cælebs* seems long-winded, verbose, uninteresting -- certainly not a novel; but lapse of time and change of taste cannot conceal its essential quality as a monument of sincere, dedicated, yet sophisticated, Christian writing” (Newell 21). “Although the criticism which she forestalled remains valid, *Cælebs* cannot be dismissed. . . . Like all her writing, *Cælebs* proceeds at an even tenor with sophisticated eighteenth century ease and grace” (Newell 12). The novel’s greatest value is seen in its attracting readers who would otherwise never read a religious work. Regrettably, here in this most appropriate place, the impact of *Cælebs* in changing conservative and religious attitudes about the genre of the novel is left unexamined. Still, in its recognition of the impact the work had on the reading audience, as well as of its artistic failure to capture the imagination long after its time, this criticism represents the most sympathetic and realistic to be found in the latter half of this century.

CURRENT CRITICISM

The last thirty years has seen a dearth of critical attention paid to someone who was one of the bestselling and most influential writers of her age. More merited half a chapter (named in her

honor, "Holy Hannahs and Pious Papas") of tongue-in-cheek, begrudging admiration in Manley and Belcher's tribute to the literary women of the last three centuries, *O, Those Extraordinary Women!* In *Mothers of the Novel: One Hundred Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen*, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* makes the author's list of 106 women novelists before Jane Austen (130), but does not make the subtitle's cut of 100 "good" women writers treated in the body of the work.

Likewise, current criticism of *Coelebs* is minimal in amount and enthusiasm. Some feminist critics dismiss *Coelebs*, along with More and the rest of her work, as a "case stud[y] in complicity" with a patriarchal society (Kowaleski-Wallace 12-13). "The very form of the didactic novel is inherently problematic, attempting overtly to empower the very women that it inevitably confines within the home" (Lott 134). Others, such as Jones, Quinlan, and Pickering, recognize the importance of *Coelebs* both in terms of the growth of Evangelicalism and its role in English life and literature in the early nineteenth century. Along with More's other works, according to these critics, *Coelebs* "paved the high road to Victorianism" (Quinlan 49). Though he finds *Coelebs* to be "a relentlessly didactic novel" (Pickering *The Moral Tradition* 80) Samuel Pickering recognizes the importance the work played in shaping the future of the novel as a literary genre. With it, More popularized (arguably singlehandedly) the genre of "religious novels" which paved the way for the acceptability of novels within the Evangelical movement, which, in turn, gave rise to the Victorian age of English history and English literature. Religious writers such as More "determined not only the expectations of the reading public . . . but also the form and content of the Victorian novel" (10). The history of the popularity of the novel as a genre, he writes,

overlooks the preparatory importance of religious tracts and the phenomenal success enjoyed by Hannah More's *Coelebs*. The first nineteenth century novel to be acclaimed by "religious readers," *Coelebs* convinced many doubters . . . that the novel could become a handmaiden to Christianity. (89)

A few more recent publications point to a trickling of renewed recognition of More's literary importance. Patricia Demers begins her 1996 social and literary history, *The World of Hannah More*, with a prefatory apology, of sorts. Warned by a colleague not to expect to give Hannah More "a place in the sun," Demers asks, "What about at least allowing her to lounge in slightly more benign shade?" She then explains that her work is "not really a rescue mission, it is an attempt to take Hannah More seriously." That an historian must defend a study that takes seriously a figure once universally esteemed says as much about the current age as the one past. Demers' interest in More's work, however, lies more in its social, rather than its literary, implications. She views *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* from within the context of courtship and the selection of a marriage partner and approves of the novel's "equating virtue with self-regulation" and its "attack on the selfishness and laziness of the pleasure-loving upper classes" (98).

This approach contrasts sharply with Kowalski-Wallace's psychosexual analysis of More's works (along with those of Maria Edgeworth) as evidence of patriarchal complicity and attempts by the women to repress "the awful power of female sexuality" (13). Similarly, in *The Feminine Irony: Women on Women in Early-Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, Lynne Agress interprets More's work as merely reinforcing the subordinate role of women and anachronistically views More herself as a reactionary rather than a reformer. Agress's analysis of More's work is exceedingly narrow and often wrongheaded. She views More as a hypocritical "self-appointed messiah" (48), whom she faults, with a blindly ironic misogyny, for leading "a stimulating social and intellectual life" (49). (In all fairness to Agress, this misinterpretation of More's life seems based on Agress's fundamental inability to reconcile More's piety with her other pursuits -- the very tendency More fought to change within conservative religious thinking.)

Charles Howard Ford's 1996 *Hannah More: A Critical Biography* is a serious and honest examination of the life and works of a complex figure in what was a rapidly changing cultural and historical context. Ford explores the nuances and seeming contradictions of More's personal and political accomplishments and attempts an understanding of a figure who denies facile

categorization. His is a reassessment of “one of the most prolific and influential” English authors of her time, one which attempts to correct the extremes in her critical treatment between those that are “generally uncritical and superficial” and those that easily dismiss her work as “second-rate” (ix). An historian, Ford is more interested in the social implications of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (which he describes as an attempt at maintaining “artificial distinctions between male and female”) than in its literary significance.

Clearly, even what little critical attention has been given to Hannah More in recent studies has tended to focus on aspects other than her literary significance, resulting in an unfortunate neglect of a consequential, though admittedly not central, figure in the development of the novel. A writer out of sync with modern day sense and sensibilities, whose only novel contributed little if anything to the form of the genre, More nonetheless played a distinctive, if undervalued, part in the inextricably intertwined stories of the rise of the novel, the rise of Evangelicalism, and the assimilation of the novel into, and its acceptability within, popular culture.

CHAPTER FIVE:

A CRITICAL READING OF *CÆLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE*

"A LITTLE TO RAISE THE TONE": MORE TURNS TO THE NOVEL

She had reached the literati with her drama and verse, the aristocracy with her treatises, and the poor with her cheap tracts. The only audience remaining for More to turn her attention toward was that of the swelling ranks of middle class patrons of the circulating libraries -- the novel readers. In seeming contradiction of her own condemnation of novels, in 1808 More published her only novel, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*.

As she explained in a letter to William Pepys shortly following the publication of *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, More hoped through this work to appeal to a different class of readers than that reached by the tracts:

I thought there were already good books enough in the world for good people, but that there was a larger class of readers whose wants had not been attended to,-- the subscribers to the circulating library. A little to raise the tone of that mart of mischief, and to counteract its corruptions, I thought that was an object worth attempting. (Roberts *ii* 168)

The Title of the novel itself seems calculated to attract the readers of the circulating library novels that More and her peers so adamantly despised.

The success of her Cheap Repository Tracts provided More with ample encouragement to expand her effort at providing readers with entertaining instruction to a new audience. Some years earlier she had received prompting from her old friend William Wilberforce, as well, to “write some religious and moral novels, stories, tales, - call ‘em what you will, - illustrative of character and principles. The Cheap Repository tales, a little raised in their subjects, are the very things I want” (Thompson 67). The possibilities for the novel envisioned by Samuel Johnson back in his *Rambler* 4 essay in 1750s that “these familiar histories may perhaps be made of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions” seems to have been forgotten by most; More’s newest project would contribute to the novel’s rise by hearkening back to this early prediction by Johnson of its powerful potential.

The “raised” subject of More’s novel was, ironically (for she never married herself), what her biographer agreed was the “most important subject” of marriage (Thompson 240). Thompson seems to have understood perfectly More’s purpose in employing a form she otherwise had little good to say about:

In the narrative form, all the perfections of a wife might be exhibited in their minutest details and most delicate gradations; while, so far from giving offence to any, the pleasing picture would excite rather the imitation of all. There is a vitality, too, in narrative, which no merely preceptive treatise can possess; and narrative would ensure a wider range of readers; many who would, on no account, open a dissertation on any thing, being eager to devour whatever might appear in the form of a novel or tale. (240-41)

What we find in *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* is a narrative treatise on the selection of the right marriage partner. Incorporated into this subject is a range of concerns typical of the conduct

book, presented in a style heavily influenced by the essay form. The result is a work that equally resembles all of these -- conduct book, essay, novel. The inordinate patience required of the present-day reader of *Cœlebs* contrasts dramatically with the fervor with which the book was read, reviewed, circulated, and commented upon in its time. Understanding this contrast, however, can bring a greater understanding of the changing status and development of the novel as a literary form and a cultural phenomenon.

CŒLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE AND THE CONDUCT BOOK

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife embodies many of the characteristics and topics found in the eighteenth-century conduct book. Indeed, the most recent reissue of the work is as part of the "For Her Own Good," a five-part series of conduct books published by Thoemmes Press which includes the work of More's literary foil, Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*.

The novel's genealogy includes a strain of influence by the conduct book, a literary process which resulted in "the diverting of courtesy-book material into the rising novel of manners" (Hemlow 756). Hemlow attributes this marriage of forms to several social phenomena: the entrance of the daughters of the merchant and professional classes into the drawing rooms, the growing importance (thanks, in part, I would add, to the influence of the evangelical movement) placed on moral utility rather than art, and the novel's status of ill-repute, so often proclaimed in the didactic novels themselves.

The writers of courtesy books, therefore, endeavored to enliven their precepts and examples by pleasurable and entertaining devices borrowed from the novel, while some of the novelists attempted to justify and dignify their new art by including the reputable and useful matter of the courtesy books. (Hemlow 757)

The influence of the conduct book on More's novel is heavy. More's didactic and

religious treatises, as examined here in previous pages, certainly can be included in the category of conduct book, and Hemlow describes *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* as “a work half novel and half courtesy book” (756). Robert Colby, while questioning the merits of the work as a novel, agrees that it can “command a certain respect as a personified courtesy book” (82). Like all bona fide conduct books, More’s novel covers the usual range of material: education (particularly female education), proper female deportment and behavior, child-rearing, marriage (and the selection of a marriage partner), and domestic economy; the novel in fact opens with this topic, when in the third paragraph, Cœlebs raises the much-disputed issue by attempting to offer a definition of the phrase “household good”:

Now, according to my notion of “household good,” which does not include one idea of drudgery or servility, but which involves a large and comprehensive scheme of excellence, I will venture to affirm that, let a woman know what she may, yet, if she knows not this, she is ignorant of the most indispensable, the most appropriate branch of female knowledge. (9)

As antifeminist as this sentiment might sound to the modern ear, it is Cœlebs’s apparent belief (as well as More’s) that this “branch of female knowledge” actually “restores [a woman] to all the degree of influence that raises her condition, and restores her to all the dignity of equality” (10). The need for “restoration” of the woman’s condition and the dignity of equality, of course, refers in the Christian framework to what was lost to woman (and man) as a result of the fall of man in Eden,⁶³ the setting with which the novel opens in its reference to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Naturally, in an evangelical novel by an evangelical author, the sentiments promoted are

⁶³ According to the Genesis narrative, the differing roles men and women have traditionally experienced since the Fall are a direct result of the specific judgments placed on Adam and Eve by God following their disobedience: “To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband and he shall rule over you.’ Then to Adam He said, ‘. . . Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground. . . .’” (Genesis 3:16-19, New American Standard translation).

those that spring from beliefs about God.⁶⁴ So it is with Cœlebs's view of the definition and purpose of female education, which is

not that which smothers a woman with accomplishments, but that which tends to consolidate a firm and regular system of character; that which tends to form a friend, a companion, and wife. I call education, not that which is made up of the shreds and patches of useless arts, but that which inculcates principles, polishes taste, regulates temper, cultivates reason, subdues the passions, directs the feelings, habituates to reflection, trains to self-denial, and, more especially, that which refers all actions, feelings, sentiments, tastes, and passions to the love and fear of God. (13)

Of all of More's extensive life work and causes, female education was one of her greatest passions; not surprisingly, this concern is reflected in her novel. Not only through the proclamations of Mr. Stanley, but through the (mainly negative) examples provided by the many minor characters, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* has a great deal to say about education and its importance in the formation of taste, character, and subsequently, both earthly and eternal happiness. Among the lessons to be learned are: the attempt to teach girls something about everything results in their learning nothing; the cause of Miss Denham's tragic elopement with Signor Squallini lay more with her "wretched education" than her own natural propensities; a woman trained solely in domestic duties is ill-suited for properly educating her own daughters; the greatest art of education is to counteract selfishness; religious unbelief can be directly attributed to a faulty education; only those convinced of the doctrine of human corruption can conduct a proper education; the exemplary Lucilla represents what a similar education could make of nearly any girl; and, as is discovered through the two fathers' correspondence, what makes their children so well-suited for each other in marriage is the systematic and similar approach to their

⁶⁴ Vallone correctly points out the inherent difference between the conduct novel and the Evangelical conduct novel as thus: "the conduct novel heroine needs the 'conduct voice' to guide and teach her to make moral choices, but the Evangelical character already possesses these abilities through religion and the Bible -- God's 'voice' "(184-85).

education.

In contrast to the educational system that has produced such a one as Lucilla, More includes plenty of opposing examples. Through Cœlebs's encounters with eligible ladies, we view firsthand their endless flaws, which he attributes to their inferior education. Since our hero is male, and he is looking for a wife, we meet more female examples (though More includes ample commentary in the novel concerning male education; see chapter 36 for example). The prattling Miss Rattle's costly education in French, Italian, German, drawing, varnishing, gilding, japanning, modeling, etching, engraving, dancing (Scotch and Irish), singing, playing harp and piano, along with the whole menu of academic subjects, seems to Cœlebs to be for naught since Miss Rattle prefers to travel up front with her coachman upon whom her many accomplishments are wasted (109). In one of the most frequently cited passages in the novel, Cœlebs dines with sisters who disprove the myth that "nothing tended to make ladies so useless and inefficient" in table management than the study of dead languages. These ladies' ineptitude in dressing the dishes served at dinner convinces Cœlebs that they must be masters of Greek as well as Latin; but, a short interlude of dinner conversation reveals that they have never heard of Virgil and that their literary diet consists solely of sentimental romances. And the antifeminine spinster Miss Sparkes is pitied more than disdained for attempting masculine pursuits while abhorring everything within the feminine realm. Even worse are female characters who use their abilities to entertain company to cover more serious faults, and those who, too modest to speak in company, don't hesitate to sing for it.

One of the great objectives in female education, of course, was to attract the right kind of marriage partner, and this is the central theme of the novel. *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is not concerned with just any kind of marriage, but rather the Christian one, and evangelical at that. As Hess points out, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* "illustrates the ideal pattern of marriage and family cast in the evangelical mold" (16). For, indeed, it was the family that formed the center of religious life for evangelicals; and it was the marriage relationship that evangelicals believed held the most

power over the outcome of one's life both here and in eternity.

Thus More's novel, narrated by Cœlebs (a name derived from the Latin "celibate," meaning "bachelor"),⁶⁵ depicts the theme of the title: the search for a wife. Cœlebs (called Charles more informally in the narrative) begins his search immediately following the deaths of his parents, parents who have left him not only their clear wishes for his future, but reinforcement through an education and the instillation of religious principles that form the basis for his successful independent entry into the world. Cœlebs had received instruction from his father not to select a wife without first making a journey -- a pilgrimage of sorts -- to his father's childhood friend, Mr. Stanley. What Cœlebs does not know is that Mr. Stanley has a daughter who has been raised, in concert with Cœlebs's father, under the same educational regime and according to the same religious principles as Cœlebs; it was the hope of the two fathers that their two children would develop like minds and tastes that would thus form an ideal marriage match. This is indeed what transpires, and most of the novel concerns how these two minds come to understand one another, particularly through comparisons drawn from abundant unsuitable counterparts encountered during the course of Cœlebs's journey and subsequent stay at Stanley Grove.

The evils of arranged marriages and the refusal of parents to grant even a veto-power to their children had been dramatically illustrated more than fifty years earlier by Richardson in *Clarissa*. So while a gradual consensus had emerged against parentally-arranged (or at least forced) marriages, there arose in its place another set of problems altogether. This new freedom in selecting one's marriage partner was accompanied by a new set of questions concerning how that selection should be made. Thus a new theme for the novel writer was produced.

More's novel illustrates the evangelical ideal of companionate marriage and the growing opposition to marriages of economic convenience or parental arrangement. Greatly improved health and economics made the choice of a marriage partner increasingly important as both of these improvements resulted in the possibility of a longer lifetime to be spent with one's spouse.

⁶⁵ I am indebted to Robin Reed Davis for pointing this out (73).

The growing ideal of a companionate marriage gave children, rather than parents, more say and more responsibility in the selection of a marriage partner. Mutual affection “based on knowledge and judgment” rather than sexual desire was thought to be the proper basis for a marriage (Figs 6-7). In light of these societal changes, a predominant theme in fiction became the selection of a suitable and loving marriage partner, a theme of particular interest to female readers and authors (Figs 7).

More's view of the ideal, companionate marriage as presented in her novel was influenced by the evangelical faith. In accordance with the evangelical mindset, Cœlebs recognizes before beginning his journey that his choice in marriage is “a step which might perhaps affect my happiness in both worlds” (12). Cœlebs's father has instructed him not to permit even the beloved Mr. Stanley to direct Cœlebs's choice in marriage, since that was privilege he would not allow even himself (15). The two fathers had purposely maintained a separation between their two children because they wanted to give them the freedom to choose one another as marriage partners. But they believed strongly enough (as did More) in the power of education, upbringing and religion to harbor the reasonable hope that the two, once meeting, would naturally choose one another.⁶⁶ Along with similar beliefs and values, the cultivation of common interests and taste is held as central to the companionate marriage. Says Cœlebs, “In our friends, even in our common acquaintance, do we not delight to associate with those whose pursuits have been similar to our own, and who have read the same books? . . . Shall we not then delight in the kindred acquirements of a dearer friend?” (202).

This ideal of the companionate marriage is a mark of *Cœlebs's* kinship with Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*.⁶⁷ Marriage is a theme both of these novels share with the conduct book tradition. While *Sir Charles Grandison* “suggests a new standard of companionship rather than

⁶⁶ This is also the belief advanced by Rousseau in *Emile*.

⁶⁷ The familiar name that Cœlebs goes by in the text of the novel is, interestingly, “Charles.”

authority as the basis for mutual and continuing love" in marriage (Brophy 98), *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* turns that suggestion into the only real choice, for a Christian marriage at least. In both novels, shared religious belief is the most important point of compatibility: in *Cœlebs* this idea goes unquestioned, while in *Sir Charles Grandison* much of the novel's tension turns on Charles's choice whether or not to marry Harriet Byron, who shares his Protestant faith, or the Catholic Clementina.

Lasting marital happiness, according to Mr. Stanley, can be found in the same balance advocated by More in literature: "Mutual affection decays of itself ... without mutual endeavours, not only to improve, but to amuse" (112). The companionate ideal painted in the novel extends beyond the husband and wife to the entire family and to friendships between men and women. An obvious defect Cœlebs sees in a number of the families he encounters is the "want of companionableness in the daughters" within the family unit. In contrast to the ideal set forth in Cœlebs's own family as well as at Stanley Grove, these children "did not seem to form a part of the family compact, but made a kind of distinct branch of themselves" (30). Further, the ideal of friendship between the sexes is promoted at Stanley Grove where the ladies, to the "great gratification" of the men, sit "longer than is usual at most tables," rather than withdrawing immediately to segregated quarters (60). The unsurpassed influence of parents on children -- for good and for ill -- is a theme woven throughout the novel. The religion imparted to Cœlebs by his father is his constant standard for the many variants he encounters on his journeys to and around Stanley Grove. And the unsuitability of many of the young ladies he meets is usually traced to the faulty education of (and consequently by) the mother. Central, of course, to successful parenting is not only the inculcation, but the living example, of right ideas.

More's own theology is reflected in the hope of Cœlebs's father and Mr. Stanley that their two children would someday marry and in the means they undertook to increase the chances of that hope being realized. Cœlebs and Lucilla are raised and educated under the same plan and guided by the same principles, an effort ensured through regular correspondence between the

two fathers. Both fathers believed that “in educating our children for each other; in inspiring them with corresponding tastes, similar inclinations, and especially with an exact conformity in their religious views” (226), they could increase the possibility of the future union of their two children. Yet, in order to allow freedom to Cœlebs and Lucilla in choosing their marriage partners, the fathers agreed that the two children should not meet until reaching marriageable age. As much as the parents desired the union of these two children, even more they wished such a union to take place by their own choice. They did not even let the existence of each be known to the other so as not to “perplex and hamper those to whom we wish perfect freedom of thought and action” (226). This “perfect freedom” in marriage parallels the human free will in More’s non-Calvinistic theology: God wants people to follow Him, and He makes provision for their salvation and direction through circumstance and communication (the Bible), but He allows people the freedom to choose Him or not.

Another favored topic of conduct books that finds its way into *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is the rearing and discipline of children. While the favored methods of child-rearing and education are exemplified by the Stanleys, Cœlebs is disappointed by those he witnesses in various families he encounters in both town and country. His very first stop is at the home of the Belfields (who will later join him at Stanley Grove), where his great hopes of experiencing the “fine flow of London talk” (20) are stymied by, among other things, “half a dozen children, lovely, fresh, gay, and noisy” rushing into the room, spoiling whatever possibility there may have been for peaceful postdinner talk. Throughout the book, we encounter the products of wrongheaded ideas about education: children spoiled by too many playthings (the Ranbys), the result of an education too liberal and injudicious (Miss Rattle), upbringing that is too austere and strict (the Astons), education based on the fads and fashions of society rather than more lasting principles (the Fenthams), and the unfortunate fruit of a marriage entered into for material gain only (the Misses Flam). Only at Stanley Grove does the reader encounter children raised with loving discipline from both parents (indeed, Mr. Stanley, in contradiction of the nineteenth-century stereotype of the harsh, emotionally

uninvolved provider, anticipates child-rearing notions popularized in the next century), a conscientious inculcation of religious principles, and ample opportunities for the children to practice from an early age what they have been taught.

Like all conduct books aimed at a female audience, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* addresses the issue of behavior proper (and not) for young, middle class ladies. For example, Miss Rattle shocks the Stanleys by opting to seat herself with the driver of her carriage (109), and Mr. Stanley laments that ladies who appear too modest to join in polite conversation don't necessarily scruple to sing before the same group (111). The character of Miss Sparkes, however, represents the antitype of the female conduct book reader: "In her adoption of any talent, or her exercise of any quality, it is always sufficient recommendation to her that it is not feminine" (157). She can outdrive, outride, outargue and outpolitic all of her male counterparts. Needless to say, Miss Sparkes remains unmarried, and Mr. Stanley takes every care to gently dissuade any admiration for Miss Sparkes expressed by his daughter Phoebe.

Responsible fulfillment of one's obligation to the poor is another matter addressed in many conduct books and in this novel. Indeed, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is a veritable guideline for the distribution of charity, which "is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession" (138). Through the examples set by numerous characters, the novel demonstrates that true charity requires meeting spiritual as well as physical needs; that in order to achieve good, giving should be systematic, not random or sporadic; and it should meet the needs of the worthy and truly needy, not advance the interests of the giver. Like *Sir Charles Grandison*, More's novel advances the view that private charity is both an obligation of the upper classes and the political, and moral, solution to poverty. By having Mr. Danby leave his fortune to Sir Charles, Richardson's novel shows how an individual's benevolence can change the lives of others and initiate a cycle of giving that has far-reaching effects (Brophy 105). In *Cœlebs*, one of the most powerful scenes in the book is that in which Cœlebs stumbles upon Lucilla as she provides comfort and sustenance to one of the parish poor. Cœlebs, in fact, experiences the greatest deepening of his growing

love for Lucilla as he (unbeknownst to her) witnesses her tender kindnesses to one of the poor and sick of the village. Indeed, Cœlebs learns that Lucilla is largely responsible for the markedly improved existence of the poor surrounding Stanley Grove. Each home has been provided with fruit trees from her own orchard which yield both fruit and labor for the poor inhabitants, and regular visits to the neighborhood poor by the Stanley girls is part of the family's systematic charity. Thus the novel advances More's view that one's system of charity encompasses and reflects one's character, learning, and religion, and also provides the opportunity to put these into practice for the benefit of all. This view of charity advanced in *Cœlebs* was so well-received that cottage visiting became a popular trend for some years, based on the examples of Lucilla and Lady Belfield's charitable acts (Tobin 130).

CŒLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE AND THE ESSAY FORM

More's lifetime of reading and writing essays is evident in the style and content of her novel, which at times overwhelm the narrative. Indeed, as noted previously in chapter two, Hopkins declares that the novel "is less a story than a series of essays" (229). The didactic element -- the same persuasive voice of More's treatises -- is always at the forefront. More's love of the periodical essay is evident not only in style, but in the subject of the novel. *Cœlebs* advances, for example, three of the appeals made to the reader by *The Spectator* papers: amusement, reform, and reward of virtue (Smithers in Smith ix). The structure of the tale, too, relies upon the same rhetorical devices used in any good essay: examples, parallels, contrasts, and repetitions. Indeed, one of More's biographers candidly admits of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, "To the mere novel-reader it must appear heavy, for it is no more a novel than the dialogues of Plato. Like *Rasselas*, it is in fact, a treatise. It is a narrative essay on the choice of a wife. . . ." (Thompson 244).

Marriage and family were, of course, central topics in the *Spectator* papers. "*The Spectator* argued that marriage might be a source of joy, if based on mutual good will. In such a

reevaluation the ideal for women was changing from that of the obedient wife to the companionate wife" (Myers 123). Like the periodical essay, More's novel presumes and promotes an approach to life based on reason and the rational faculty. The approach to marriage has a similar basis. The ideal of marriage presented in *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* is based not on romantic notions, as Vallone points out, but on "a rational, governable . . . emotion leading to a reasonable marriage" (174).

Certainly, the influence of Johnson, along with the other great essayists of the eighteenth century appear throughout the work. Carey McIntosh calls *Cælebs* "a vastly extended Johnsonian quest, padded with edifying discourses . . . evidence of Johnson's influence on one of his young lady friends" (60n). *Cælebs* is even similar to Johnson's "near-novel," *Rasselas*, in the sense that both works make use of experience only as it confirms a preordained principle (Karl 284). As Renwick explains, the general theme, the audience addressed, and the methods used in this novel are all those of essayists such as Addison and Johnson. To the character sketches, anecdotes, and conversations among representative figures typical of the essay, More added "a slight tale of love and marriage" geared toward the female audience. As with the essay, the aim of the work "is the maintenance of order in society, in religion, in individual moral and emotional life" (67). Indeed, not only does Renwick find that *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* "derives from the periodical essay," but he goes so far as to declare that the work would fail in its "transformation into narrative medium . . . if it were a novel at all" (Renwick 66).⁶⁸ Despite such criticism, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* attains the status of novel, albeit a novel that owes its origins -- and its success -- to the essay form.

The characters in the novel all serve as examples, good or bad, that advance More's ideas. The importance of these examples to the narrative structure is best illustrated by the story

⁶⁸ Renwick's exclusion of *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* from the classification of novel places the work in the great company of many novelists -- primarily women -- of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, see Dale Spender's *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen*.

of Mr. Carlton, a profligate converted by his wife's prayers and example. Following his conversion, one of the most dramatic scenes in the novel, Mr. Carlton laments his own lack of good examples while growing up and attributes to this his wayward direction: "I wanted examples which should influence me to act, as well as proofs which should incline me to believe; something which would teach me to do, as well as what to think. I wanted exemplifications as well as precepts" (153). In this expression, perhaps, lies More's own reason for departing from her preceptive essays to a form which would, like her tracts, but on a grander scale, provide the "exemplifications" so essential to establishing an appropriate life pattern.

The characters in the novel, all of whom function as examples, are themselves provided with examples that wield influence over them. Miss Denham, for example, is referred to as "the poor girl . . . who has furnished such a commentary to our text" (113), illustrating a blending of the techniques of novel (character) and essay (commentary). The most predominant of these examples, however, is that of Milton's Eve. The novel opens with Cœlebs drawing upon Milton's depiction of Eve in *Paradise Lost* to derive his ideal of a woman. This allusion is repeated in the climax of the novel when Cœlebs, upon receiving Lucilla's assent to marriage, discovers that she, too, has been influenced from her early years by her reading of Milton. Thus Cœlebs and Lucilla, in sharing a mutual admiration for the poem's depiction of the character of Eve, cement their suitability -- and thus their love -- for one another. Even though she cannot agree completely with Milton's portrayal (and Addison's assent) of Eve's sorrow in being expelled from the Garden, Lucilla declares that there is "no female character in the whole compass of poetry in which I have ever taken so lively an interest, and no poem that ever took such powerful possession of my mind" (218). This expression parallels the opening of the novel when Cœlebs declares that he "early became enamoured of" the character of Milton's Eve: "I never formed an idea of conjugal happiness, but my mind involuntarily adverted to the graces of that finished picture" (9). This example also reinforces the evangelical emphasis on the primacy of reading in forming the mind and assisting the spirit.

Cœlebs's attraction to this figure reflects the aesthetic values of the later eighteenth century ascribed to by More and articulated by her fellow conservative Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*:⁶⁹

Those [virtues] which engage our hearts, which impress us with a sense of loveliness, are the softer virtues; easiness of temper, compassion, kindness and liberality. . . . Those persons who creep into the hearts of most people, who are chosen as the companions of their softer hours, and their reliefs from care and anxiety, are never persons of shining qualities, nor strong virtues. It is rather the soft green of the soul on which we rest our eyes, that are fatigued with beholding more glaring objects. (111)

Similarly, Cœlebs says of Milton's Eve, "The perfection of her character, as the divine poet intimates, does not arise from a prominent quality, or a showy talent, or a brilliant accomplishment, but it is the beautiful combination and result of them all" (10). Cœlebs's attraction to this figure of the first female (and later to Lucilla) is not to any "glaring" quality or attribute, but to the "tranquility, smoothness, and quiet beauty, which is the very essence of perfection in a wife" (10).

Contrast is a predominant device in this novel, and for nearly every character who errs in one direction, More provides another who illustrates the faults of the opposite extreme. Cœlebs contrasts Mrs. Ranby with Lady Belfield, from their beliefs about education (it means everything or it means nothing) to their most relied-upon scriptures (Old Testament or New Testament?) to their views of human nature (essentially good or completely corrupt). "But if these two ladies," observes Cœlebs, "were diametrically opposite to each other in certain points, both were frequently right in what they assumed, and both wrong only in what they rejected" (34). Similarly, Lady Denham's belief that religion is but a means to compensate for a life of indulgence is contrasted with Lady Melbury's preservation of religion as merely a habit. The refined education (or, rather, overeducation) of Miss Rattle is contrasted with the coarseness of the Misses Flam. Mr.

⁶⁹ This quote is taken from the second edition, published in 1759.

Flam's emphasis on religious works is contrasted with Ned Tyrrel's emphasis on grace at the expense of works. "It is impossible to say," remarks Mr. Stanley, "what injury religion has suffered from the opposite characters of these two men. Flam, who gives himself no concern about the matter, is kind and generous; while Tyrrel, who has made a high profession, is mean and sordid" (236).

The lesson repeated over and over by the lives of each of these characters and through Mr. Stanley's comments is one of balance and moderation. "Mr. Stanley," observes house guest Sir John Belfield, "you steer most happily between the two extremes" (199). More herself could have spoken these words by Belfield about Mr. Stanley:

How many men have I known . . . who from their dread of a burning zeal have taken refuge in a freezing indifference! As to the two extremes of heat and cold, neither of them is the true climate of Christianity; yet the fear of each drives men of opposite complexions into the other, instead of fixing them in the temperate zone which lies between them, and which is the region of genuine piety. (209)

How well this reflects the pattern of More's life: the devoted member of the Established Church, scandalously accused of "methodism," the schoolmaster's daughter who matured into a literary influence, the independent woman who served the low as contentedly as she consorted with the great. This was, after all, as examined earlier, the appeal of evangelicalism, a "religion of the heart" that brought meaning to what many viewed as the cold, empty ritualism of the Established Church.

Chapter three of this paper examined the close link between the growing genre of the periodical essay and the popularity of polite conversation in various social settings. *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* reflects the great importance placed during this time on conversation for the formation of relationships, tastes and ideals. The book opens, in fact, on this theme of conversation, when in the first line, Cœlebs remarks:

I have been sometimes surprised, when in conversation I have been expressing

my admiration of the character of Eve in her state of innocence, as drawn by our immortal poet, to hear objections raised by those, from whom of all critics I should have least expected it -- the ladies. (9)

A short space later, Cœlebs credits his conversations with his father for forming his ideal of domestic happiness: "Home was the scene in which my imagination had pictured the only delights worthy of a rational, feeling, intellectual, immortal man. . . . This inclination had been much increased by my father's turn of conversation" (14). The entire novel, following the pattern of Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, depends primarily on the flow of conversation; incidents -- of which there are few -- are secondary. Like *Grandison*, *Cœlebs* is a novel of conversation. Like *Grandison*, *Cœlebs* is less a novel than "a debate or discussion of questions regarding morality and conduct," as Sylvia Kasey Marks remarks of Richardson's novel (60). Though *Grandison* includes more intrigue and turns of plot than *Cœlebs*, both works are squarely in the tradition of the conversational style that mark both the periodical essay and the conduct book of the eighteenth century. Conversation not only influences the style of both novels, but is an activity both authors hoped to increase through the influence of their work. Just as "the main interest Richardson invites us to share in his last novel is in the quality of the moral discussion it elicits" (R. T. Jones 136), *Cœlebs* provides an example for its readers of the primacy of conversation in forming values and in both developing and imparting beliefs.

For instance, because of Lucilla's and her parents' reluctance to attract undue attention or praise, Cœlebs learns about her mainly through conversation. From family friends, neighbors, even the household cook, Cœlebs greedily solicits stories of Lucilla's acts of charity, proofs of moral judgment, and applications of her faith. Even the lame gardener Lucilla employs from among the village poor to help maintain her nursery serves as a source of Cœlebs's knowledge of Lucilla's character, generosity, and virtue (147). The mystery surrounding Lucilla's rumored suitor, Lord Staunton, is uncovered through a series of conversations Cœlebs has with several others (more on this below). Through the unfolding of these anecdotes in conversation, Cœlebs learns

about Lucilla and ultimately grants himself permission to love her.

In this polite world, conversation provides a remarkably equal opportunity for both men and women to participate and benefit. Contrary to what some feminist critics have said, Lucilla's "most important attribute" is *not* her silence (Waldron xxii).⁷⁰ Cœlebs is pleased to discover after his first meal at the Stanley home that when the ladies leave the table following dinner, "[a]fter their departure the conversation was not changed" (60). Lucilla's conversation with Cœlebs is, indeed, what cultivates his love for her. "I very early found, that though a stranger might behold her without admiration, it was impossible to converse with her with indifference" (65). Though unforward in sharing about *herself*, Lucilla is by no means reticent in conversing with Cœlebs about *ideas*. Her parents, in fact, have purposely developed this characteristic, as Mrs. Stanley explains:

She is not only our delightful companion, but our confidential friend. We encourage her to give us her opinion on matters of business, as well as of taste; and having reflected as well as read a good deal, she is not destitute of materials on which to exercise her reasoning powers. (215)

Revealing for the first time his attraction to Lucilla, Cœlebs states, "She is from nature a woman, gentle, feeling, animated, modest; she is, by education, elegant, informed, enlightened; she is, from religion, pious, humble, candid, charitable" (80). (Not a word about "silent"!) Indeed, several times Cœlebs notes his pleasure, his benefit even, in Lucilla's contributions to numerous conversations: "I always feel that our intercourse unfolds not only her powers but my own. In conversing with such a woman I am apt to fancy that I have more understanding, because her animating presence brings it more into exercise" (80). Such "unreserved communication" is,

⁷⁰ What Cœlebs remarks upon in the passage Waldron quotes to support her assertion is "how intelligent her silence" is, presumably, in contrast to the young ladies Mr. Stanley later complains of who attend to their needlework disinterestedly during polite conversation, detracting from rather than contributing to the discussion.

according to *Cœlebs*, no less than “the lawful commerce of conjugal affection” (81), an expression that once again reinforces the importance of conversation in developing taste and character, as well as the ideal of the companionate marriage.

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife is a work to which the words of Samuel Johnson regarding Samuel Richardson’s novel are justly applied: it must be read for the sentiment. This approach is one which More would have wholeheartedly approved. The novel abounds in ideas, most designed to encourage More’s readers toward an evangelical Christian faith, but many of which challenged the readers from More’s own evangelical culture. The novel presents tempered versions of many of the ideas evangelicalism inherited from Puritan ancestors. For example, two favorite obsessions -- investing time well and keeping diaries -- receive modified endorsements here. Mr. Stanley represents the voice of moderation in all things. On how one spends one’s time, Mr. Stanley remarks, “My family, as you have seen, are rather exact in the distribution of their time, but we do not distress ourselves at interruptions which are unavoidable.” He warns of the potential danger in the common practice of self-examination through diary-keeping. His neighbor Lady Aston provides a ready example:

A diary has been found useful to many pious Christians, as a record of their sins, and of their mercies. But this poor lady spent so much time in weighing the offences of one day against those of another, that before the scruple was settled, the time for action was past. She brought herself into so much perplexity by reading over this journal of her infirmities, that her difficulties were augmented by the very means she had employed to remove them; and her conscience was disturbed by the method she had taken to quiet it. (72)

Even observance of the Sabbath -- for which Hannah More’s own strictness was widely known -- is subject to Mr. Stanley’s moderate view: *Cœlebs* observes that in keeping Sabbath at Stanley Grove, “The seriousness was without severity, and the cheerfulness had no mixture of levity” (113).

Similar moderation can be seen in Mr. Stanley's view of simple pleasures. In accordance with the New Testament teaching that Christ offers his followers a "more abundant life." Mr. Stanley draws upon a casual observation of surroundings to demonstrate to the austere Lady Aston that the Creator intended a more joyful life than she allows for herself or her daughters. While sitting under an oak at the lush Stanley Grove, Mr. Stanley remarks, " 'Look, madam,' said I 'at the bountiful provision which a beneficent Father makes, not only for the necessities, but for the pleasures of his children' " (75). Mr. Stanley follows this remark by quoting from a passage of Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*, one of the most frequently cited sources in the novel (after Milton) and an important basis for the challenge the novel offers to more conservative views of the imagination and imaginative literature. Akenside's work forms the subject of discussion for the entirety of chapter 8, and Cœlebs is inspired to utter a few lines from the work upon seeing Lucilla crossing the lawn at some distance (95). As examined earlier in this paper, the imagination, and thus imaginative works, were treated with a fair amount of suspicion by conservative evangelicals and others. *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* demonstrates, however, that rather than being feared or shunned, the imagination, if properly cultivated, could strengthen moral and religious principles.

Originally published in 1744 as *The Pleasures of Imagination*, Akenside's Milton-esque philosophical poem was reissued in 1757 as *The Pleasures of the Imagination*. More's friend and fellow bluestocking, Anna Barbauld, published her own edition of the work in 1794. The poem is influenced by philosophical theories that link aesthetic with moral sense. Among those contributing to the school of thought reflected in the work are Addison, Shaftesbury (Third Earl), and Francis Hutcheson (Drabble 772). According to Drabble, Hutcheson, in developing more fully Shaftesbury's ideas connecting art and morality, "saw a close relation between aesthetic and moral perception, by which we come to be aware of providentially designed order" (486, 888). This connection between moral and aesthetic taste is made frequently throughout *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*. "Imagination," asserts Mr. Stanley, "well directed, is the charm of life; it gilds

every object, and embellishes every scene: but allow me to say, that where a woman abandons herself to the dominion of this vagrant faculty it may lead to worse than a disorderly table....” (186). The power of imagination is expressed most vividly when Cœlebs realizes that Lucilla Stanley is the wife for whom he has been searching:

In contemplating the captivating figure and the delicate mind of this charming girl, I felt that imagination, which misleads so many youthful hearts, had preserved mine. The image my fancy had framed, and which had been suggested by Milton's heroine, had been refined indeed, but it had not been romantic. I had early formed an ideal standard in my mind; too high, perhaps, but its very elevation had rescued me from the common dangers attending the society of the sex. I was continually comparing the women with whom I conversed, with the fair conception which filled my mind. (65)

The importance of “taste,” how it is formed, and its relationship to morality is a theme frequently repeated in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*. “The art of poetry,” says Mr. Stanley, “is to touch the passions, and its duty to lead them on the side of virtue” (141). Upon asking Lucilla what inspired her fondness for and skill and taste in gardening, Cœlebs learns that it came from her “early and intimate acquaintance with the ‘Paradise Lost.’ . . . ‘Milton,’ she said, ‘both excited the taste and supplied the rules. He taught the art, and inspired the love of it’ ” (217). As remarked earlier, their similarities in taste are an important indicator to Cœlebs and Lucilla of their compatibility as marriage partners. The lack of attention to aesthetic standards and judgment attributed by some to the evangelicals of the nineteenth century (for example, see Jay 205) most certainly can not be attributed to More’s influence.

Like all other sentiments More promoted in her novel, the proper view of imagination is inseparable from one’s view of God; its formation, along with that of taste, therefore, becomes a matter of religion. True learning, like true religion, is seen in its fruits, not as mere adomment; it is “a knowledge that is rather detected than displayed” (218). In conversation with the most unimaginative Ned Tyrrel, Cœlebs says of imagination, “I cannot think . . . that the Almighty

conferred such a faculty with a wish to have it extinguished. Works of imagination have in many countries been a chief instrument of civilization" (141). Thus, references to taste are usually embedded with moral meanings that have implications for the cause of religion; M. G. Jones's charge that More distrusted the application of intellect to religion (233) is not exactly correct. Mr. Stanley "was of the opinion that bad taste could never advance the interests of Christianity" (59), and an entire chapter is devoted to Mr. Stanley's attempt to convince Ned Tyrrel that a polite and learned education is an essential part of the training of a clergyman.

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife addresses More's and her fellow evangelicals' concern over the books that constitute the literary diet. It is clear in the world of the novel that books contribute immeasurably to the formation of the mind and taste to an extent that has far-reaching consequences for both this life and the hereafter. Indeed, it is Cœlebs's and Lucilla's early and repeated readings of Milton that cement their affection for one another. Cœlebs's taste and expectation in a wife is shaped not by the amorous novels of intrigue or sentimental romances read by the vapid young ladies at the first stop of his journey (19), but by the classical, religious works of the greatest of Christian poets.

Likewise, Mr. Stanley is careful to disabuse his children of "the notion that being entertaining [makes] amends for everything" (161), and the novel includes frequent disparagement of the popular value for "novelty." Cœlebs proclaims that his native and familiar home had never lost that power to please, which, he remarks ironically, "it is commonly imagined that novelty alone can confer" (13). He finds the recurring novelty of "the ever restless, rolling tide of new intelligence" in London disappointing. "I always found the pleasure of the moment not heightened, but effaced by the succeeding moment," he admits (174).

THE NOVEL ON THE NOVEL

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife is clearly a vehicle for More's didacticism, and her work more often resembles a treatise or conduct book. Yet, the work is a novel, and in some ways it is a meta-novel, a work as much about the novel and novel reading as anything else, and it contains frequent commentaries on these concerns. *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* exhibits More's own consciousness that, while employing the form of the novel, she was creating a work very unlike those books so popularized by the circulating libraries. Thus built into the work are numerous criticisms of the popular novel, on the one hand, and defenses of the genre and its potential for redemption in the right hands, on the other.

Such a commentary is found in the following passage, when the Belfields compare the love "story" developing between Cœlebs and Lucilla to a novel, and Lady Belfield laments,

It will be a sad, dull novel, however -- all is likely to go on so smoothly that we shall flag for want of incident. No difficulties nor adventures to heighten the interest. No cruel stepdame, no tyrant father, no capricious mistress, no moated castle, no intriguing confidante, no treacherous spy, no formidable rival, not so much as a duel, or even a challenge, I fear, to give variety to the monotonous scene. (94)

To which Sir Belfield offers the following tongue-in-cheek advice:

"Well, but Charles," said Sir John, "you must positively assume a little dejection to diversify the business. It will give interest to your countenance, and pathos to your manner, and tenderness to your accent. And you must forget all attentions, and neglect all civilities. And you must appear absent, and distrait and reveur; especially while your fate hangs in some suspense. And you must read Petrarch, and repeat Tibullus, and write sonnets. And when you are spoken to you must not listen. And you must wander in the grove by moonshine, and talk to the Oreads, and the Dyads, and the Naiads -- oh no, unfortunately, I am afraid there are no Naiads within hearing. You must make the woods vocal with the name of Lucilla; luckily 'tis such a poetical name, that Echo won't be ashamed to repeat it. I have gone through it all, Charles, and know every high-way and by-way in the map of love." (94-95)

Understanding the role played by the Belfields helps in understanding More's perspective here and the point she makes about the novel as a literary form. Sir and Lady Belfield are longtime friends of Mr. Stanley who have arrived from the city for their first visit at Stanley Grove. The Belfields are, like most of the novel's minor characters, victims of ill-guided notions of child-rearing, religion, and conduct. But unlike the majority of these other characters, the Belfields are receptive to the principles and practices Mr. Stanley is only too eager to teach. Thus, through the Belfields, More promotes a more forgiving and generous attitude toward those led astray by the false doctrines (be they concerning religion or novels) of the world at the same time she provides favorable and imitable examples of folks sincere-hearted and teachable.

Cælebs includes pointed examples of the dangers of novel-reading: Lady Melbury, whose faults effect the greatest misery in the story -- running up a debt to a poor family which results in the father's premature death and the utter ruin of the family -- is a sentimental woman apt to be running hours late for her appointments because she has stayed up all night reading novels. Mrs. Stanley complains that novels,

with a few admirable exceptions, had done infinite mischief by so completely establishing the omnipotence of love, that the young reader was almost systematically taught an unresisting submission to a feeling, because the feeling was commonly represented as irresistible. (82)

As explained in an earlier chapter, it was not the objection of evangelicals that novels and other literature might simply lack Christian ideas; rather, it was the inclusion of false doctrines or ideas inconsistent with the Christian faith that raised alarm. Mr. Stanley goes on to explain later in the same passage: "I do not quarrel with books for having *no* religion, but for having a *false* religion" (123). Because one's view of human nature is dependent on one's view of God, a false representation of human nature constituted "false religion" as much as anything else; according to the mindset of evangelicals and other conservative religious readers, the typical novels failed to

depict an accurate view of man when characters were not presented as subject to a fallen human nature. Again Mr. Stanley explains, "These entertaining authors seldom ground their stories on any intimation that human nature is corrupt; that the young reader is helpless, and wants assistance; that he is guilty and wants pardon" (122). Thus, what More sees as the "blending" of "irreligion" with "philosophy" is particularly dangerous when embodied by heroic or otherwise admirable characters, always ready examples for readers, characters who are "good" but whose goodness lacks explicitly Christian principles. "I should like," remarks Mr. Stanley, "to interweave the character of a Christian among the heroes of Fielding and Smollet, as the shortest way of proving their good men to be worthless fellows" (133). This objection is consistent with the evangelicals' insistence on the doctrine of the depravity of man, as opposed to belief in the innate goodness of man promoted by Rousseau and others, popularized by characters such as Fielding's Tom Jones. According to Mr. Stanley, there is plenty of danger in permitting children to read too many of these works:

The misfortune is, that the stimulants used to attract at first, must not be continued but heightened, to keep up the attraction. These books are novels in miniature, and the excess of them will lead to the want of novels at full length. The early use of savoury dishes is not usually followed by an appetite for plain food. To the taste thus pampered history becomes dry, grammar laborious, and religion dull. (121)

The most serious indictment of novels uncovered in *Cælebs*, and another common objection among evangelicals, occurs in chapter 27. This is the frequent misrepresentation and negative portrayal of the clergy. More, via the voice of Mr. Stanley, expounds on the evil of

employing the vehicle of fiction for the purpose of blackening, or in any degree discrediting, a body of men who depend much for the success of their labours on public opinion and on the success of whose labours depends so large a portion of the public virtue. (135-36)

Here, Stanley is not contradicting his frequent admonitions against the Christian's pursuit of worldly accolades, but rather indicting the opposite impulse -- cultivating mistrust of the shepherd upon whom the sheep depend. According to Stanley, authors who ridicule, degrade or debase the figure of the clergyman

have done more mischief to religion by their artful mode of introducing degrading pictures of our national instructors, in their popular tracts, than the Hobbes's [sic] and the Bolingbrokes' [sic] had done by blending irreligion with their philosophy, or the Voltaires and the Gibbons by interweaving it into their history. Whatever is mixed up with our amusements is swallowed with more danger, because with more pleasure and less suspicion, than anything which comes under a graver name and more serious shape. (134)

None less than Fielding, Smollett, Dryden, Rousseau, and even Addison fall under the judgment of More's pen for their failure to use their "knowledge of the world . . . to mend the world" (133).⁷¹

Obviously, More (speaking through Mr. Stanley) does not agree with Fielding that such satiric portrayals might "laugh Mankind out of their favourite Follies and Vices," the purpose of satire that Fielding expresses in his Dedication to *Tom Jones*. Known for a caustic wit and sharp tongue of her own, More is guilty of an apparently automatic acceptance of commonplace objections to the work of Fielding and to satiric art in general. Such passages in *Cœlebs* as the one cited above demonstrate the limitations of More's understanding of the power of fiction. More seems to have overlooked the fact that even the works of Samuel Richardson, whom she admired, contained condemning portrayals of the clergy. As Wagenknecht points out, *Pamela's*

⁷¹ Needless to say, the rector of the Stanleys' parish, Dr. Barlow, is as faultless in character as he is in the fulfillment of his vocation. Yet, consistent with her evangelical views, which place increased responsibility on lay persons for the promulgation and practice of the gospel, More is careful to keep the character of Dr. Barlow in the background and to allot to Mr. Stanley the role of religious instructor. More is artful enough, however, to include a dose of human imperfection in her clerical portrait through the character of the curate: his "indiscreet marriage" to a woman who mistook a clergyman for a gentleman (70).

Parson Williams's ministry to the beleaguered girl is impotent, and Mr. Peters "is as contemptible a cleric as any in Jane Austen" (47n). Overlooking the didactic power in the depiction of such characters, More was in good company. Her view supported the sentiments of Johnson expressed in, again, *Rambler* 4: "It is not therefore a sufficient vindication of a character, that it is drawn as it appears, for many characters ought never to be drawn." It was a colleague of Dr. Johnson, Sir John Hawkins, who declared that Fielding was "the inventor of that cant and phrase, goodness of heart, which is everyday used as a substitute for probity," adding that Fielding "has done more towards corrupting the rising generation than any writer we know of" (qtd. in Wagenknecht 68).

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife does not simply criticize the genre of the novel, however. The book spends a great deal more time promoting learning, polite literature, and the potential both of these have in advancing the cause of religion. The work makes a strong, evangelical appeal for the importance of literature in education and in the formation of character and morals. The very arguments offered in this appeal are those that make a case for the novel as a vehicle for instruction and a force for change. The novel is laden with literary quotes, allusions, and references that exemplify a learned literary diet. These include Milton (*Paradise Lost* primarily), Donne, Cowper, Pope, Addison, Dryden, Akenside (*Pleasures of the Imagination*), Shakespeare, Scott, Gray, and of course numerous biblical references. *Cœlebs* includes page after page of defenses for the reading and study of all literature, which can effect much good: "To raise and to purify the amusements of mankind; to multiply and to exalt pleasures, which being purely intellectual, may help to exclude such as are gross, in beings so addicted to sensuality, is surely not only to give pleasure, but to render service" (141).

A strong case is also made (as in all of More's works) for polite learning for women. For example, well-chosen books, according to Mr. Stanley, deter a woman from exhibitionism, from leading a life as though it were a stage performance: "The knowledge a woman acquires in private desires no witnesses; the possession is the pleasure. [Reading] improves herself, it embellishes

her family society, it entertains her husband, it informs her children" (112). In addition, reading has the added advantage that it consumes far less time than some other amusements, such as playing music; but Mr. Stanley is careful to caution that the "reading woman . . . be a religious woman," for not even the education of polite literature can ward off vices such as vanity the way that only a mind "habitually disciplined by Christian principle" can (113). "An intellectual woman," extols Mr. Stanley, "like a well-written drama, will please at home . . . the beauties of the superior piece, and of the superior woman, will rise on a more intimate survey" (175).

This appreciation for literature and learning is further explored through the contrasts provided by characters who lack such a sensibility: the small son of the indulgent Reynoldses demonstrates all that is wrong with their educational system when he, "having kicked about a whole little gilt library, was sitting, with the decorated pages torn asunder at his feet, reading a little dirty penny book, which the kitchen-maid had bought of a hawker at the door" (127). The over-severe Lady Aston undermines her daughters' education because her "scrupulous mind" finds "something dangerous in every author who did not professedly write on religious subjects" (74). Several of the novel's disagreeable characters are associated with a lack of reading or appreciation for literature. Ned Tyrrel and Mr. Flam are the most notable among these. Mr. Flam, who at twenty years of age "has scarcely read a book . . . except 'Burns' Justice' and 'The Agricultural Reports' " (130-31), is More's version of Tom Jones, presented in all his (in More's thinking) unflattering glory: his "religion" is founded on neither faith nor principle, but on honesty and benevolence (to him "the sum and substance of religion"); he prides himself for being more virtuous than a professing Christian such as Ned Tyrrel; his greatest concern with his wife and daughter is that they not exceed his liberal monetary allowance to them; but most serious is Mr. Stanley's charge that Flam's "good nature is so little directed by judgment, that while it serves the individual, it injures the public" (131).

While Mr. Flam represents virtue absent religion, Mr. Ned Tyrrel brings us religion minus the virtue. Mr. Stanley's conversations with Tyrrel reveal the strongest arguments for the

necessity of literature in the cause of religion. Tyrrel is a reformed profligate, an acquaintance of Mr. Stanley's from his college days. Converted to Christianity but instructed under a preacher espousing the antinomian doctrine of liberty from the law, Tyrrel has no appreciation for virtue, morality, or polite learning. Mr. Stanley, on the other hand, possesses a "noble" library and strives "to inspire his children with the love of literature" (125). However, Tyrrel fears that even the best of books are a danger to his nephew and even under the influence of Mr. Stanley "will only fill his heart with cold morality, and stuff his head with romance and fiction" (140). Tyrrel asks Mr. Stanley, "[Y]ou would have our young men spend their time reading idle verses, and our girls, I suppose, in reading loose romances?" (143).

To which Mr. Stanley replies (with a closing quote from Pope's *Essay on Man*):

It is to preserve both from evils I deprecate . . . that I would consign the most engaging subjects to the best hands, and raise the taste of our youth, by allowing a little of their leisure, and of their leisure only, to such amusements, and that chiefly with a view to disengage them from worse pursuits. It is not romance, but indolence; it is not poetry, but sensuality, which are the prevailing evils of the day -- evils far more fatal in themselves, far more durable in their effects, than the perusal of works of wit and genius. Imagination will cool of itself; the effervescence of fancy will soon subside; but absorbing dissipation, but paralyzing idleness, but degrading self-love: "Grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength." (143)

It is here in Stanley's defense of literature to Ned Tyrrel that More makes her strongest evangelical defense for the virtuous power of great literature, even the novel. In arguing that men of leisure need poetry to help keep them from more dangerous amusements, Mr. Stanley could not make a more eloquent or convincing apology for the novel's use as a vehicle of didacticism:

Let us then endeavour to allure our youth of fashion from the low pleasures of the dissolute; to snatch them not only from the destruction of the gaming table, but from the excesses of the dining-table, by inviting them to an elegant delight that

is safe, and especially by enlarging the range of pure mental pleasure. In order to do this, let us do all we can to cultivate their taste, and innocently indulge their fancy. Let us contend with impure writers, those deadliest enemies to the youthful mind, by exposing to them, in the chaster author, images more attractive, wit more acute, learning more various; in all of which excellencies our first-rate poets certainly excel their vicious competitors. (141)

What better form than the novel could fulfill the call for a literature that indulged the fancy, portrayed an acute wit, and provided variety for the youthful mind? A similar defense, on religious and therefore stronger ground, is represented in an earlier discussion between Stanley and Tyrrel:

Besides what we call book-learning, there is another species of knowledge in which some good men are sadly deficient -- I mean an acquaintance with human nature. The knowledge of the world and Him who made it, the study of the heart of man, and of Him who has the hearts of all men in his hand, enable a minister to excel in the art of instruction; one kind of knowledge reflecting light upon the other. The knowledge of mankind, then, I may venture to assert, is, next to religion, one of the first requisites of a preacher. . . . (102)

In arguing for the necessity both of knowledge of literature and of human nature in advancing the cause of Christianity, More (through Mr. Stanley) increases the novel's acceptability among its most skeptical of evangelical and conservative critics. More demonstrates the possibility of turning every opening (perhaps every literary genre, too) into an opportunity for didacticism. As Cœlebs remarks of Mr. Stanley:

. . . [H]is manner of conversing was that, without ever pressing religion unseasonably into the service, he had the talent of making the most ordinary topics subservient to instruction, and of extracting some profitable hint, or striking out some important light, from subjects which in ordinary hands would have been unproductive of improvement.

. . . I have known him, when conversing, with a man who would not have relished a more sacred authority, seize on a sentiment in "Tully's Offices" for the lowest degree in his scale of morals, and then gradually ascending, trace and exalt the same thought through Paley, or Johnson, or Addison, or Bacon, till he has unsuspectedly landed his opponent in the pure ethics of the Gospel, and surprised him into the adoption of a Christian principle. (59, 60)

Even in its lament of the lowered standards of both novel-readers and writers following the example of Richardson, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife's* praise for Richardson is also praise for the art of the novel set to the proper course. In his description of Richardson, Sir John Belfield demonstrates the potential power of a novel written by one who exhibits both the knowledge of humankind that Mr. Stanley finds so essential in promoting the cause of religion and high moral purpose:

This author, with deeper and juster views of human nature, a truer taste for the properties of female character, and a more exact intuition into real life than any other writer of fabulous narrative, has given his heroines exemplifications of elegantly cultivated minds, combined with the sober virtues of domestic economy. In no other writer of fictitious adventures has the triumph of religion and reason over the passions, and the now almost exploded doctrines of filial obedience, and the household virtues, their natural concomitants, been so successfully blended. (182)

Mr. Stanley sounds a virtual call for evangelicals and conservatives to seize the opportunity for their cause that all literature, including the novel, presents. Speaking to Ned Tyrrel, whose character is but a stand-in for all who would be piously religious but who see no purpose in the pursuit of general knowledge or the study of polite literature, Mr. Stanley proclaims, "Let us . . . rescue from the hands of the profane and the impure the monopoly of wit which they affect to possess, and which they would possess, if no good men had written works of elegant literature, and if all good men totally despised them" (142). Thus the sentiments

expressed in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* serve as both More's defense of her turning to a literary form she had joined so many others in condemning and as an implicit call for other like-minded authors to do the same.

CŒLEBS IN SEARCH OF A WIFE AS A NOVEL

How well did More succeed in appropriating the novel form for her didactic purposes? Or perhaps, more pointedly, one might ask how well did the novel survive this experiment in didactic art? Many literary and cultural influences on More's novel and the traditions of its reading audience must be examined in order to begin to answer such questions.

In many ways, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* represents a threshold between the neoclassical and Romantic worlds, as well as a threshold between the novel of ill-repute popularized by the circulating libraries and the esteemed novel of manners of the Victorian age. Neoclassicism's rational and aesthetic principles of order, balance, moderation, and clarity inform the structure of the novel and the approach to its subject matter; the poetry and emotional sensibilities of romanticism and the emphasis on "imagination" are prominent in the work's setting, in many of its literary allusions, and in the self-reflective examination of its own form (this will be explored in greater detail below). The novel's inclusion of some of the most influential writers representing both periods support the ideas advanced by *Cœlebs*: Milton, Addison, and Pope are juxtaposed with Gray, Scott, and Cowper. The novel's two quotations from James Thomson's *The Seasons* (128, 157) illustrate how the novel is a transitional work that anticipates literature's romantic age: Wordsworth later recognized Thomson "as the first poet since Milton to offer new views of 'external nature'" (Drabble 979). Yet, while the subject matter anticipates the romanticism of the nineteenth century, the style of the verse is more classical, for which Thomson was criticized by later poets (Drabble 979). Much the same can be said of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, a work reminiscent of the style of the eighteenth century essay periodical and the moral purpose

of early novelists such as Richardson and Defoe, but in setting and sentiment anticipating the Romanticism of the nineteenth century.

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife is clearly written in the Richardsonian tradition; the work by Richardson with closest kinship to *Cœlebs* is *Sir Charles Grandison*. Both novels exhibit the influence of the drama in employing dramatic devices to indicate dialogue. *Sir Charles Grandison*, of all of Richardson's novels, comes closest to the novel of the nineteenth century with its focus on drawing-room manners and morals (Wagenknecht 51). *Grandison*, like *Cœlebs*, is a development of the kind of descriptions of manners found in the *Spectator* and *Tatler* combined with a plot-interest or story (Minto 89). This kinship of More's novel to Richardson's last novel was by no means unique to her. The works of the generation of female novelists that includes Fanny Burney, Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, Elizabeth Inchbald, Sophia Lee, and Charlotte Smith, as well as More, derive more from *Sir Charles Grandison* than *Clarissa* or *Pamela* (Karl 230n).

The structure of both *Grandison* and *Cœlebs* can be criticized on similar grounds. *Cœlebs* has been described as merely a repetition of the themes of More's essays, "thinly disguised as 'conversation'" (Davis 73). *Sir Charles Grandison*, meanwhile, is faulted for being "a badly disguised episodic narrative" (Karl 114n). And just as Brophy states of *Grandison*, *Cœlebs* "is primarily a utopian picture of a society in which virtue indeed produces its own rewards" (83). The weaknesses in both novels can be attributed to their "lack of emotional tension," but their strengths are manifested in their idealized presentation of a society ordered by virtue (Brophy 94). The claim Warner makes of Richardson's aim in novel-writing -- to develop "replacement fictions as a cure for the novel-addicted reader . . . to deflect and reform, improve and justify, the pleasures of a new species of elevated novel" (3) -- just as aptly describes More's purpose in writing her novel. Richardson believed that exemplary characters were an effective means of conveying moral lessons (Brophy 20), and More's novel followed Richardson's example. Like More, Richardson wrote first as a moralist. Indeed, "he would not have faced the labor of writing a single sentence for art's sake alone" (Wagenknecht 54). Concerning *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson has been

charged with “confusing literary means with moral ends” (Karl 114n); More might justly be accused of the same.

Though the *Eclectic Review* was reluctant to classify it as a novel, and though the work bears as much, if not more, in common with More’s archetypal genres – the essay and the conduct book – *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* certainly transcends the category of mere narrative fiction or conduct literature and rests clearly in the genre of the novel. The work features several important characteristics shared by the novel as it developed through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, including: a tale structured around a quest; an orphaned hero; a dramatic scene of deathbed repentance; a scandalous elopement; competition (perceived, at least) in love; and an ending with a marriage. While such incidents increase the novel’s interest, they do not really advance the plot in any way. Rather, such occasions serve as vehicles for instruction, usually through the voice of Mr. Stanley, who is ready to turn any event or observation into a lesson for his family, for Cœlebs, for his guests, and, of course, for the reader.

Like the most memorable heroes in the best of novels, the central figure, Cœlebs, is an orphan from the opening of the book. Yet, unlike the orphaned Tom Joneses, Jane Eyres, and Philip Pirrips of the literary world, Cœlebs’s parents have left him a legacy of education, example, and faith upon which his search is solidly grounded. Cœlebs attributes his “keen relish for domestic happiness” to the example set by his father’s family as well his father’s “turn of conversation” (14).

In the tradition of the novel, a quest forms the center of the tale. Here the quest is that of Cœlebs’ search for a wife. And not just any wife, but one that will fulfill the expressed wishes of his beloved, deceased parents. Cœlebs’s mother’s advice to Cœlebs is, in seeking a wife, not to be

misled by the captivating exterior of any woman who is greatly deficient in either sense of conduct; but remember, my son, that there are many women against whose characters there lies nothing very objectionable, who are little calculated to taste or to communicate rational happiness. (13)

From the outset, Cœlebs's quest for a suitable wife is inextricably bound to questions not only of conduct and character, but of taste and mental (rational) qualities. *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is, like all of More's works, concerned with the influence of education and religion on character and conduct, and the ramifications of these in this world and the next. This legacy left to Cœlebs by his parents helps to explain why in More's explicitly Christian novel, Cœlebs quest is not a search for himself -- his soul, his identity, or his place in the world. Such have already been imparted to him by his parents, made possible by their religious faith and practice. Thus, Cœlebs is not the hero of the kind of story Lukacs describes in *The Theory of the Novel*, "the story of the soul that goes to find itself" (89). Nor is the world of Cœlebs the world Lukacs envisions as the domain of the novel: "the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88). "The novel," according to Lukacs, "tells of the adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence" (89). But the hero's quest in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is one of an entirely different nature. As Robin Reed Davis explains,

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife provides a perfect illustration of why, even though its structure may be similar, an Evangelical novel is not, cannot be, a Bildungsroman. When an Evangelical hero, such as Cœlebs, encounters the world, the problem he confronts is not to be educated by the world, but the very reverse. An Evangelical hero must successfully resist contamination by the world; he may change the world -- as a clergyman, missionary, or simply through his example of steadfast adherence to principle -- but the world must not change him. (74-75)

Unlike the typical hero of a novel, Cœlebs's quest is not one that will involve dramatic self-revelation or discovery of a universal truth that will bring meaning to his life. Instead, much like Richardson's character Sir Charles Grandison, Cœlebs carries with him a truth already imparted, that of his Christian faith; he seeks only to complement that truth with a compatible marriage partner.

Although very early in the novel Cœlebs meets the woman who will become the wife of his search, his quest has just begun. Lucilla's humility and propriety prevent her from forward communication or self-revelation, so Cœlebs's search becomes one to learn the true nature and character of Lucilla indirectly from those around him. Because her parents are as reticent about their daughter's attributes as she is herself, Cœlebs's search for knowledge about Lucilla is a difficult one: "I had never once heard my friends extol their Lucilla, or bring forward any of her excellencies" (214). So meticulous in this are they that upon Cœlebs's arrival at Stanley Grove, the watch Lucilla hangs in her garden to ensure not overspending her time there (and thus turning her innocent pleasure into a vice) is removed in order to prevent any inquiry from Cœlebs. Thus, what might have been a far simpler story becomes an unexpectedly complex narrative that slowly and in pieces acquaints Cœlebs, and the reader, with the heroine Lucilla.

Cœlebs's journey has allegorical elements as well. Part of the purpose in his search is to fulfill the wishes of his absent earthly father, a father whose will he comes to know more intimately through his written word, letters left to Mr. Stanley to be passed on to Cœlebs. Like the religious pilgrim on a spiritual journey in search of a physically absent God, Cœlebs' journey is directed by the wishes of a physically absent father. Like the pilgrim who pores over holy scriptures in order to know and thus to do the will of the heavenly Father, Cœlebs reads these newfound letters written by his father to Mr. Stanley, letters concerning the upbringing of his son and whose instruction parallels the Bible itself:

I shut myself into my apartment, and read for three hours, letters for which I hope to be the better in time and in eternity. I found in them a treasure of religious wisdom, excellent maxims of human prudence, a thorough acquaintance with life and manners, a keen insight into human nature in the abstract, and a nice discrimination of individual characters; admirable documents for general education, the application of those documents to my particular turn of character, and diversified methods for improving it. (227)

Like the typical novel, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* includes a potential competitor for the heroine's love. At first, the weak development of this part of the story is so disappointing, it appears to be a great flaw in More's writing. Indeed, the character of the rival, Lord Staunton, never even appears during the course of the narrative. Yet, on closer scrutiny, it becomes apparent that More's purpose in including this near-rival in love is not to heighten the plot. Rather, the presence of Lord Staunton (who, as it turns out, was never seriously considered by Lucilla as a potential object of her affections) serves instead to illustrate how a Christian hero such as Cœlebs confronts his jealousy and how a paragon such as Lucilla deals with an unsuitable suitor like Lord Staunton. It is significant that Cœlebs first learns of Lord Staunton's rival affections for Lucilla from a false rumor circulated by gossiping servants. In Cœlebs' response, More demonstrates the nature of an inner battle between reason and passion: Cœlebs wants to follow his reason, which finds no basis of support for such inconsistency by Lucilla, but struggles with his passion. "How violent were my fluctuations," he laments. "How much at variance was my reason with my heart!" (92). Cœlebs and Lucilla never discuss Lord Staunton. Rather, from Doctor Barlow and Mrs. Carlton (the relation of Lord Staunton and the means of his acquaintance with Lucilla) Cœlebs learns that Lord Staunton's attentions have been spurned by Lucilla, whose purity and religious scruples cannot countenance one known to have seduced an innocent girl and who openly disavows the central tenets of the evangelical faith. The means Lucilla uses to effect her rejection is, arguably, one of the greatest examples of cleverness on the part of the heroine of a novel from this period. Just hours before Lucilla's rebuff of Lord Staunton's addresses, he mocked Lucilla's reading of a work on the power of religion to change the heart, saying that "a good heart did not want mending and a bad one could not be mended" (155). Later, Lucilla rejects Lord Staunton's appeal that "your charming society will reform me" by reminding him of his own words that "the work of changing the heart was too great for the Almighty Himself" and it was therefore unreasonable to expect her to accomplish the work that, by Lord Staunton's own admission, God Himself could not do.

Yet, narrated after the fact to Cœlebs by other characters, the presence of this rival in love adds very little to the plot-interest of the novel. Rather, More uses the incident as an example of the general tendency in other novels to overplay the drama and romantic sentiment of such occasions, as seen in the comments by the Belfields (quoted above) that compares Cœlebs's and Lucilla's love to a dull novel. Lucilla's "noble rejection" of Lord Staunton also serves to strengthen the weak faith of the newly converted Mr. Carlton (154). Additionally, More causes her heroine to reject unwaveringly the popular sentiment that "a reformed rake makes the best husband." While disappointingly minimizing this incident's impact on the plot, More deftly demonstrates through it definitive ideas on a range of topics that includes the evils of gossip, the primacy of reason, the unsuitability of rakes as husbands, and the importance of good examples in building one's faith.

More's novel challenges other characteristics of the typical novel. While the usual novelistic formula finds a couple's love-interest and desire heightened through correspondences, letters, and illicit rendezvous, the love of Cœlebs and Lucilla is cultivated apart from one another through similar education and upbringing. Their parents "maintained the necessary separation" while preparing "each other to expect to see a being just such a one as each would have wished for the companion of his child" (224). It is only after their love has been confirmed, the marriage proposal offered and accepted and the wedding date set, that Cœlebs returns to his home and begins a correspondence with Lucilla.

The most serious weaknesses of More's work are in two areas that might be considered most essential to the art of the novel: plot and character. Some of the critical commentaries on this subject have been detailed in the previous chapter. As seen in these reviews, one of the main criticisms of the characters in *Cœlebs*, like Richardson's central characters, was that they attain a level too near to perfection. While the fault found with the heroine Lucilla generally pertains to her too-near-perfection, the criticism of Cœlebs, too, can be summed up by Hopkins's remark that he is a "tiresomely perfect hero" (115). The complaint against Richardson's character Sir Charles that he lacks the "dialectic of opposing values and forces within . . . himself" (Karl 114n)

might be made against Cœlebs as well. An adherent to the Johnsonian school of thought concerning the dangers of “mixed” characters, More would not have portrayed a central figure who was not overwhelmingly “good,” or one who was no less than an example to which most parents would be pleased to have a child aspire. In fact, it is important to note that it was generally understood by More’s critics and biographers that the Stanley children were modeled after the actual children of Zachary Macaulay, particularly his son Thomas Babington Macauley. From the age of four years, Thomas was a favorite of More’s, and the story is told in several sources of the aging Hannah coming to the door of the Macaulay household and being received by the four-year-old Thomas, who, upon declaring his mother not to be at home, offered the visitor a seat and a glass of spirits. The two read books together, studied various subjects and enjoyed a lively correspondence for many years. In light of this, it is doubtful that More would have thought her characters to be as unrealistic as some critics think them to be.

While More’s characters must have been necessarily (for her purpose), though perhaps unrealistically, slanted toward “positive” or “negative” examples, this does not mean that they are without human weakness or whimsy or the power to engage the reader. More is perfectly capable of presenting characters that amply demonstrate both the doctrine of human corruption so central to her evangelical theology, as well as the unlimited potential of beings made in the image of God. What More is apparently incapable of is trusting her readers to do the interpretive work of discerning the difference: every flaw in precept or practice in any of the novel’s characters is carefully analyzed and explained, usually by Mr. Stanley or Cœlebs, who undeniably represent the voice of Hannah More herself.

According to other veins of criticism, ideal characters such as Lucilla are worthy of the highest praise: “It is a fault which might, with equal reason, be charged on the Venus of the Medici. Lucilla Stanley was drawn for a model; and it is the artist’s highest praise to have attained that perfection at which she avowedly aimed” (Thompson 241-42). Johnson himself has stated in the highly influential essay of *Rambler* 4 that “the best examples only should be exhibited.”

Yet, it is clear that More did not intend for Lucilla to represent a character of unattainable perfection in virtue and thinking. Through the words of Mrs. Stanley, More makes her hopes for the character of Lucilla clear: "If she is not a miracle whom others might despair to emulate, she is a Christian whom every girl of a fair understanding and good disposition may equal, and whom I hope and believe, many girls excel" (137). If, as Mrs. Stanley asserts, "a thousand other women" of similar education and upbringing could be Lucillas, then the importance More places on the role of education in forming character is only reinforced. Lucilla represents what More believed women should and could be if provided the right kind of education supported by her evangelical principles. By presenting a female heroine such as Lucilla, More "went beyond the usual exploration of inner feelings and repressed thoughts by female novelists and presented a heroine holding her own in intellectual engagement" (Ford 239). Previously cited passages illustrating the role conversation plays in Cœlebs's falling in love with Lucilla also demonstrate that Lucilla is a different sort of heroine, more interested in ideas than self, more guided by principle than passion.

The problem with the character of Lucilla isn't so much that she is painted too perfectly as that she isn't painted completely enough. Though the reader learns a great deal about her through Cœlebs's conversations with others and their descriptions of her deeds and character, Lucilla fails to come alive, save for a few rare incidents -- such as when she shares her passion for gardening with Cœlebs and her scruple to prevent her pleasure from crossing the line into sin. More has difficulty sustaining the brightness and vitality of the Cheap Repository Tracts during the lengthier narrative of her novel, particularly when so much of the work is devoted to the characters' discussion of ideas rather than her portrayal of those ideas through the narrative.

Deemed an "insufferable egoist" and "a totally uninteresting prig" (M. G. Jones 194), More's character of Cœlebs deserves little -- and has received less -- sympathy. Yet, even Ford's less severe criticism of Cœlebs isn't exactly right either: "As the novel progresses, he becomes an increasingly tedious robot who glacially scorns those women (and men) who do not quite cut it

by his father's impossible standards" (237). While Cœlebs certainly possesses greater certainty and understanding in matters of taste and religion than most gentlemen thrice his age, his character in other respects accurately reflects the foibles, insecurities, and self-absorption typical of any young man in pursuit of love. Most humorous is his genuine surprise that others have detected his love for Lucilla, even before he makes an open declaration! While his character is often criticized, correctly, for being too self-possessed or flat, Cœlebs does display credible human weaknesses: his eagerness to please Mr. Stanley in their countless conversations on all manner of religious and intellectual concerns reflects a young man's natural nervousness before a respected elder and father of his soon-to-be-beloved; upon the arrival of other visitors to Stanley Grove, he chastens himself for his jealousy at sharing Lucilla with other guests; even after a thorough acquaintance with her character and her family background, Cœlebs finds himself horrified by the thought that Lucilla may be a participant in scandalous holiday pageantry of drama (as discussed in chapter four of this paper, an idea that is picked up by Jane Austen and extensively examined in *Mansfield Park*); and he finds himself torn between his passion and his principles upon facing the possibility of the reformation of his only rival for Lucilla's love.

Minor characters are amusingly and artfully fleshed, as well. More approaches the satiric bent of an Austen in a few scenes, such as this one between Mr. and Mr. Ranby:

In the evening Mrs. Ranby was lamenting, in general and rather customary terms, her own exceeding sinfulness. Mr. Ranby said, "You accuse yourself rather too heavily, my dear; you have sins, to be sure." "And pray what sins have I, Mr. Ranby?" said she, turning upon him with so much quickness that the poor man started. "Nay," said he meekly, "I did not mean to offend you -- so far from it that, hearing you condemn yourself so grievously, I intended to comfort you, and to say that, except for a few faults ----" "And pray what faults?" interrupted she, continuing to speak, however, lest he should catch an interval to tell them. "I defy you, Mr. Ranby, to produce one." "My dear," replied he, "as you charged yourself with all, I thought it would be letting you off cheaply by naming only two or three, such as ----" Here, fearing matters would go too far, I interposed, and, softening

things as much as I could for the lady, said, "I conceived that Mr. Ranby meant that, though she partook of the general corruption ----" Here Ranby, interrupting me with more spirit than I thought he possessed, said, "General corruption, sir, must be the source of particular corruption. I did not mean that my wife was worse than other women." "Worse, Mr. Ranby, worse?" cried she. Ranby, for the first time in his life, not minding her, went on, "As she is always insisting that the whole species is corrupt, she cannot help allowing that she herself has not quite escaped the infection. Now, to be a sinner in the gross, and a saint in the detail -- that is, to have all sins, and no faults -- is a thing I do not quite comprehend." (27)

The ironic authorial distance in the description of this scene anticipates the approach that Austen would take in her satirical attacks on the tastes and values of her society. Here, in a too-rare instance, More's technique not only delights, but conveys (far more effectively than her usual heavy-handed didacticism) the religious ignorance and hypocrisy with which she was so concerned. While religion is a more serious topic, to be sure, than Austen's concern with manners, and therefore more difficult to convey with subtle wit, this scene demonstrates the possibility of expressing serious ideas more effectively through narrative art than straightforward didacticism.

Similarly, the portraiture of Dickens's characters is hinted at in passages such as the description of Fanny the flower girl, particularly in the unfolding of the terrible irony that the seven hundred pound debt of which the girl speaks was incurred by Lady Melbury herself, a shocking discovery uncovered in the next chapter:

She was the more interesting, because the delicacy of her appearance seemed to proceed from ill health, and a tear stood in her eye while she exhibited her works. "You do not seem well, my dear," said Lady Belfield, with a kindness which was natural to her. "I never care about my own health, madam," replied she, but I fear my dear mother is dying."

. . . We found the sick woman lying on a little poor, but clean bed, pale and emaciated, but she did not seem so near her end as Fanny's affection had made

her apprehend. After some kind expressions of concern, Lady Belfield inquired into their circumstances, which she found were deplorable. "But for that dear girl, madam, I should have perished with want," said the good woman; "since our misfortunes, I have had nothing to support me but what she earns by making these flowers. She has ruined her own health, by sitting up the greatest part of the night to procure me necessaries, while she herself lives on a crust."

. . . "Pray my good girl, what sort of education have you had?" "Oh, madam," said she, "one much too high for my situation. But my parents, intending to qualify me for a governess, as the safest way of providing for me, have had me taught everything necessary for that employment. I have had the best masters, and I hope I have not misemployed my time." "How comes it, then," said I, "that you were not placed in some family?" "What, sir! and leave my dear mother helpless and forlorn? O I had rather live only on my tea and dry bread, which indeed I have done for many months, and supply her little wants, than enjoy all the luxuries in the world at a distance from her."

"What were your misfortunes occasioned by?" said I, while Lady Belfield was talking with the mother. "One trouble followed another, sir," said she, "but what completely ruined us, and sent my father to prison, and brought a paralytic stroke on my mother, was his being arrested for a debt of seven hundred pounds. This sum, which he had promised to pay, was long due to him for laces, and to my mother for millinery and fancy dresses, from a lady who has not paid it to this moment; and my father is dead, and my mother dying! this sum would have saved them both!" (52-53)

This description echoes and expands the pathos found in More's earlier tracts. While the novel provides the perfect vehicle for More to develop her obvious literary skills, she unfortunately and unnecessarily allows her didactic purpose to overpower her art.

This failure of More's art to transcend her didacticism may lie in an apparently inherent antithetical relationship between art and didacticism. As John Gardner argues in *On Moral Fiction*:

Didacticism and true art are immiscible. . . . We recognize true art by its careful, thoroughly honest search for and analysis of values. It is not didactic because, instead of teaching by authority and force, it explores, open-mindedly, to learn

what it should teach. It clarifies, like an experiment in a chemistry lab, and confirms. As a chemist's experiment tests the laws of nature and dramatically reveals the truth or falsity of scientific hypotheses, moral art tests values and rouses trustworthy feelings about the better and the worse in human action. (19)

Ultimately the failure of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* is not that its characters are too good or its plot too thin. The failure of the novel is its failure to “learn” for itself what More wanted it to teach. Rather, the novel fits a category of works Gardner describes as “good and ‘serious’ fiction [that] is merely first-class propaganda -- fiction in which the writer knows before he starts what it is that he means to say and does not allow his mind to be changed by the process of telling the story. . . .” (107-08). It is clear that in writing *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, More knew what she wanted to say. Her perception of her characters or plot is unlikely to have changed from the start of writing her story to the end. There is no hint of the characters having taken on a life of their own, and in so doing, developing turns of plot or thought that might have prompted More to deviate from her original plan.

Yet, fictional characters that come alive to both reader and writer are those that take on a life of their own in the process of the story being written and in so doing communicate truth in a way that no other art can. More's characters come to us already knowing everything More wants them to know. As Robin Reed Davis points out, “[U]nlike secular literary heroes, Lucilla Stanley is educated, not by the world, but by a system. The burden of *Cœlebs* is not to trace the progress of the heroine's education, but to unfold the system that has already transformed an ordinary English girl into the paragon Lucilla is” (80). For example, Lucilla does not learn over the course of the novel that Lord Staunton is an unsuitable match; she already knows this. Likewise, while *Cœlebs* does not know immediately whether or not Lucilla is the right choice of a mate, he does already know the qualities such a mate should possess. By failing to allow her characters to engage in the creative process, or the plot to emerge from the development of the characters, More's novel fails to fulfill the most important function of fiction: to convey truth through the

process of creating. Ultimately, this is the difference between a novel and a treatise.

From a Christian perspective, the value of art is that it allows the artist, through the process of creating, to imitate God. Likewise, good fiction mirrors truth through the process of its being created. As Gardner explains, in true moral fiction art “controls the argument and gives it rigor, forces the writer to intense yet dispassionate and unprejudiced watchfulness, drives him -- in ways abstract logic cannot match -- to unexpected discoveries and, frequently, a change of mind” (108). Thus, the writer “communicates meanings discovered by the process of fiction’s creation” (Gardner 108). In other words, in genuine art, it is through the process of creating that truth emerges and is communicated. There is, unfortunately, no evidence of this kind of process in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*.

It is, therefore, understandable why some contemporary critics have refused to classify *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* as a novel and why its success was so short-lived. The criticism that “Miss More’s is a slight addition to the tradition of the novel” (Renwick 67) is certainly true in terms of genre’s artistic development. Yet, it is important not to overlook the importance of More’s work in helping to overcome widespread antipathy toward the genre and in bringing it to a place of greater cultural acceptance. As a didactic and evangelical novel, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* attracted readers who would seldom if ever have read a novel. By successfully demonstrating the potential of the novel form for cultivating taste while indulging fancy, and for imparting the “knowledge of the world and Him who made it” (102), the novel as a form was justifiable in the eyes of critics.

So although the appeal of the work itself is confined to a narrow audience and timeframe, it points to something outside itself far greater which is best described by More’s own words. In one passage of the book, Mr. Stanley, Sir Belfield, and Cœlebs discuss the merits of various fields of knowledge. The following remark by Cœlebs on poetry serves as an apt evaluation of More’s didactic art in *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*:

"In Mason's 'English Garden,'" replied I, "Alcander's precepts would have been cold, had there been no personification. The introduction of character dramatises what else would have been frigidly didactic. Thomson enriches his landscape with here and there a figure, drawn with more correctness than warmth, with more nature than spirit, but exalts it everywhere by moral allusion and religious reference. The scenery of Cowper is perpetually animated with sketches of character, enlivened with portraits from real life, and the exhibition of human manners and passions. His most exquisite descriptions owe their vividness to moral illustration. Loyalty, liberty, patriotism, charity, piety, benevolence, every generous feeling, every glowing sentiment, every ennobling passion, grows out of his descriptive powers. His shrubbery, his forest, his flower-garden, all produce 'Fruits worthy of Paradise,' and lead to immortality." (178)

Cœlebs in Search of a Wife presents More's landscape, one painted by her literary, social, and evangelical views; though "drawn with more correctness than warmth," its "descriptive powers" ennobled the novel as a worthy vehicle for the "exhibition of human manners and passions" in hopes that it might "lead to immortality" (178).

AFTERWORD

In 1948, Charles Earle Funk published a book on word and phrase origins called *A Hog on Ice and Other Curious Expressions*. One of the entries found therein is “not amount to Hannah More.” Here is Funk’s explanation of this phrase and its origins:

This saying, equivalent to “not amount to a hill of beans,” is a common way of telling a young person around Gloucester, Massachusetts, that he doesn’t show much promise. The saying was also current in some parts of England many years ago, but why the name of Miss Hannah More became bandied about in such a manner is a mystery. Hannah More, born near Bristol, England, in 1745, the daughter of a boarding-school master, began to write while still in her teens, and to have those writings published. A friend of the actor, Garrick, she wrote two slightly successful tragedies. But before she was thirty her work turned to moral and religious topics and, in 1795, one of these, the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, had such success that two million copies of it were circulated in its first year. In 1809 her most successful work, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, which despite its title was a religious novel, reached the remarkable sale, for that period, of ten editions in its first year. It was very popular, also, in the United States. . . . After such a notable career, it is odd that her name ever became a word of disparagement. The suggestion has been offered that, despite her assiduous work, nothing ever came of it; but if that be the interpretation, thousands of other names might be infinitely more appropriate. (124)

Indeed.

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