WOMEN, WORK, AND GOD

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THE INCARNATIONAL POLITICS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRAXIS OF VICTORIAN LABOURING WOMEN

BY

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the cross-class relations of Victorian women separated by social status but brought together by their faith in a subversive Christian God who supports female labour. Using original archival research, this project documents the untold story of working-class women and their middle-class allies who challenged patriarchal interpretations of Christian theology and, particularly, the limitations placed on women's material lives. Drawing on Victorian social thought, feminist autobiography theory, and contemporary body theology, my project pursues two complementary objectives. The first aim is to bring the neglected voices of working-class women into the debates about gender, labour, and cross-class relations that defined the Victorian period. The second is to trace the origins of a feminist "theology from below," which, born out of the material grittiness of everyday life in the nineteenth century, emphasized the incarnational nature of all bodies, including those labeled dirty, disabled, and perverse.

My first two chapters respectively explore the diaries of two well-known Victorian women, Josephine Butler and Hannah Cullwick. Both reconfigure Christian discourses of mission and servitude, seeking not only agency within their positions of subjugation but also new models of relationality. The final two chapters bring together the voices of Jane Andrew (a farm worker) and Ruth Wills (a factory worker) with the writings of fin-de-siècle Christian socialists to construct a politics of redemption based on an ethics of inter-relation that, instead of positioning some bodies as "godly" and others as in need of "saving," recognizes the immanent divine spirit animating all material life. Using contemporary feminist theology to strengthen the incarnational politics found in these Victorian writings, I argue in favour of bodily transgression—the willingness to walk, talk, touch, and labour in ways that are thought to be "perverse" and "ungodly"—as a legitimate answer to Christ's call to defy social hierarchies, especially the ones established by capitalist modernity.

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INTRODUCTION ~ VICTORIAN CONTEXTS & CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS

> *God sent all human beings into the world for the purpose of forwarding, to the utmost of their power, the progress of the world.*
>
> *One duty in this world is to try and make it what God intends it shall become; we are His tools.*
>
> *To do God's work in the world is the duty of all, rich and poor, of all nations, of both sexes.*
>
> —Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *Women and Work* (37-38)

The notion of progress that is normally associated with the Victorian era has to do with industrial growth, urbanization, and technological advancement. As the above quotation from Barbara Leigh Smith's treatise *Women and Work* (1857) attests, there was also a religious discourse of progress circulating that challenged the largely materialist concerns of capitalist expansion. By mid-century, with the negative social impact of industrialism becoming increasingly obvious, especially amongst the working classes, Victorians were questioning whether or not Britain was forwarding God's plan for the world.[1] Reframing progress to serve an ethics of moral equality, social reformers began to argue that what God wanted was surely not an increase in wealth and power for men of the upper classes but, instead, an increase in the rights and conditions of those living on the margins. Despite the growing social conscience of Victorians, the question of how to

[1] The best examples of the religious framing of social concerns in the Victorian period can be found in social problem fiction. For example, Margaret Hale, the main character in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), argues in favour of improving the lives of factory workers by stressing that God has made all humans "mutually dependent" (122) and, therefore, the wellbeing of each member of society should be more important than capital gain. See also Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861).

improve social conditions and conflicting ideas of who was doing God's work in the world properly meant that progress was often slow and contentious.

One of the most controversial aspects of the social progress debates had to do with the relationship between women and work. Although occupying different social strata, both middle- and working-class women had to contend with the limitations imposed on their work by patriarchal interpretations of Christian theology, which divided their material engagements into the dichotomous categories of spiritual/embodied, decent/indecent, pure/perverse, and godly/ungodly. While the challenge to these limitations posed by middle-class women who wrote publicly, such as Barbara Leigh Smith, has now been thoroughly documented, the more private challenge put forward by working-class women, contained in their life writing, has yet to be told. This dissertation will tell that story by using original archival material to weave together the testaments of diverse women who, in the process of uncovering the spiritual value of their labour, also uncovered a new Christian God living and working within the physical realm.

My project pursues two intimately related objectives. The first, which addresses a gap in scholarship, is to bring the voices of working-class women into the debates about gender, labour, and cross-class relations that defined the Victorian period. The second is to bring those voices, many of which reflect an equal concern for the spiritual as the material, into conversation with the feminist theology that was arising amongst middle-class women and expressed in their published social critiques. The primary concern of the Victorian women's movement during the last half of the nineteenth century was the education and employment of women, but the rhetoric they used was very class-specific,

excluding those women who worked out of necessity rather than out of a sense that God was calling them to a life outside of the domestic (J. Pederson 28). Instead of being positioned as fellow workers, working-class women were often framed as the objects towards which middle-class women's labour was directed. For the middle-class women that I discuss in the project, doing God's work in the world meant helping poor women through physical and spiritual support, advocacy, and patronage. What is missing from the public record is the multiple ways in which working-class women also helped middle-class women by shaping their self-conception as workers and modeling how to live an incarnational life in the messiness of the material world.

In focusing on the role that working-class women played in Victorian cross-class relations, I am seeking to move beyond the limiting approach that positions them as the objects of sympathy or, as Audrey Jaffe describes it, the "negative image" that allows for the creation of a solid and unitary middle-class identity (12). Instead, as I read the cross-class relationship from a working-class perspective, I will be focusing on its mutually disruptive and transformative potential. Despite occupying different social positions, all of the women in this study sought to define meaningful work through a sacralization of the everyday while at the same time resisting the Victorian trope of spiritualized womanhood (i.e. women as domestic, pious, pure, submissive). In order to escape their status as set apart from the world, middle-class women, such as feminist social reformer Josephine Butler, who I will be discussing in Chapter One, argued in favour of extending feminine virtues into the public sphere—a position that challenged the public/private divide but also maintained many of the patriarchal limitations placed on female

embodiment. Unlike their middle-class counterparts, who had to deny their bodies in order to enter the public sphere, working-class women faced a different challenge: that of claiming the spiritual legitimacy of their labour in bodies that already defied the standards of feminine virtue. As I will show through the writings of Hannah Cullwick, Jane Andrew, and Ruth Willis in Chapters Two and Three, working-class women succeeded in proving the sacred value of their labour by using their bodies as a form of resistance, scandalously insisting that Christian faith is at its core an embodied spirituality meant to be worked out through corporeal engagement.

In this thesis, I take my cue from these working-class women and argue in favour of bodily transgression—the willingness to walk, talk, touch, and labour in ways that are thought to be "perverse" and "ungodly"—as a legitimate way of imitating Christ. For Cullwick, that transgression meant embodying an ethic of service to the point of not only washing but also sometimes kissing and licking the feet of her "master" to express a self-giving and humble love. For Andrew and Wills, their transgressive act was the refusal to deny the vulnerability of their disabled bodies, choosing instead to embrace brokenness as a means of connecting with others. Because their station in life made these women unable to ignore the demands of material existence, including the dependence of human beings on one another and God, their stories reflect the inter-subjective ideal inherent in Christ's proclamation: "I in them, and you in me" (*Oxford Annotated Bible*, John 17:23). My focus on the theological vision of trans-personal reality that motivated and inspired these women finds productive parallels in historical materialist analysis with its ideas of collective social transformation. Belying the well-known Marxist critique of religion as

the opium of the masses, the Christian women in my study tap into the aspects of Christian theology that are fiercely egalitarian in order to critique bourgeois ideology.[2] What these working-class women bring to the story of Victorian feminism is not only the experience of an immanent God living in, between, and through abjected bodies (like prostitutes, servants, and manual laborers), but also a vision of the possibility of new social relationships that form in the interstices and cracks of capitalism's hierarchies, subtly subverting their modes of social reproduction and control.

Finding Meaning in the Material

In the winter of 2011, I travelled to the heart of industrial Britain believing that I could uncover what scholars of the past have assumed did not exist: life writing by Victorian working-class women.[3] While it is well-known that many working-class women could and were writing during the nineteenth century, it has been a long held assumption that any autobiographical writing that they did would not have been deemed important enough to preserve. Inspired by Florence Boos and Meagan Timney's recovery

[2] In an essay entitled, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the Right" (1844), Marx wrote, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (244). Critical of Christianity's otherworldly focus, Marx positioned religion as a counter-force to social revolution because of its powers to ideologically anesthetize people into accepting the oppressive conditions of their lives. As we will see as this dissertation progresses, the women in this study were far from anesthetized, but rather roused towards rebellion by their faith.

[3] Over the course of my three-month research trip to the UK, I conducted research in six main repositories: University of Birmingham Cadbury Research Library, The Working Class Movement Library (Salford), John Rylands Library Special Collections (Manchester), The Northumberland County Records Office (Newcastle), The Women's Library (London), and The British Library (London). My sincerest thanks to the archivists in each of these libraries for their assistance in finding the archival sources included in this project.

over the last decade of hundreds of poems by nineteenth-century working-class women, I felt confident that somewhere in the midst of the vast British archives there had to also be autobiographical writings by the same type of women. In her short anthology of Victorian diaries published in 2001, Heather Creaton suggests that the selections in her volume represent only "the tip of a true iceberg of diary material" available in British archives (8), and the multiple entries that can be found in the British National Archives online database confirms this claim. While it was easy for me to find listings for diaries, autobiographies, and letters written by Victorian women in the database, the lack of details in the entries made it difficult to determine the class status of the writer let alone predict the content of the document. The recent shift to an emphasis on material culture in Victorian Studies had piqued my interest, and I entered the archives hoping that I would be able to map the connections between materiality—the physical environment of workplace and home (i.e. the "things" that define working-class existence)—and the construction, maintenance, and transformation of female working-class identity in the nineteenth century. But, as I read through my first two manuscript diaries at the University of Birmingham Library, I realized that although there was a material history there to be traced, the texts themselves were calling me to shift my focus to something else.

The question that repeatedly came to mind as I read was: where was God in the dirt, dust, and labour of everyday existence for working-class women? The answer to that question began to take shape as I noticed a pattern emerging in the archive of autobiographical writings I was uncovering. To varying degrees, the material concerns of

everyday life—making money, paying rent, supporting a family, performing domestic duties, engaging in paid employment—were documented alongside declarations of faith and musings about the divine as if they were one and the same. Making very little distinction between matters of the body and matters of the spirit, the working-class women that I include in this study were chosen specifically because they located the source of spiritual knowledge within the material. Rather than extracting or abstracting spiritual meaning *from* worldly experience, a favoured strategy amongst middle-class reformers, they found meaning *in* it and used that meaning to further connect with the world around them.

The process of finding and collecting archival material felt like one-part painstakingly hard work and two-parts serendipity.[4] In *Dust* (2001), Carolyn Steedman argues that our scholarly investment in the "uncomfortable quest for original sources" (9) resides not so much in the "deep satisfaction of finding things" (although that thrill certainly spurs us on), but in the creation of an "original story" that tells just as much about the finder as the document found (128-135). The autobiographical writings that I have chosen are written by women from diverse backgrounds, encompassing rural as well as urban dwellers and spanning occupations as diverse as farmers and factory workers to domestic servants and prostitutes; what they all have in common is their precarious economic situation, their status as "working women," and their faith in God. It is not my

[4] My approach to the archival process, and reading manuscript diaries specifically, has been greatly influenced by Cynthia Huff's groundbreaking work in this area. In her 1989 article "The Diary as Feminist Practice," Huff stresses the importance of "not playing the part of censor" and accepting the "unfamiliar process" of discovery, which she describes as a "mysterious" and "thrilling" venture (8).

intention to suggest that all Victorian working-class women were concerned with spiritual matters (they were not) nor is it my goal to create a uniform portrait of "working-class women's religious beliefs" in the nineteenth century—an approach that would result in a further silencing rather than an opening up.[5] Instead, I am interested in the active and embodied ways that individual women whose lives were dominated by material demands chose to reconfigure Christianity—a patriarchal and class-based religious system—as a means of personal, social, and political transformation. Just as significant, their desires to maintain the relational bonds of Christianity while at the same time challenging the systems and beliefs that create hierarchies of power out of those bonds is also the desire that informs my own faith. In this way, my dissertation is personal: it seeks to create connections between the reader and writer by transgressing the boundaries between past and present, public and private, and self and other (Huff, "Diary as Feminist Practice" 6). As a white, female, middle-class, Christian academic, the position from which I encounter the working-class subjects in this study is similar to that of the key players in the Victorian women's movement, and, like them, I have been challenged to rethink my own faith by the bold violations of social norms by women who, certain of their convictions, were in search of a new model of relationality more in line with their understanding of God's vision for the world.

[5] There was one diary in particular—the diary of Beatrice Welch (1899)—that I would have loved to include in this project because it tells such an honest and endearing story of life in London for young working women; however, it did not fit in the scope of this project because Welch was not at all concerned with matters of faith. Although she did attend church, she treated it as a social affair, often behaving as a self-declared "cheeky girl" by laughing and playfully mocking social customs with her friends.

While life writing has been historically read as a part of the development of western subjectivity and in feminist criticism as a form of gendered self-creation, the women in this study all take up the question of what it means to move *beyond* the self, not only through the writing they leave to posterity, but also within their contemporary social worlds. I argue that it is their affirmative embrace of the body—the locus of our shared human experience—and its central place within the Christian story of incarnation that allowed them to embrace an ethic of inter-relationality. The Christian story of incarnation is at its core a story of corporeal dispossession: the body is embraced by God through the figure of his son only to be later given up as a means of establishing a form of collective salvation.[6] The working-class women in this study claim, not that their own or any individual body is the key to salvation, but that becoming Christ-like in the world means truly realizing and embracing one's corporality by freely giving it over to the service of others. This is a risky claim because it can be (and has been) easily co-opted as a tool to reinforce hegemonic power structures, but, when freely embraced as an ethics to live by, it represents the possibility of creating a social bond that does not privilege the individual over the collective. Capitalism also often demands self-sacrifice from subjects. The genius of these women lies in their ability to resist the sacrifice systemically demanded of them by recuperating it as a form of self-giving that reconstitutes collectivity, rather than division and hierarchy. These women show that, despite the abuses that history may have made of it, the defining story of Christianity also potentially holds within it a key for reversing the damage capitalism wreaks on bodies, relationships, and communities.

[6] This affirmation of the corporeal transcends the modern myth of creating, preserving, and protecting selfhood as the remedy to social ills.

Capitalism, Work, and Cross-Class Relations

The Victorian era in Britain has been characterized as an age shaped by the quest for national self-definition, and the country's status as an industrial powerhouse became one of its primary markers of identity (Henderson and Sharpe 451). By 1850, England was one of the most advanced industrial countries in Europe and, as Marx lamented, seen as an "image of the future" by other capitalist societies (Bottomore 21).[7] The impact of industrialism and its accompanying urbanization on the working-class population was, however, undeniable as extreme poverty and overwork left its mark on the sick and dying bodies of industrial workers. As Erin O'Connor describes in *Raw Material* (2000), the overcrowding and lack of sanitation in urban slums, known colloquially as "fever nests," contributed to the spread of typhoid, cholera, influenza and scarlet fever and the working conditions in the factories led to new forms of industrial disease (5-6). A whole new genre of writing, written primarily by middle-class men who visited the slums and reported back to the members of their class on the horrible conditions they found there, arose as a response to the plight of the working classes.[8] This form of social reportage helped to bring about factory reforms by putting the plight of workers at the fore of

[7] The textile industry is a prime example of England's industrial growth. As Carlisle notes, "cotton constituted 45 per cent of Britain's exports between 1831 and 1850" (up forty per cent in value since the 1780s) with approximately one half million employed producing it, of which 70 per cent were women and children (16-18).

[8] The reports arising out of this type of "social investigation" include the Parliamentary reports or "blue books," such as *Report on the Employment of Children in Factories* (1830) and the *Factory Inspectors Report* (1839), as well as a number of private investigations such as James Phillips Kay's *The Moral and Physical Conditions of the Working Classes* (1832) and Friedrich Engel's *Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1845).

popular imagination, but it also problematically positioned working-class people as the dirty and diseased (and therefore threatening) portion of the British social body.[9]

The working classes became so strongly linked to their abject material conditions in the Victorian imagination that they occupied a position of both pity and fear. Their unhealthy bodies were the symptom of the "altered social order of an increasingly materialist culture," which threatened to consume not just the "disposable" bodies of workers but also the healthy bodies of those who did not labour (O'Connor 4).[10] The fear of this threat spread so far that working classes as a whole, including rural and non-industrial workers, came to occupy the paradoxical position of being essential to the economic health of the nation but being seen as inimical to its overall wellbeing. The health of the English social body as a whole was seen as being under threat and, in order "to mitigate the anxiety" produced by the "decomposition that was taking place on both social and cellular levels," the Victorians attempted to manage "the vexed and uncertain relationship" between the human body and labour (O'Connor 3-5). In attempting to manage the working classes through acts of benevolence and control, the middle class

[9] Edwin Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842) was one of the most widely read of the treatises and helped solidify the connection between dirt, disease, and the working classes in the popular imagination. As Peter Melville Logan recounts in *Nerves and Narratives* (1997), Chadwick advocated a large-scale social intervention to improve the public health conditions in the worst working-class neighbourhoods by describing the working classes as literally living knee-deep in their own excrement (146). Chadwick's report and political efforts led to the passing of a Public Health Act in 1848 that created local boards to oversee street cleaning, garbage collection, and sewer maintenance; however, he also created an association that lasted throughout the rest of the century between the working classes and dirt and disease (Logan 146).

[10] The connection between the individual body, the social body, and disease in the nineteenth century has been a popular topic of study in the last decade. In addition to the work of Erin O'Connor, Mary Poovey, Pamela K. Gilbert, and Catherine Gallagher have also written extensively on the subject.

developed a discourse of work that solidified its own desired identity as the moral, virtuous, and heroic class in opposition to its frightening social shadow—a position that allowed for an alternative to a purely economic or self-interested model of living while at the same time allowing capitalist industrialism to continue as a source of profit for the nation.

The "Gospel of Work," as it became known in the nineteenth century, set the middle-class moral tone of the period through an idealization and devotion to work as an ennobling practice.[11] Far from its biblical origins as a necessary burden to account for original sin, work was configured throughout the nineteenth century as a spiritually uplifting social duty that was both necessary and good (Bradshaw and Ozment xviii-xix).[12] Thomas Carlyle lays out this "latest Gospel" in his section on labour in *Past and Present* (1843) by praising the "perennial nobleness" and "sacredness" of work:

> Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness . . . Labour is Life: from the inmost heart of the Worker rises his god-given Force, the sacred celestial Life-essence breathed into him by Almighty God; from his inmost heart awakens him to all nobleness. (38)

[11] I am indebted to Rob Breton for first introducing me to the class dynamics at play in the gospel of labour through his book *Gospels and Grit: Work and Labour in Carlyle, Conrad, and Orwell* (2005), which I draw on extensively in this section.

[12] Work continued to be seen as a burden throughout the middle ages, but shifted with the protestant reformation in the sixteenth century. Luther and Calvin invested work with value, but denounced any material gain from that work (Breton 1-2). The legacy of Protestantism combined with the romantic critique of industrialism, led to the popular and profitable belief that work itself held an intrinsic value above and beyond the economic in the nineteenth century. See Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1978) and Rob Breton's *Gospels and Grit: Work and Labour in Carlyle, Conrad, and Orwell* (2005) for more details on this history.

Carlyle's parable of the happy labourer, which arises out of nostalgia for an idealized pre-capitalist past, reflects the larger tendency of middle-class commentators to engage in a utopian valorization of work—a move which, however well intentioned, conceals the debilitating effects of labour by erasing the distance between middle- and working-class experience. Work and labour are used interchangeably, both written about as fulfilling the divine purpose of life. By aligning himself with the positive value of working-class labour, the middle-class man was able to distance himself from the idleness of the upper classes. Yet, this association remained the realm of the symbolic, and the work of the middle class, which tended to be more intellectual in nature, continued to be treated with more respect and remained more lucratively remunerated than the physical toil of the manual labourer. In *Gospels and Grit* (2005), Rob Breton argues that, despite middle-class rhetoric about the intrinsic nobility of all work, the oppressive nature of the repetitive, task-based, de-skilled, and systematized types of labour the working classes were required to undertake in the nineteenth century ensured that, outside of the realm of middle-class discourse, the distance between mental and manual labour remained enormous. Carlyle's claim that "all work, even cotton-spinning is noble" (3) helped to improve the image of working-class labour by attributing positive value to it outside of an economic imperative, but it did so by placing its own middle-class vision and values onto working-class experience without acknowledging that those engaged in manual labour may have their own vision of the spiritual value of their labour.

The economic function of working-class labour as the generator of profits for the bourgeois class remained hidden in the idea of work celebrated by the middle classes,

leading to a resistance to the "gospel of work" by those who understood labour to be a source of oppression rather than opportunity.[13] Addressing Carlyle's universalizing sanctification of work directly in his lecture "Useful Work versus Useless Toil" in 1884, William Morris wrote:

> It has become an article of the creed of modern morality that all labour is good in itself—a convenient belief to those who live on the labour of others . . . we must say in the teeth of the hypocritical praise of all labour . . . that there is some labour which is so far from being a blessing that it is a curse. (178)

Morris's point is that, even if they are shrouded in an equalizing rhetoric, the hierarchies of a class-based system of labour only become further entrenched when the non-economic values of work are touted above the reality of daily life for those whose labour offers little reward (178). Reading Victorian society from a Marxist perspective, Morris argues that there are three classes that make the British social body: 1) those who "do no work and make no pretense of doing anything"; 2) those who work fairly hard but are rewarded with "abundant easements" and "holidays" for their efforts; 3) those who labour constantly without pleasure or hope of rest and enjoyment (179). He levels the greatest criticism at the middle classes, who benefited personally the most from the system of capitalist exploitation while claiming to be working for the benefit of all (180). Although there were multiple types of "middling sorts" during the nineteenth century—the middle class referring broadly to a variety of people with a wide range of occupations, types of

[13] In their anthology *The Voice of Toil* (2000), David Bradshaw and Suzanne Ozment identify three primary discourses of work that were circulating in the nineteenth century: work as oppression, work as opportunity, and work as mission.

employment, and levels of income (Cannadine 95)—there was also a very real attempt to establish a coherent and stable middle-class identity.[14] The way that they did so was not by establishing any real coherency or superiority as a group but by creating the illusion of it through their proximity to the working class. As Morris explains, "I do not say that the middle class troubles itself about its members being *positively* long lived, beautiful or refined, but merely insists that they shall be so *relatively* to the inferior class" (182). In other words, the hierarchies of work established by the "gospel of work" between clean/dirty, respectable/immoral, mental/physical, and paid/unpaid served to solidify the middle class as the normative subject of capitalist modernity while ensuring that the working class remained a source of labour-power by rendering so-called "worthy work" inaccessible to them.

The women in my study sacralize labour in a way that contains echoes of Carlyle, but they do so in a way that draws attention to the conditions that make work oppressive, placing them in line with Morris' socialist critique. They are able to do this, in large part, because their first-person autobiographical accounts, by speaking from a position that was assumed to be inarticulate, reframe the social field out of which middle-class critique emerged.[15] Rather than glossing over class difference or positioning it as cause for an all-

[14] The same can be said about the working class in the nineteenth century; there were multiple types of working-class people living across Britain with different occupations and levels of income. Nonetheless, there was an attempt to create a "working class" not only by the middle class, as an "other" to work for/against, but also by working-class people themselves, who were attempting to form a collective labour movement rooted in a unified working-class consciousness. When I refer to "the working classes" (plural) I am referring to the labouring masses in their diversity, but when I use the term "the working class" (singular) I am referring to the socially constructed collective identity.

out class war, the texts in this study highlight the challenging but productive relationships between people of different classes. It would be too simple (and untrue) to characterize the relationship between the classes in the Victorian era as one of straightforward domination and resistance. Despite the critical tendency to read women on the margins of society as victims and the people who occupy the center as their oppressors, the dynamics of power are never that clear-cut (Stanley 19). As Seth Koven argues in *Slumming* (2006), cross-class relations in the nineteenth century were an "altogether messier mingling of good intentions and blinkered prejudices" than any straightforward account could account for (3).

One of the most surprising aspects of the women's autobiographical writing that I uncovered was the generosity and love with which they wrote about the middle- and upper- class people that they served. In their writing, there is no all-powerful middle-class subject who holds all of the agency and power, nor are we shown a totally subjected working-class person who is seen as completely other. Without denying the oppressive conditions of their own labour, the women acknowledge, in conscious and unconscious ways, the reality that the ill effects of capitalism, particularly its divisive powers, impact all people even if the cost is not borne equally. Writing from a position outside of middle-class discourse, they present freedom as coming neither from escaping labour nor from focusing on its self-improving qualities, but from ridding oneself of the capitalistic illusion that class division is the ultimate determinant. Without access to an alternative

[15] Underlying many of the critiques of the class system by middle-class reformers was not only a lack of first-hand experience but also the troubling assumption that the working classes could not speak for themselves and therefore needed someone with more education, money, and power to speak for them.

economic model, the women in this study turned to the ideal model of social relations laid out in Christianity: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).[16] By treating their employers and patrons as fellow Christians instead of oppressors and challenging their behaviour on those grounds, the women move beyond simply imagining a classless society to acting as if one is possible.

Writing the Revolution

In addition to promoting a gospel of work in *Past and Present*, Thomas Carlyle also famously speculated about what the "labouring millions of England" would say if they were able to speak for themselves (22). The notion that the working classes were inarticulate was widespread amongst the more learned classes, which led many middle-class men and women to take it upon themselves to "speak for" the people.[17] Until the last few decades, much of what we knew about the working classes in Victorian Britain came from texts that were written *about* rather than *by* them. Since the early eighties when John Burnett, David Vincent, and David Mayall published an annotated bibliography of over 800 Victorian working-class autobiographies, there has been an increasing amount of

[16] Although I argue that the women's writing contains socialist undertones, socialist discourse belonged almost exclusively to the *men's* labour movement, from which women were excluded, until late in the nineteenth century (more about this to come in Chapter Four). Religion, because it was a part of Victorian women's everyday lives, was a much more natural place to turn as an alternative to capitalist social relations.

[17] See Janice Carlisle's introduction to *Factory Lives: Four Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiographies* (2007) for more on Thomas Carlyle's figuring of the working classes as "inarticulate" and the middle-class response in "speak[ing] for workers" (14-15). I am indebted to Janice Carlisle for first introducing me to this reading of Thomas Carlyle.

critical attention to working-class life narratives.[18] Yet, the misconception that continues to shape the popular conception of the working classes during this period is that they were illiterate or, if they were literate, they did not have the time or means to leave a record of their lives. It is true that literacy rates were low at the beginning of the century, but, due to the expansion of popular education and the increasing availability of cheap reading material, the rates rose dramatically between 1850 and 1900 (Bailey 90).[19] The education that the working classes received, however, strongly reinforced the status quo by teaching conformity to gender and class positions (Gomersall 5). For this reason, the existence of working-class writers, especially women writers, was rare until the twentieth century. The women included in this dissertation represent the exception rather than the rule when it came to recording their thoughts on paper, and none of them would have likely identified themselves as "writers."[20] For the most part, they were women who were encouraged and

[18] It is important to note that, although critics have been paying more attention to working-class writing, most of the criticism that is out there still focuses on reading the working-class through middle-class narratives. The exceptions include Owen Ashton and Stephen Roberts' *The Victorian Working-Class Writer* (1999); James R. Simmon's *Factory Lives: Four Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiographies* (2007); Florence Boos's *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain* (2008); Meagan Timney's *Of Factory Girls and Serving Maids: The Literary Labours of Working-Class Women in Victorian Britain* (doctoral dissertation, 2009).

[19] Literacy rates increased from one-half in 1840 to ninety-seven percent in 1900 based on the signatures (as opposed to crude marks) left in marriage registries across England (Mitch qtd. in Bailey 89). At the beginning of the century, most education for the working classes was provided informally by the church; it is estimated that one-third to one-half of working-class children in the 1830s attended church-run Sunday Schools and learned to read the Bible (Rosen). The Education Act of 1870 led to the creation of expansive state-run elementary education, which led to an increase in literacy amongst the working classes (Rosen).

[20] By mid-century, literary endeavours were becoming increasingly professionalized. Although "being a writer" was still rare for women, there were middle-class women, such as George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, who considered writing to be their profession and were making money doing it. Most working-class women writers, even those who were lucky enough to get a few poems or stories published, still considered writing an aside from their regular lives of labour. For

supported by their "superiors," whether it was an employer, a benefactor, a kindly philanthropist, or middle-class lover, to pursue writing for personal development or private pleasure. While education provided them with the practical skills necessary to write, it was personal relationships that provided them with the support necessary to venture into the realm of imaginative possibilities. This was particularly true for the working-class women I will be discussing in Chapter Three; Jane Andrew wrote her memoir because of the encouragement and financial assistance provided by her late benefactor's family, and Ruth Willis' inspiration to become a poet came from the support her early employers provided in allowing her to use their library. Because these women were encouraged to write, and provided with the financial and social support to do so, I propose that they were given the capacity to shape, at least on the page, their lives in the way they wanted—to re-negotiate their relationship with labour beyond the limitations of middle-class discourse.

To provide a framework for the difficult but supportive cross-class relationships that I argue are central to not only the authorial but also the spiritual development of both working- and middle-class Victorian women, I turn to Jacques Rancière's discussion of the relationship between the Saint Simonians—a group of well-intentioned bourgeois socialists—and the workers that they helped to become poets in Paris during the 1830s. In *Nights of Labor* (1989), Rancière describes the collision of misguided and misunderstood intentions and desires between the two groups that led to a vision of a new social order that neither group could have seen coming. While the Saint Simonians intended to

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more details on women and the literary profession, see Julia Swindell's *Victorian Writing and Working Women* (1985).

educate the working classes to understand the positive value of work in hopes of creating an army of labour to withstand the corrupting influences of the other classes, what they ended up doing was providing the workers with a vision of a life of poetry and philosophy beyond labour. Much to the disappointment of the Saint Simonians, the workers rejected the image of the worker-soldier and instead embraced that of the worker-poet (Reid xxxv). What the Saint Simonians could not see, and what Rancière retrospectively points out, is that by embracing poetry and spending the time when they are not labouring writing, philosophizing, and thinking, the workers created an even greater threat than that of a worker-army: that of the "near-normal."[21] As Rancière explains, it is not so much the mass of militant workers from below that threaten the existing social order but those migrants who cross the borders between classes, those who dare to "be both poet and worker, thinker and common labourer" (13). He describes the worker's decision to write as a revolutionary act ("la transgression poétique") because it breaks with the daily rhythms of labour and allows for the worker to claim his/her own existence through a forbidden language reserved for those who do not labour (22).[22] The agendas of the

[21] The threat of the "near normal" is an idea also explored by contemporary disability studies critics. As Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues in *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997), the perceived threat of corporealites that do not conform to standards of "normalcy" (i.e. white, male, heterosexual, self-supporting, self-governing) arises from their ability to call into question the basic ideological assumptions about embodiment and individuality that structure society. When a person with disabilities moves through a social space built according to standards of "normalcy," or when a manual labourer ventures into an intellectual realm created by/for her "superiors," their anomalous presences trouble the fantasies being maintained through their exclusions. This connection between the disabled body and the working-class body will be explored further in Chapter Three.

[22] As Donald Reid points out in his introduction to the 1989 English edition of *The Nights of Labor*, in this way, Rancière breaks from Marx by valorizing workers for their difference, for

middle-class women in this story are not as straightforward or unified as the socialist Saint Simonians in their interactions with the working classes, but the results are similar: working-class subjects who become worker-theologians despite the pressures to fit within an often well-intentioned but misguided or exclusionary middle-class vision. As Rancière points out, conversations between marginalized workers and those "who want to minister to the sorrows of labour" are always "difficult" because it is a meeting of two worlds that do not share the same social frame of reference (20-21). This was certainly the case with the Victorian middle-class feminists, many of whom shared the same enthusiasm as their male counterparts for the gospel of work. In demanding the right to work on the basis that it cultivates virtue and fosters a sense of fulfillment and self-definition, Victorian feminists spoke from a position of privilege without fully realizing the limitations of their vision. Despite their widely different social stations, both middle-class and working-class women had to struggle to have their respective forms of work valued within a male-dominated public sphere. Whereas middle-class women were fighting against being reduced to figures of spiritual salvation, thus limiting their ability to work outside the home, working-class women were fighting against their objectification as figures defined entirely by material existence. And yet, despite their differing agendas, the exchanges between these middle and working-class women, which often took a philanthropic or charitable form, helped both parties to see beyond their limited social field. The important thing about these relationships was not the content of the doctrine propelling them forward, or the success or failure of the venture, but rather the productive disordering of

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their willingness to step outside of the proletariat mass and "appropriate for themselves the power reserved for the 'other'" (Reid xxxii).

repressive social structures, effected when worldviews rubbed up against one another. The productive value of this disordering will be explored further in Chapter One through Josephine Butler's writing. Despite Butler's attempt to maintain the illusion of distance between herself and the women she was helping, the challenge the women presented to her understanding of female embodiment forced her to confront the social hierarchies built into the Victorian discourse of charity, fostering a new sense of solidarity between the two parties.

Although Rancière focuses primarily on the impact that cross-class relations had on the working-class subject, who was given a "hint of another world, of a reason to revolt other than egotism and materialism" (Reid xxxiv), his theory also affords the middle-class subject a key role in the new social order that unfolds in the writings of the worker-poet.[23] Building upon and extending this insight, my dissertation shows how middle-class women became, sometimes unintentionally and despite themselves, the catalysts for working-class emancipatory writing. This places them, if not in the role of outright allies, then at least as the furtive supporters and enablers of projects to shape working-class female identities dedicated to something other than exploitation.

[23] This is another way that Rancière breaks from Marx. Rather than casting the revolution and the socialist utopia that will follow into the future, he argues that it is an ongoing process, theorizing it as "a break in the present rather than an ideal put in the future" (Reid xxxvi).

Bodies: The Good, the Bad, and the Sacred

One of the primary ways that the worldviews of Victorian middle- and working-class women differed was in their understandings of the relationship between work and the body. The gender debates of the 1840s created clear lines between "feminine" work and "unfeminine" labour as middle-class women promised to keep their bodies out of the public's view if they were allowed to take on professional lives. Drawing on the 1861 census in her treatise *The Education and Employment of Women* (1868), Josephine Butler estimated that there were over two and a half million unmarried Englishwomen working for their own subsistence in Britain during the 1860s (4): most of these women were from the growing middle classes who, being either unmarried or widowed, found themselves competing for increasingly sparse and low paying jobs as clerks, governesses, and teachers (Butler 5). Butler notes that even those women who did find employment often made so little money that they lived in poverty (5). Her proposed solution was to professionalize middle-class women through better education so that the value of their labour would be recognized as more worthwhile and they would be better equipped to "raise the character and social standing" of those they teach and act as a strong moral influence over "men as well as women" in the "heart" of the social world (11). This vision, which simply extends "feminine" virtues out into public, could not encompass the type of work that most working-class women were engaged in because of the body's association with immorality in the Victorian imagination. The prohibition against the physical body, especially those bodies that did not conform to standards of purity and virtue, was so strong that middle-class women would not even speak of their bodies for

risk of being considered immoral. "Respectable" Victorian woman could not tell embodied stories because of the cultural meanings assigned to their bodies (Smith and Watson 51), which positioned them as wholly pure or wholly corrupt.[24] But, working-class women, whose lives were so dominated by material demands, could not deny the body in the stories of their lives. In their writing, the reality of embodied subjectivity disrupts the cultural discourses that determine which bodies should or should not be seen or talked about. The actual living bodies of the Victorian working classes (the material from which they thought, felt, moved, and existed) posed the greatest challenge to the nineteenth-century class and gender systems by refusing invisibility.

According to the 1851 census, 635,000 British women worked in textile factories (the second largest employer of women after domestic service), 143, 475 were employed in various forms of agricultural labour, 600,000 earned their livings through needlework and dressmaking, and more than one million women worked in domestic services and laundry work (Holloway 18-30). In addition to the women who performed documented forms of labour, there were also thousands working in the streets as vendors, beggars, and prostitutes. In the 1840s, the female coal miner became a living embodiment of the fears surrounding this type of undocumented female labour. An investigation commissioned by Lord Ashley in 1842, which was set up to investigate children's work in the mines, turned into a shocking exposé of the moral perils of "unfeminine" labour with detailed

[24] Feminist autobiography scholar Sidonie Smith attributes this phenomenon to the social construction of gender: "Women had to discursively consolidate themselves as subjects through pursuit of an out-of-body experience precisely because their bodies were inescapably gendered, intensely fabricated. Thus they had to write out of their bodies or write off their bodies to gain an audience at all" (272).

descriptions and drawings of women engaged in the tough, dirty, physical work of coal mining.[25] The first-person testimony contained within the report describes the sight of the "young females, dressed like boys in trousers, crawling on all fours, with belts around their waists, and chains passing between their legs" as "disgusting," "indecent," "revolting," and akin to what one would see in a brothel (qtd. in Johnson 20). The connection made between coal mining women and prostitutes served to position any type of labour that threatened the sexual and economic power of Victorian men into the category of the degrading and immoral. The relegation of certain "unruly" labouring bodies to the realm of the disreputable did not, however, stop working-class women from working "powerfully, visibly, [and] for money" in the public sphere (McClintock 116). In fact, despite their poor working and living conditions, the working-class women in this study uniformly express pride in their labouring bodies, writing about them not as a source of shame but a source of strength, even when broken or disabled.

In this way, their writings anticipate and preemptively contribute to a conversation about disability, bodily suffering, and self-representation that has only solidified as a critical discourse in the last two decades. Contemporary disability scholars, such as Rosemarie Garland Thomson and Susannah Mintz, have challenged the standards of normalcy that position the able-bodied, heterosexual, white male as the ideal and marginalize all others bodies that fail to conform. Their theorization of disability as a cultural construction, and their celebration of the so-called disabled body as inherently no

[25] Patricia Johnson provides a detailed reading of the impact of this report on perceptions of working-class female labour in *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction* (2001).

less beautiful or ideal than any other, has loosened the trope of disability from its position in able-bodied culture as a symbol of "deviance, helplessness, insufficiency, and loss" (Mintz, *Unruly Bodies* 1). In a context where impairment and illness are an accepted part of embodied life, rather than symptoms of a body's failure to conform to individualist standards of self-sufficiency and self-control, vulnerability and pain take on potentially productive meanings. Mintz's latest work on pain positions bodily suffering as generative rather than destructive because of its ability to make us more aware of our "embeddedness" not only in social structures but also in "relationships with others" (*Hurt and Pain* 6). Likewise, feminist autobiography scholar Leigh Gilmore has turned her attention to narratives of pain in life writing, arguing that chronic pain, when it is not subsumed by a narrative of triumph or transcendence over a suffering self, can become a vehicle for acknowledging "relations of dependence and interdependence across living and non-living matter" (83). Although the suffering the women in this study endured was not always physical pain, the type of agency they exerted—one that allowed them to be active agents in their own lives without denying the vulnerability of their bodies—fits into the category that Gilmore calls "agency without mastery" (84). As we will see in Chapter Three, Andrew and Wills are the most obvious examples of women in this study who successfully claim full personhood without disavowing their anomalous bodies; however, Hannah Cullwick, the subject of Chapter Two, whose body bears no marks of disability but signals its otherness through the dirt of physical labour, takes the notion of "agency without mastery" to a new level by carving out an identity for herself predicated on subservience. It is only by totally relinquishing the inner compulsion to accrue control

and power, even over her own body, that Cullwick finds a way to transform an oppressive narrative of servanthood into a liberating one.

While the labouring bodies of the working classes represented a larger, mostly unacknowledged, anxiety about the ravages of capitalism on the social body for the middle classes, they signaled for those living in them the potential for the creation of a new kind of social body rather than the destruction of a deceivingly safe one. As feminist scholars such as Judith Butler and Sidonie Smith have argued over the last two decades, "communal discourses and practices determine how the material body is called together" and assigned meaning (Smith 268). While Victorians were struggling to understand the complex substance of the rapidly changing social body after industrialism, especially the place of individual bodies within the larger system, the working classes became an easy scapegoat for the wounds of capitalism. At the heart of the question "how to deal with the labouring millions of England" was confusion over the source of the social body's growing illness (Carlyle 22): Were the working classes infecting the social whole? Or was the overall capitalist system ultimately responsible for the illness of both individual bodies and the social body?[26] In either instance, the position of a working-class subject in

[26] In *Making a Social Body* (1995), Poovey explains that the tendency to see the working classes as predatory members of the organism had its origins in the historical development of the idea of a social body (7). In the seventeenth century, the only people who belonged to the body politic—the linguistic precursor to the social body—were aristocratic men; the lower classes, especially the poor, were considered "inimical" to its overall health (Poovey 7). In the eighteenth century, however, the term body politic came into competition with Adam Smith's metaphor of "the great body of people," which referred "not to the well-to-do but to the mass of laboring poor" (Poovey 7). By the nineteenth century, the two phrases were joined together in the term social body, which was understood in two very different ways. As Poovey explains:

> The image of the social body . . . referred either to the poor in isolation from the rest of the population or to British society as an organic whole. The ambiguity of this double usage . . . allowed social analysts to treat one segment of the population as a special

the social body is predetermined to be either a threat or a victim. This is because the middle classes were trying to work through the problems of capitalism from *within* a capitalist framework, attempting to preserve the productive capabilities of working-class bodies while at the same time lamenting (or pretending to lament) the suffering it required.

The women's autobiographical writing that I address in the dissertation provides an alternative vision of their bodies and labour because of the framework their Christian faith supplied. The belief that God is made known to us through human presence, which is always embodied, and that the incarnation extends beyond the person of Jesus meant that the women were writing from the contradictory bodily position of being divinely sacred but culturally profane.[27] Rather than concerning themselves exclusively with the humanly constructed social body, in which they were considered disposable, they chose to see themselves as members of the divinely constructed body of Christ—a symbolic collectivity built on the human equality and unity promised through Christ's sacrifice.[28]

> problem at the same time that they could gesture toward the mutual interests that (theoretically) united all parts of the social whole. (8)

[27] Here, I am using the dichotomy of the sacred/profane in a general sense to denote the distinction made in Christianity between material that is seen as being infused with the divine (i.e. holy, blessed, revered) and that which is considered ordinary and mundane (i.e. not deserving of the same reverence and respect). I am aware of Giorgio Agamben's troubling of this dichotomy in *Profanations* (2007) through his positioning of profanation as a libratory act that dismantles the dogmatic illusion that there are some objects and people that are inherently more sacred than others (i.e. set apart from common use) (77). It would be a productive avenue of further exploration to bring Agamben's notion that profanation, which he argues has the power to undo the separations caused by capitalism (85-86), into my reading of these women's projects; however, given the amount of scholarly discourses already included, I am going to save Agamben for the next iteration of this project.

Within that collectivity, they, like Christ himself, could be both victims of the world and prophets of a radical new vision of community predicated not on the perfection of the body but on its vulnerability. Being able to see the individual body, in all of its suffering and brokenness, as a potential source of revelation and liberation rather than as a symbol or cause of humanity's suffering, allowed the women in this study to claim sacredness in the midst of profanation without retreating from the body.

Shifting Understandings of God

The Victorian "crisis of faith," which has historically been read as leading to the secularization of British society, is now recognized as leading to a change in the nature of faith rather than a rejection of it (Bevir 32).[29] In *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (2010), Rebecca Styler documents that change, characterizing it as a shift in emphasis from atonement to incarnation. As she explains, religion played a prominent role in political life at the beginning of the century and most believed in its power to transform economic and social struggles. But as Christianity accommodated itself to the capitalist work ethic, a diversification of social attitudes arose in response, many of which envisioned relations between the human and the divine as working

[28] See Romans 12:5: "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another."

[29] It is beyond the scope of this project to go into details about the Victorian crisis of faith; however, the textbook account of the crisis names Marx and Darwin as two of its progenitors: Marx for his radical critique of a social order that was thought to be god-given and Darwin for his evolutionary theories which implied that "the biblical accounts of creation could not literally be true" (Henderson and Sharpe 457). In fact, scientific discoveries and new socio-economic theories were only the catalysts for people to begin openly raising questions about religious authority, which had been in circulation since the time of Newton.

through individual faith and practice rather than in the workings of the state (15-16). The eighteenth-century idea of God as a rational and constitutional being, defining and upholding the laws of church and state from his position beyond temporality, was replaced by the idea of a God intimately involved in human relations (Steedman, *Master and Servant* 3). As the nineteenth century progressed, "religion became regarded as being far more integrated with the social and material sphere, and less an otherworldly compensation for it" (Styler 17). This integration meant that a God who had previously been thought of as separate from his creation because of original sin became a recognizable and vital part everyday life (Styler 17).[30]

The central doctrine that came to define the newly emerging social gospel by mid-century in Britain was that of God's incarnation in Christ; the previous emphasis on His death and its redemptive powers gave way to an emphasis on His life and teachings.[31] As a result, people began to believe that they, as individuals and a society, could effect change in the world, or, to put it in theological terms, that they could work towards building the kingdom of God on earth. Philanthropy and advocacy on behalf of the poor

[30] I use Rebecca Styler's account of this transition to a nineteenth-century embrace of the incarnational because her topic—women writing theology from a place of exclusion—is close to my own, and, therefore, she touches on many of the contextual aspects of the transition that are also necessary for understanding the women's writing in my project. The transition is also one that has been noted by Boyd Hilton in *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (1988); Gerald Parsons in "Social Control to Social Gospel: Victorian Christian Social Attitudes" (1988); Linda Woodhead in *Reinventing Christianity: Nineteenth Century Contexts* (2001); and Mark Bevir in *The Making of British Socialism* (2011).

[31] Boyd Hilton attributes this shift to the changing social climate in Britain over the century. While the 1830s and 1840s were a time when catastrophism still dominated public thought, social pessimism began to evaporate in the 1850s when the threat of revolution or death by cholera posed by the working classes was no longer as pressing ("Religion, Doctrine, Public Policy" 240).

became central to the social agendas of most mainstream denominations (Styler 16), and public policy moved towards "prevention in place of punishment" in treating social ills (Hilton, "Religion, Doctrine, Public Policy" 240). The complexity of class relations under the new agenda of philanthropic engagement will be discussed in detail in chapters to follow, but for now it is enough to say that both the middle and the working classes were impacted by the shift to a form of Christianity in which "human agency and action were granted a greater value than dogma" (Styler 18). The shaping force of faith was no longer outer religious structures but the inner moral voice, giving people permission to speak out against the system and think, feel, and act "in the name of God" in ways that would have previously been deemed heretical. This shift in religious understanding opened up a space for both women and the working classes to claim that God was working with and through them in their struggle to break free from oppression.

The last half of the nineteenth century was a time when feminism and the labour movement, which were only in their infancies in the first half of the century, grew in tandem with one another and gained enough strength to pose a legitimate threat to the established order.[32] The Christ figure was central to factions of both of these struggles as His image was refigured to lend credibility and authority to their demands. In their introduction to *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain* (2010), Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries argue that, despite the power of the Church in Victorian times, "religious discourses were not being passively received within religious institutions or in

[32] Although they grew in tandem with one another, they were not always mutually supportive as women were almost entirely excluded from the socialist movement until the end of the century. Further discussion of this issue can be found in Chapter Four.

wider culture; instead they were being constantly reinterpreted and invested with new meanings" (3). As the feminist movement gained strength, "women across denominational lines in Victorian society" began to imagine alternatives to "the strongly masculinized image of God" (Melnyk 32). While theologically conservative women created a new image of Christ by emphasizing Jesus' more "feminine" qualities to create a savior who embodied both feminine and masculine qualities, more radical visionaries offered women an escape from the stereotypical gender expectations of passivity and self-denial by imagining a fully female Christ who was not a victim but a leader, teacher, and activist (Melnyk 32). In "Cassandra," for example, Florence Nightingale calls her readers not only to imagine the possibility of a female Christ but also to become that Christ in their own lives, writing: "The next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ. But do we see one woman who looks like a female Christ? Or even a messenger to prepare our hearts and minds for her?" (53).[33] Josephine Butler also shared this sentiment, arguing that God ordained not only women but also servants and handmaids as prophets, even if society failed to recognize them as such (*Memoir* 237). She attributes their divinely inspired ability to question the established social order to their status as outsiders. After all, who is better fit than those living and labouring on the margins of society to understand the life of man crucified for his counter-cultural beliefs and to give meaning to his message?[34]

[33] It is important to note that Nightingale did not consider herself a part of the Victorian women's movement. In fact, she was notoriously critical of what she saw as "female laziness and ignorance" in the movement, and she arrogantly dismissed the "emotions and values of ordinary women" (Showalter 396). She has been retroactively claimed as a "feminist" for rejecting the gender expectations of idleness and passivity imposed by her class; however, as Elaine Showalter notes, her form of feminism had many blind spots (396).

The Christology expressed by Victorian Christian feminists is unorthodox as it focuses almost exclusively on the human life of Christ and suggests that he left his work unfinished and in need of women to complete it. They were not alone in this figuration as many in the Victorian labour movement regarded Jesus as "the first socialist" whose unfinished mission of freeing (wage) slaves, lifting up the fallen, and rising up in protest on behalf of the poor had been passed on to the modern day proletariat ("Religion, Doctrine, Public Policy," Hilton 238). The image of Jesus as a "simple-minded Galilean" who "threw up his carpentering" to stand up against the the hypocracies of his day was a popular one amongst Christian socialists (Trevor, qtd. in Harris 125). The key to salvation in their doctrine, which will be discussed further in Chapter Four, was belief in a living God dwelling in and working through individuals. This immanentist faith, with its emphasis on the equality and divinity of all, stood in direct contrast to the individualism of capitalism. It also gave those without formal theological training the right to talk about God with an authority derived from everyday experience. As Rancière explains in his argument about the rights of workers to philosophize, "Who is better suited than those who hire out their bodies day after day to give meaning to dissertations on the distinction between body and soul, time and eternity, or on the origin of humanity and its destiny?" (19). The women included in this dissertation are not theologians in the traditional sense; their writing does not concern itself with doctrine or the nature of eternal religious truths, but rather with the here-and-now and where the transcendent enters everyday life. When

[34] Rancière articulates a similar argument in his discussion of the worker-poet: "Metaphysical problems, said to be good for bishops who find their supper ready and waiting for them, are even more essential for those who set out every morning to find the work on which their evening meal will depend" (19).

ordinary experience is located at the heart of spiritual reflection, "the sacred" ceases to be a special immaterial quality attributed exclusively to holy things and becomes the potential animating force of all material reality.

Women and Faith: Where Feminist Theory Meets Theology

It is much easier to analyze the official theological and institutional structures of the Church than to begin to grapple with everyday questions of individual faith, but it is precisely within those nuances of personal experience that we will be able to see the "shape, contours, and attitudes" of women towards the God who not only motivated women but gave them the strength to question, criticize, and defy conventional interpretations of the godhead (Steedman, *Master* 5). In *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the Industrial Age* (2007), Carolyn Steedman takes a unique approach to the faith of her historical subjects by "believing" within the confines of her project that their God actually existed; she does this by concentrating on God as "a kind of phenomenon" with shaping power, rather than dismissing him as the culmination of "human wishes and desires" (5). Unlike many literary scholars, when I write about the God of my subjects, I am also writing about my own God, even if s/he takes a different form or shape. Admitting my personal investment in this project opens me up to accusations of bias, or worse, dismissal on account of what Allyson Jule and Bettina Pederson name as "the stubborn myth still circulating that one's faith undermines one's thinking and scholastics:

the idea that one cannot believe and think" (5).[35] Yet, by insisting that the personal is political, feminist critics of the past have laid the groundwork for this type of faith-based reading. Rather than clouding my vision, discovering in my research the feminist Christian mentors that I had longed for since adolescence has made me more attentive to and critical of my subjects' personal, political, and religious investments. My struggle to reconcile the two most influential discourses in my life—feminism and Christianity—has allowed me to make connections between the living faith of Victorian women and their everyday acts of resistance that have not yet been addressed by other scholars.

Broadly speaking, the two primary theoretical discourses that inform this project are feminist theory and contemporary theology. In the last couple of decades, there has been an overlap in these discourses as a feminist theology has arisen to challenge the patriarchal roots of Christianity. Contemporary feminist theology, much like that of the nineteenth-century women's movement, fosters a rebirth within the system of Christian symbolism by locating women's experience at the heart of religious life. Like the Victorian women I write about, I am not a theologian in the traditional sense, but I am on a journey to understand the relationship that is at the core of our shared faith: God—Ourselves—Others. Even though women are no longer systemically excluded from Church-sanctioned theological discussions, I believe that the most radical, transformative, and divinely ordained "theology" is still happening on the margins in the everyday lives of regular people, many of whom would not even consider themselves Christians. The

[35] To those who question how I can be a serious academic and write about faith, I respond in a same way that Lauren Berlant responds to those who question her investment in optimism in the field of queer theory. When people ask "why optimism?" with the underlying assumption that optimism is stupid she answers "well not the stupid kind" (Davis and Sarlin 8).

story of a feminist theology emerging "from below" that I tell in this dissertation is built on four primary theoretical concepts, each drawing on contemporary feminist theory and theology but connected through the lived experience of working-class women during the last half of the nineteenth century.[36] Before moving into the details of each chapter, the central terms that I have already begun to use—subjectivity, the body, incarnation, and inter-relationality—deserve some clarification.

My understanding of **subjectivity** is derived from the feminist intervention into the field of autobiographical studies during the 1990s, which drew attention to the falsity of the modern Western notion that we each possess a primary and unique individuality that can be expressed in a rational and unified way. By introducing the question of gender into a highly masculinized autobiographical tradition, feminist scholars, such as Sidonie Smith and Leigh Gilmore, claimed a space in the genre for those people whose circumstances do not allow for the illusion of mastery over life and self-narration (i.e. women, racial minorities, people with disabilities). In *Autobiographics* (1994), Leigh Gilmore proposed the idea of an autobiographical self that is not a complete subject emerging from a coherent master narrative, but a self that is constantly emerging, changing, and rewriting itself (42). The story of the female self that Gilmore tells, which has been adopted by feminist autobiographical criticism as a whole and by me in this project, is one of a self-reflexive, elusive, and highly interpellated subjectivity.

[36] "Theology from below" is the expression used by Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart in *Introducing Body Theology* (1998) to refer to theological reflection that arises from personal experience—"the concrete stuff of people's lives"—in opposition to the "lofty contemplation of an Almighty Absolute" that defines the traditional theological method (39).

The body, as the grounding place of female subjectivity, has always been a central part of feminist autobiography criticism.[37] Recently, the poststructuralist emphasis on self-construction as a discursive practice, which, as outlined above, dominated early interventions into the field, has given way to a renewed material focus on the connection between the physical body—that which we understand to be the "real" living part of ourselves—and our mental and emotional processes that we use to understand who we are. Lived experience, as feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz explains, is located midway between mind and body as the combined product of actual physical engagement with material reality and the conscious processing of that engagement (95). Critical disability studies has played a key role in reviving an embodied feminism that does not subordinate the body, in all of its anomalous forms, to the workings of the mind or soul. Susannah Mintz, who adds a theological dimension to her reading of life narratives about disability, has been particularly influential in my thinking about the unruly body's ability to, using her words, defy "pretensions of control over the flesh" as well as "notions of selfhood as separable from the messiness of physicality" ("Ordinary Vessels").

The struggle to overcome the limiting dualism of mind/soul over body/flesh is the common ground on which I bring contemporary feminist theory into conversation with Christian theology. While there has been a tendency to disparage the body as the origin of human sinfulness in many strands of Christianity, the doctrine of **incarnation**, which

[37] In a 2008 article in the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Sara Ahmed argued that, despite new materialism's claim that poststructuralism caused feminism to forget the body, the body has always been a essential part of feminist theorization: "In claiming to return to matter, we might then be losing sight of how matter matters in different ways, for different feminisms, over time . . . We should avoid establishing new terrain by clearing the ground of what has come before us" (36).

literally means "enfleshment" (OED), positions the body as the meeting place of the divine and the material. In order to redeem the world, God had to take on flesh, and in doing so he fundamentally changed the nature of human embodiment, transforming the body and its experiences into sites of divine revelation. The notion of incarnation that feminist theologians stress is not the kind that starts and ends with Jesus Christ; instead, as Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart claim, incarnation functions a "present reality in the bodiliness of all people" (*Body Theology* 43). In this way, the body becomes the site of not only personal redemption but also "redemptive interdependence" (Isherwood and Stuart 39). An incarnational politics, when embraced to its full extent, emphasizes the inter-connectedness of all human beings through an embodied and indwelling divine spirit.

Feminists working outside of a Christian framework, such as Stacey Alaimo and Leigh Gilmore, have also stressed the inter-corporeal and **inter-relational** nature of human existence as a means of moving beyond the self. Focusing on the relations, patterns, connections, and encounters in the world rather than the "content" of subjectivity, their "posthuman" approach suggests that we are constituted not through our own understanding of self but by our connections with each other and the material world.[38] At the risk of oversimplifying, the perspective on the world that they advocate is what some Christians would call a "God's eye view"—the ability to exist in the world

[38] Although posthumanism will not be discussed in detail in this dissertation, the way that posthuman scholars theorize the body "as less a vessel for carrying a stable interior identity than a porous ecosystem" connecting all of reality is a helpful way of thinking through the inter-subjective ideal at the heart of the women's writing (Gilmore, "Agency" 91). While posthumanism is not Gilmore's area of expertise, she draws on it in her most recent work to explore the relations of interdependence that shape self-narratives of chronic pain.

and see the interconnections that bind it together without resting comfortably in any one subject position. In this project, I use current feminist theorizations of the inter-relational nature of human existence to strengthen my reading of working-class women's incarnational politics as fundamentally rooted in the god-given desire for connection and interdependence.

Those who have studied Victorian working-class autobiography have noted that, more so than their middle-class counterparts, working-class people found the "most compelling sources of their identities" in community—allegiances with fellow workers, friends, family, and even employers (Carlisle 29).[39] The stories of the women in this study are interactive rather than solitary, and one could easily argue that this due to the fact that working-class women lacked the formal training necessary to construct the singular self of classic realist autobiography.[40] Their emphasis on the complex interconnections between an internal consciousness traditionally labeled "the self" and the external world of materiality shaped by what has been called "the social," however, suggests that their choice to reject the singular self in their writing was a conscious one. Choosing incarnation as the primary shaping story of their lives, the women understood what

[39] The relational nature of female identity, which was emphasized in the early years of feminist intervention as a distinguishing feature of women's autobiography, later came under scrutiny for creating rather than dissolving binary distinctions between the writing of the normative subject and all "others." Relationality was then redefined to be a central feature of all autobiography, regardless of whether or not the author consciously acknowledged it, as the individual story came to be seen as always refracted through the stories of others (familial, communal, ethnic, nation, religious) in third-wave feminism. As Judith Butler has argued, the moment one attempts to narrate the story of an "I," one enters a discursive field that demands constant self-other negotiations and adaptation to the externalities of a social world (Smith and Watson 216-217).

[40] In the introduction to *Factory Lives* (2007), Janice Carlisle describes the conventions of nineteenth-century autobiography as constructed to display "a well-educated author's ability to use language as a sophisticated means of self-expression" (27).

feminist scholars are only now coming back to as the basis for an ethics of inter-relation: the belief that there is something deeper than the multiple socially constructed identity categories that make up "the self" connecting us all and animating our material lives.

Analyzing the Autobiographical Accounts

This dissertation is divided into four chapters, each focusing on the writing of one or two women struggling to live an incarnational life in the context of their labour. Chapter One, "Josephine Butler and the Politics of Perverse Incarnation," is the only chapter devoted to the writing of a middle-class woman and functions to establish the complicated dynamic between well-intentioned middle-class reformers and the women they set out to help. Known primarily for her public life as a political advocate for Victorian prostitutes, Josephine Butler struggled in her private life to understand her own "spiritual" work in relation to the abject bodily labour of those she saw herself as serving. Unlike many of her male counterparts, she was self-reflexive about where her own story converged with those of women in the streets; however, social censure prevented her from discussing details of their labour in her writing. I argue that Butler is only able to build the illusion of a stable, respectable, and valued middle-class identity as a working woman by hiding the "indecent bodies" of those on whom her public career is built. As a result, her autobiographical writing is haunted by the shadow labour of her "fallen sisters," whose presence at the edge of her narrative raises questions about the validity of labeling some bodies as more "godly" than others. My reading emphasizes the incarnational politics at work in Butler's writing, suggesting that, perhaps unwittingly,

she puts forward a radical vision of the kingdom of God coming into being not through the selfless and benevolent work of the middle classes but through the perverse and indecent labour of the abject working-class body.

The second chapter, "On Her Knees: Hannah Cullwick's Erotic Sabbath," explores the spiritual dimension of the relationship between the most famous Victorian maid-of-all-work and her middle-class lover. While critics have written extensively on the sexual dynamics underlying their quasi-sadomasochistic relationship, Hannah Cullwick's desire to play the role of slave to her "master," Arthur Munby, has largely been detached from its origins as an expression of embodied Christian servitude. The seventeen volumes of diaries that Cullwick kept between 1854 and 1872 chronicle her commitment to lowliness and servitude as the key to salvation, raising the question: What is the line between indoctrination and desire? Cullwick's agency in choosing to remain, as she puts it, "a drudge" throughout her life plays out on the level of the body as she performs her labour in excess of middle-class expectations. My reading focuses on the labour she performed on Sundays for Munby, which included not only cleaning and scrubbing but also washing her "master's" feet. I argue that, by engaging in this form of "feetishism," Cullwick imitates both Mary Magdalene, who is rumored to have been the unclean woman who washed Christ's feet with her hair, and Christ himself, who got down on his knees and washed feet of his disciples to demonstrate the divine love of servanthood.[41] By symbolically taking on Christ's position of submission, Cullwick is not only able to

[41] I borrow the term "feetishism" from Marcella Althaus-Reid, who uses it in "Feetishism: The Scent of a Latin American Body Theology" to highlight the eroticism inherent in the act of Christ washing his disciples' feet (4). I will provide further theorization of this term in Chapter Two.

gain ritual control over her social disempowerment but also point to the artificiality of seemingly naturalized class positions. The erotic Sabbath that she creates reverses the rituals and beliefs that structure the inner workings of the middle-class household by acting out in exaggerated ways the conditions of cultural subjectivity that positions some bodies as "sovereign" and others as "subjected."

Stressing human connectedness and interrelation, Chapter Three, "Moving Beyond Charity: The Politics of Bodily Redemption," explores the question of how to redeem working-class bodies from the perspectives two different women impeded in their labour by physical disabilities. The first part of the chapter reads Jane Andrew's memoir *Recorded Mercies* (1899) as a reversal of the typical cross-class encounter by analyzing Andrew's life-long relationship with her benefactress as an experience of mutual transformation. I argue that, despite the social inequalities between them, the two women form a relational connection that moves beyond the supposedly "self-less" giving of benevolence, opening up a space for redemption to become an inter-subjective process predicated on the vulnerability of both parties. The second part of the chapter reads Ruth Wills' poem, "The Seen and the Unseen," as a response to the social position of misery and exclusion that the Victorian capitalist enterprise placed on non-productive working-class bodies. I argue that, through poetry, Wills is able to express a sense of personal wholeness outside of the economy of exchange and its cult of normalcy. Writing against cultural discourses that privileges self-sufficiency and independence, Andrew and Wills consciously resist the notion that full personhood is predicated on the strength and health of the body. In Andrew's memoir and Wills' poem, the grace of God comes through the

broken body, not from an outside source desiring to "restore" it, allowing the frail and ailing body to claim itself redeemed on its own terms.

In the final chapter of this project, "*The Labour Prophet* and Hope for a New Relationality," I draw on the writings of women from a Christian socialist newspaper, entitled *The Labour Prophet* (1892-1901), to create a political framework for the radical theologies underlying the autobiographical accounts discussed in the previous chapters. Using articles by well-known Victorian socialists, such as Fyvie Mayo and Isabella O. Ford, as well as articles by women whose biographical information has not been documented in the historical record, I will be focusing on three key components of their collective religio-political vision: 1) God as an immanent force in the world; 2) Women as revolutionaries; 3) The subversive power of incarnation and the inter-relational ethics at its core. It is my argument that the revolutionary potential of female labour put forward by the women of *The Labour Prophet* translates what was largely a personalized struggle in the autobiographical accounts of working-class women into a political framework that has the power to present a collective challenge to the structural inequalities created by modern capitalism. Connecting feminism, socialism, and Christianity, the women's writing in this chapter points to a continued need for challenges to capitalism that unify rather than divide factions. In the final pages of this dissertation, I argue that the vision of cross-class service and solidarity put forward by the women in this study can help us to dismantle the contemporary social hierarchies that are becoming increasingly entrenched even while the illusion of their eradication grows.

CHAPTER ONE ~ JOSEPHINE BUTLER AND THE POLITICS OF PERVERSE INCARNATION

> *It was a Sunday evening in hot summer weather. I had been sitting for some time at my open window to breathe more freely the sultry air, and it seemed to me that I heard a wailing cry somewhere among the trees in the twilight which was deepening into night. It was a woman's cry—a woman aspiring to heaven and dragged back to hell—and my heart was pierced with pain. I longed to leap from the window, and flee with her to some place of refuge.*
>
> —Josephine E. Butler, *An Autobiographical Memoir* (33)

The vision put forward in the above quotation from Josephine Butler's posthumously published memoir offers a momentary glimpse at the spirit that haunts the rest of her writing. The safety of Butler's position within a scene of middle-class domesticity is interrupted by "a wailing cry" coming from the darkness. It is a disembodied cry, making it difficult to tell whether it has arisen from an actual woman out alone in "deepening night," from Butler's own unconscious, or from a female spirit haunting the otherwise blissful scene. In the days before this vision, Butler had encountered a young female acrobat, in whom she had identified a desire to escape the bodily labour of circus life, but whose situation meant that her "acrobatic performances" were likely "the most innocent" of the acts that she had to perform to survive (32). The acrobatic image of Butler leaping from the window and fleeing with the crying woman not only foreshadows her future as a feminist reformer advocating for the rights of prostitutes, but also places her middle-class female body in the scandalous position of performing an audacious feat normally reserved for scantily clad trapeze artists. Literally flying in the face of the public gaze, the movement, energy, and androgyneity of the female acrobat made her virtually indistinguishable from her male counterparts in the Victorian circus (A. Smith 52-53)—a freedom from gender constraints that Butler

struggled to obtain in her own life. The story that Butler tells in her autobiographical writings is one of finding an active mission in the world while remaining within the acceptable limits of female respectability; however, moments such as this vision of flight disrupt the illusion of distance that she creates between her missional work and the bodily labour of the prostitutes she is attempting to "save." As she contemplates jumping from the window, the permeability of the boundary between the embodied (Butler's material positioning in the world) and the imagined (all other possibilities, most often represented by the bodies of others) is laid bare. While Butler informs us that her vision "passed," the nature of its impression—that strong, desperate, and dangerous desire to leap—lurks in the margins of her story, exposing an intimate connection between the bodies and desires of "respectable" women and those of their "fallen" sisters. Although Butler attempts to construct an acceptable public self through a spiritualization of her work, she, like the woman in her vision, is repeatedly pulled back from her heavenly aspirations by the repressed reality of an embodied divinity that is rooted in the messiness of material life.

Perhaps the most well-known feminist reformer of the Victorian period, Josephine Butler was famous for her leadership of the Ladies National Association (LNA), which successfully led a twenty-year campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.[42] Featured prominently in Judith Walkowitz's seminal study *Prostitution and Victorian*

[42] The Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, 1869) were introduced as legislation to stop the spread of venereal disease amongst enlisted men in garrison and port towns. The acts unfairly penalized working-class women because they gave police the power to arrest, imprison, and conduct invasive medical tests on any woman *suspected* of prostitution. Josephine Butler and the LNA opposed the legislation on the grounds that it deprived poor women of their legislative rights and sanctioned male vice. After much public campaigning and political influence, the LNA was finally successful at having the acts repealed in 1886 (Walkowitz 1-3).

Society (1980) and, more recently, in Nina Attwood's *The Prostitute's Body* (2011), Butler's impact on the lives of Victorian prostitutes through her fight to have the unfair legislation that gave police the power to arrest, imprison, and conduct invasive medical tests on women suspected of selling their bodies has been well documented. The part of the story that has not been told is the impact that the sex workers had on Butler and her self-formation as a middle-class woman working in the public sphere. During the campaign, Butler wrote and spoke extensively about what she deemed to be a collective sin that had been individualized and projected onto women. Given the structures and attitudes of their society, these women were left with no other choice but to sell their bodies for survival. She became a prominent public figure for doing this work, which she saw as "the work" God had chosen for her. This was a mission that, in her life as well as in her writing, she imbued with deep spiritual significance. In her public writing, Butler defines herself entirely through her work; she is the one who must "go out into the streets and cry aloud" against the iniquity brought upon the prostitutes or her "heart will break" (*Memoir* 93).[43] The public self that she constructs was modeled upon the great male reformers of history, who wrote grand narratives of victories fought and won for God, leaving little room for the losses, destitutions, and mixed feelings that also informed her work. Butler's exclusions include those aspects of the story that she felt "she may not tell" (Jordan 24), namely the details of the lives of the prostitutes, and others that she

[43] The memoir that I will be referring to most often in this chapter is the one compiled after Butler's death by George and Lucy Johnson, who used extracts of her writing to create a linear autobiographical account of her life entitled *Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir* (1909). When referencing this memoir, I will cite it as "*Memoir*." Butler also published a memoir during her lifetime, entitled *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (1896), which, because it deals specifically with the campaign, is more about the movement than about Butler herself.

could not tell—those moments of private spiritual crisis that bled into her work but resisted narration. Using Butler's unpublished spiritual diary (1856-1865) as a lens through which to read her public vocation, this chapter connects the two exclusions in her story through their haunting presence as ghosts of a shared yet separate history of gender oppression.[44] As a middle-class woman, Butler was only able to create and tell the story of a public self doing God's work in the world by erasing the bodily labour of the prostitutes from the story and, in turn, by hiding the presence of her own body and its unruly affective reactions from public view. Yet, what is repressed is never fully gone, and the bodies remain within the story as shadows that draw Butler, almost against her will, to question the validity of elevating middle-class female labour to the status of the divine through a denial of the body while demonizing working-class labour for the way that it renders materiality inescapable for the female body. Whether Butler could see it or not, these shadows were portending a feminist theology yet to come in which the bodies of both middle- and working-class women would be seen as sites of divine incarnation not because they rise above the material but because they live within it.

The predominant version of philanthropy that dominated the Victorian mentality was one in which the distinctions between giver and receiver were morally charged. While the middle- or upper- class giver was ideologically positioned as virtuous, humble, and righteous, the working-class recipient of charity was often portrayed as morally as

[44] Here, I am drawing on Avery Gordon's theorization of haunting and the appearance of "ghosts" as one way in which "abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with … or when their oppressive nature is denied …" (xvi). Drawing on Gordon's argument that what is repressed is never fully gone, I will explore the disruptive force of unresolved gender oppression in Butler's life in more detail as the chapter progresses.

well as financially impoverished.[45] The relationship of benevolence, particularly between women, was one in which virtue was meant to spread from the top down; however, for women working publicly with prostitutes, there was a perceived threat that the influence could spread in the opposite direction. Even though Butler cultivated close relationships with "fallen women," many of whom she invited to live in her home, she carefully guarded against accusations of moral contamination by arguing that God himself led her work. However, the certainty of her conviction in her missional calling—and the stable, reasonable, and convincing public persona she built on this basis—loses its coherence when her private spiritual diary is brought into conversation with her public writing. Written in the years before she discovered her calling, the diary documents Butler's struggle to reconcile her commitment to cultivating an intimate spiritual connection with God, on the one hand, and her commitment to engaging in the world, on the other. For Butler, this struggle went beyond the typical Victorian preoccupation with the public/private divide to encompass questions about the limits of an incarnational theology: If Christians are called to an embodied spiritual life, what are the challenges of bodily-being-in-the-world? If our ability to be partakers of the divine nature is dependent on material engagement, at what point does the body become overvalued? What makes some forms of bodily existence sacred and others profane? This chapter extends these questions to the story that Butler tells about her "great crusade," arguing that the spiritual crisis she experienced while grappling with her own material relationships bleeds into and structures her public narrative of reform. Reading her publicly constructed persona in

[45] I further critique the power structures involved in this relationship in Chapter Three. See pgs. 139-142.

light of the relational struggles described in her diary reveals the disavowed and profaned bodily labour of prostitutes as a concealed structuring principle of a story seemingly wiped clean of the dirtier aspects of incarnational living. The inter-subjective and inter-corporeal nature of incarnation that Butler explores in her diary not only makes visible the influence of the prostitutes' bodily labour on Butler's self-formation, but also suggests that this expansive vision of community is more in keeping with a Christian vision of sociality than the purifying influence that was meant to define the cross-class relationship.

Spiritual Crisis as Defining Mission

When Butler reemerged as a figure of interest in the late twentieth century, her progressive writings on prostitution and the sexual double standard were read through the lens of second-wave feminism. For many feminists of the 1980s and 1990s, Christianity was seen as irredeemably patriarchal, and Butler's evangelical faith was therefore read as an aside to her social and political motivations. In *Victorian Feminists* (1992), Barbara Caine describes Butler's upbringing in the household of an Anglican father and Moravian mother as "deeply religious" but in a "non-sectarian" way which reflected a concern for "states of feeling rather than with a particular doctrine" (159). The radical egalitarianism and political activism that she adopted in her adult life were seen as the by-products of this liberal upbringing, in which Butler was exposed to the values of tolerance and justice through her father's work with the abolitionist movement, rather than the central tenents of a faith rooted in social transformation. Over the last decade, the critical tendency to divorce Butler's feminism from her faith has subsided, and many more productive

treatments of her religious leanings have emerged. These interpretations use such diverse lenses as nineteenth-century Christian socialism (Milbank), Evangelicalism (Mathers), the prophetic tradition (Flamming), medieval mysticism (Neal), contemporary liberation theology (Styler), and a generalized "spiritual womanhood" (Daggers).[46]

In many ways, the difficulty of placing Butler squarely within a specific denomination has left her beliefs open to the type of theological critiques that she experienced during her lifetime. However, for the sake of contextualizing her spiritual worldview, Butler's beliefs can be seen as most in line with those of nineteenth-century liberal Evangelicals.[47] As Helen Mathers points out, the cornerstones of Evangelicalism—individual piety, activism (the need to do some "work" for Christ), and personal connection with God through prayer, biblical study, and vision—are the defining characteristics of Butler's faith, especially as it is expressed in her spiritual diary (286). The mystical experiences she recounts, which have been cited as evidence of her non-denominational faith, fit within the evangelical tradition as the natural outcome of an emphasis on deep individual holiness and active engagement with the divine (Mathers 286). In the opening lines of her diary, Butler describes an "encounter" that she had with Jesus through the reading of Scripture, but immediately expresses reservation about the public reception of her private spiritual experience, writing "I could not bear to tell this to anyone in whom there was not sympathy" ("Private Thoughts," Feb. 1856). Her hesitancy

[46] See Jenny Dagger and Diana Neal's edited collection, *Sex, Gender, and Religion: Josephine Butler Revisited* (2006), for a sample of these diverse interpretations.

[47] Butler only ever called herself "Protestant" and, as Mathers notes, "within Protestantism she was notably ecumenical . . . [and] had friends of every type of Christian persuasion" (287).

seems to arise out of a fear of appearing too "enthusiastic"—an accusation leveled particularly at women whose evangelicalism was seen as relying too heavily on passion untempered by reason. Comparing the highly reasoned, complete, and convincing arguments of her public writing to the disjointed, emotion-filled, and uncertain entries of her diary, it is no surprise that Butler expressly stated before her death that her private writings should not be published.[48] The self that comes through in her diary is fragmented and in some places literally unintelligible, standing in direct contrast to the unitary self she so carefully constructs publicly. Despite being often required to subordinate feeling in order to gain respect in a man's world, Butler was a woman of passion and it was precisely within the incoherence of an affectively driven spiritual crisis that her mission took shape.

It is obvious from the outset of Butler's diary that her spiritual malaise is rooted in the tension between individual piety and social engagement.[49] The first entry, dated February 1856, extols the virtues of an inward looking faith, locating the source of all external strength in the inner workings of the soul. As she recounts receiving a comforting vision of Christ, who caused "precious words of scripture" to infuse her being during a moment of quiet prayer, Butler laments her own "shallowness of spirit" in the

[48] In the preface to the autobiography edited by Johnson & Johnson, published three years after Butler's death in 1903, the editors state that they have not included any of Butler's private writings because "it was her strongly expressed wish that these should not be published" (v).

[49] All quotations from Butler's spiritual diary in this chapter are copied from the original manuscript, which is housed in the Northumberland County Archives in Ashington, Northumberland. My sincerest thanks to the archivists there for providing me access and assistance.

past as well as the general lack in "depth and strength" that she identifies in fellow Christians ("Private Thoughts," Feb. 1856). Criticizing her contemporaries, she writes:

> Depth is much needed in our day. Most of us suffer from living too much in public—from want of solitude. Social Christianity is developed at the expense of deep individual holiness, and therefore its foundation is not very firmly rooted… I think we cannot better serve our age than by seeking for ourselves depth and strength of holiness. ("Private Thoughts," Feb. 1856)

The distinction that Butler makes between "social Christianity" and "deep individual holiness" is on the surface a distinction between public and private; however, in the way that she frames the problem, it is also a distinction between the activities of the body and those of the soul. The people who practice social Christianity "serve the age" by living out Christian values in society (feeding the poor, taking care of orphans, sharing financial resources, advocating change, etc.), but their actions are rooted in a human desire to appear outwardly pious rather than a godly desire to follow the divine will as it is revealed through prayer, scripture, and solitude. Her call for Christians to begin looking inwards is not a call to abandon outward action, but to re-examine its source. She uses the analogy of an underground spring, which turns all of the grass around it green even in the midst of drought, to illustrate the importance of Christians cultivating their own "hidden fountains within" ("Private Thoughts," Feb. 1856).

The result of Butler's turning inwards was not an escape from the world, as she seemed to be expecting, but rather a nagging feeling that she must engage more with it. As she turns to examine her own soul in the next entry, she realizes that, in excessive

introspection, there is also the risk of failing to live out "the fullness of the Godhead *bodily*" ("Private Thoughts," July 1856). Contemplating the love that God had for his Son, an embodiment of His love for the world, Butler senses that she is being covered in a "garment of light" that not only brings together body and soul, but also unites her whole being with the external world. She recounts the revelation as follows:

> Oh that blessed "in Christ." "Ye in me. I in you. And the Father in us." Such is the high and mysterious union which was to me this morning a fact, a truth, so wonderful, to all forwarding, that it seemed as if sky & trees and flowers & sunshine were all changed, & that instead of sky, trees, flower & sunshine, they were all Love, Love, Love, Love! ("Private Thoughts", July 1856)

At the heart of Butler's revelation are the words spoken by Jesus in John 14:20, "One day you will know that I am in my Father, you in me, and I in you," as words of reassurance to his disciples that, although he will soon be killed, his divine spirit will continue to live on and manifest itself on earth through his followers. The mystery of the oneness of God with humanity through Christ's incarnation is something that even the disciples, who witnessed Jesus' miracles and heard his teachings, had difficulty understanding. But, for a moment, Butler experiences clarity, grasping without hesitation that she is connected not only to God through Christ but also to the rest of material reality, so much so that she is capable of transforming it. As the sky, trees, flowers, and sunshine are transformed into Love in her vision, the question of how to transform reality in a concrete way continues to linger. Butler closes the entry with a prayer for fuller knowledge of her "place and position" in relation to God *and* the world —a prayer that would not be answered until

almost ten years later when, at the age of forty, after much struggle, she entered the public stage.

The tension that Butler experienced on a personal level in the 1850s reflected larger tensions in Victorian society over where the individual, particularly the middle-class individual, stood in relation to the rest of society both morally and ethically. In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Matthew Arnold identified a similar lack of spiritual depth in the social engagement of Victorians, arguing that the "passion for doing good" he saw in many of his fellow citizens was fueled by a preconceived and institutionalized notion of the will of God and an overhasty desire to act rather than a genuine attempt to understand one's own positioning in relation to God and others (8-9). He saw religion as constituting a stumbling block for the individual because it forced individuals to pursue excellence through only the narrowly defined avenues of tradition and ingrained ideology (10-11). The desire to improve, or as Arnold puts it "the impulse towards perfection" (12), was the *modus operandi* of the middle classes for much of the nineteenth century, and the impulse was towards both individual and social improvement. Yet, as Andrew Miller explains in *The Burdens of Perfection* (2008), moral perfectionism, particularly amongst nonconformists, was driven by a desire to follow the example of Christ in mind, body, and spirit; "walking as Christ walked" was seen as just as important as engaging in the daily devotional practices that would allow one to develop the "clean mind" and "pure heart" of Christ because perfection was seen as something that could not be obtained in

isolation (3).[50] What is unique about Miller's approach to Victorian social relations is that he highlights the productive work of moral perfectionism, reading it as an impulse that connects an individual to others rather than as a uniquely self-serving and individualistic desire. He positions "individual transfiguration" as arising out of a morally-driven desire to "come to terms with", to "comprehend", to "respond to", and to "engage with" the "bare presence of others" (3-4).[51] This view reinforces Arnold's revaluation of moral striving as a messy and always incomplete pursuit rather than a static and ideologically prescriptive endeavour. Moreover, as Butler's private diary reveals, this vision of perfectionism functions only by the individual's being enmeshed in larger, interpersonal structures of community and sociality. Even though the vision of co-dependency that was growing amongst the middle classes remained steeped in the language of individualism, with its troubling ideological connections to capitalism, the newly emerging sense of the individual and community as mutually constitutive represented a move towards a more progressive view of the self in relations to others.

In order for an inter-subjective ideal to take hold amongst Victorians, the idea of body and soul being separate had to be overcome. For Butler, that overcoming took the form of a series of mystical experiences, which will be detailed later in this chapter. For

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[50] Miller quotes John Wesley's definition of spiritual perfection: "one in whom is the mind which was in Christ and who so walketh as Christ also whom is no occasion of stumbling, and who accordingly does not commit sin" (3).

[51] The same inter-subjective encounters the Miller identifies at the heart of moral perfectionism, Lauren Goodlad reads as the ideal fueling many Victorian middle-class philanthropic endeavours. Without denying that reality often fell short of the ideal, Goodlad identifies an openness in middle-class reformers to being shaped by working-class people, who, within a symbolic framework that privileges character and conduct over class (at least theoretically) present the possibility of being moral equals (45).

now, it is enough to say that these experiences led her back to the original miracle of the incarnation: Christ was a man with a divine soul and a human body whose identity as a saviour depended equally on both. In order for a soul to live, even the soul of God, it had to become a part of the world as, what theorist Elizabeth Grosz describes in another context, an "experiencing, suffering, passionate being" (5). As Grosz argues in *Volatile Bodies* (1994), even though we think it is possible to "stand back from the body" and develop an independent psychic life, our very existence is dependent on our "being-in-the-world"—a state that is "always necessarily embodied, corporeally constituted, [and] located in and as the subject's incarnation" (Grosz 86, 95). While Grosz's materialism eschews notions of the divine, her analysis of embodied subjectivity usefully reinforces the interpersonal dimension of Butler's struggles. What Butler was doing on an unconscious level while trying to reconcile individual holiness and social engagement was attempting to bring the material part of being, including her own body, the bodies of others, and the matter of the world, back into harmony with the immaterial part of being—the soul and its affective connections with the divine.

Although Butler's spiritual malaise was partially due to an internalization of a conflicted middle-class morality, it also had to do with the unease she felt over the gender norms that enclosed women in the private sphere. The challenge of reconciling the body with the soul was more difficult for women than it was for men because of their positioning in Victorian ideology as either wholly spiritual (the blessed angel in the

house) or wholly material (the loose, fallen woman).[52] The middle-class woman was expected to remain within the acceptable realm of female activity, which was limited to the domestic sphere, and find peace and fulfillment in her role as spiritual guardian of her home and family (Styler 8-9). The privatization of faith did not, however, lead to any kind of real religious authority or power for the large majority of women, who, even within their own homes were expected to remain silent on issues of theology (Morgan and deVries 8). It was indeed Butler's experience that, even though her husband treated her as an intellectual equal, she felt unwelcome to comment or have an opinion in the company of other men.[53] The early entries of her diary were written while she was living in Oxford during the first years of her marriage to George Butler who was working as a lecturer at the University. We know from the biography that she wrote about her husband after his death in 1890 that this was a particularly difficult period, which Butler described as a "pleasant life" that had "a shadow side" (*Memoir* 30). In addition to missing her "large family circle" in the North of England, she also felt silenced in the male academic community that made up their primary social circle. She describes the many social gatherings that took place in their drawing room at Oxford that left her feeling discontented:

[52] It is also important to note that "the angel" most often did engage in bodily labour through the maintenance of the household, but her labour was overwritten by the rhetoric of moral influence. See Elizabeth Langland's *Nobody's Angels* (1995) and Karen Chase and Michael Levinson's *The Spectacle of Intimacy* (2000).

[53] Butler later addressed this silencing head on in a pamphlet entitled "Woman's Work and Woman's Culture" (1869), in which she brazenly dismisses St. Paul's injunction against women preaching, writing, "A greater than St. Paul is here; but we seem to have forgotten it . . . His teaching was for all time; much of St. Paul's was for a given time" (59-61).

> There was much talk, sometimes serious and weighty, sometimes light, interesting, critical, witty and brilliant, ranging over many subjects. It was then that I sat silent, the only woman in the company, and listened, sometimes with a sore heart; for these men would speak of things which I had already revolved deeply in my own mind, things of which I was convinced, which I knew, though I had no dialects at command with which to defend their truth. (*Memoir* 30)[54]

Although Butler feels unwelcome to participate in the conversations of the learned men in her living room because she lacks formal training in the art of argumentation, she makes it clear that her thinking was equal to, and sometimes even surpassed, that of her guests on certain topics.[55] In particular, she had difficulty remaining silent on issues of women's rights. On two separate occasions, she brought to the attention of the "wisest" and most "esteemed" intellectuals at Oxford the cases of women who had been legally and morally wronged by men, and both times they "advocated silence and inaction" (*Memoir* 31). It was at this point that Butler began to realize that the "great wall of prejudice" that she encountered in her drawing room was connected to the more widespread gender-based violence inflicted on poor women. With this reality in mind, Butler and her husband

[54] Here, Butler's use of the word "dialects" suggests that formal argumentation skills are not the only issue, but that the men inhabit what was in effect a religious "culture" of their own complete with its own specialized languages or "dialects." The exclusion she experiences in this regard highlights the truly subversive nature of her eventual venture into the realm of the theological.

[55] In her later years, particularly in her most famous treatise "The Education and Employment of Women," Butler was critical of the lack of formal education for women from middle-class families. Her own education consisted of attending a school in Newcastle for two years and then being educated in a rudimentary way by her mother who would assemble the girls daily "for the reading aloud of some solid book and a kind of examination following the reading" (*Memoir* 12-13). It is this lack of formal training that made Butler hesitant to speak in the company of the men at Oxford; however, she was a self-taught prolific reader and writer, whose intellect likely surpassed those of the men she felt silenced by.

welcomed a woman who had been wrongfully accused of murdering her baby to live with them as their servant—the first of many "unhappy women of a humble class" to cross their threshold in the ensuing years (*Memoir* 32). The small act of transgression did not, however, prevent Butler from feeling ill at ease about the silence she was forced into, but she took comfort in knowing that Jesus would have been on the side of women in the fight for equality. Reading the Bible with her husband one evening after his colleagues and students had gone home, she found within it a call to revolution:

> Compared with the accepted axioms of the day, and indeed of centuries past, in regard to certain vital questions, the sayings and actions of Jesus were, we confessed to one another, revolutionary . . . We prayed together that a holy revolution might come about, and that the Kingdom of God might be established on earth. (*Memoir* 35)

It seemed unlikely to Butler that the revolution would come about in the "highly-educated, masculine world" of Oxford, so she primarily "held her peace" while there by "speaking little with men, but much with God" (*Memoir* 33).

The diary entry from December of 1856, written at the end of her fourth year in Oxford, reflects a turning point in Butler's approach to the masculine, academic world that she inhabited. No longer at peace with remaining silent, Butler was rendered physically ill for most of the year 1856. Although in her public memoir she blames her failed health on the "cold and damp" caused by the "winter floods which so often surrounded Oxford" (*Memoir* 36), her spiritual diary identifies the source of her malady as spiritual unrest. Nowhere is the disavowed connection between body and spirit more

evident than in this section of Butler's diary as her unrealized desire to be active in the world manifests as weakness in the body. She describes her circumstances as follows: "I am in a great measure unable to walk, combating daily with infirmities & languor, with child, & virtually disabled from physical effort" ("Private Thoughts," Dec. 1856). Physical ailment in this passage is directly linked to the realm of feeling through the inclusion of "languor"—used to connote either tiredness/fatigue in the body or mental weariness, suffering, or distress (OED)—as one of her symptoms. Without directly naming it as such, Butler pushes her illness further into the realm of the psychosomatic by describing the unabated sense of "guilt," "unease," and "uncertainty" that accompanied her physical symptoms, which she attributes to not being able to "do enough for God" ("Private Thoughts," Dec. 1856). In this way, her body acts as both a symptom of the spiritual and social ills that prevents her from pursuing "active work" and as a site of revelation through the material witness it provides to the normally hidden psychic violence of gender oppression.

It seems particularly significant that it is her pregnant body—typically a symbol of passive, domestic femininity (i.e. the woman as selfless, life-giving vessel)—that becomes the locus of rebellion against her forced idleness and silence.[56] The acceptable activities during her convalescence, namely personal "study, thought, and writing" on

[56] There is a lot more that could be said about the connection between Butler's pregnancy and her spiritual crisis, particularly since, in this part of her journal, she seems to be experiencing the type of monstrous, threatening, and impure embodiment that is normally associated with the prostitutes she will go on to help. An extensive discussion of the connection between pregnancy, motherhood, and Butler's lager malaise will be worked into the next iteration of this project. For now, please see Margrit Shildrick's *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* for an insightful reading of the pregnant female body as monstrous—a vision that provides the hidden supplement to the patriarchal construction of an idealized, "passive" pregnant body.

"holy subjects" and "fervent prayer and meditation," which were meant to bring peace to both mind and body, only caused Butler more discomfort as they brought to the fore "certain callings and intuitions" that she could not quite grasp but knew she was neglecting ("Private Thoughts," Dec. 1856). The tone of whole diary entry is one of pleading as Butler repeatedly begs God to "show [her]" how to "serve [Him]" by bringing her calling clearly into focus, but she continued to suffer for "want of self-defining work" until the late 1860s ("Private Thoughts", Dec. 1856). This suffering, which violently breaks through the false dichotomy of body and spirit, forces Butler to confront the inequalities perpetuated by and against her sex as a simultaneously material and moral issue.

There is some debate amongst critics over whether or not Josephine Butler can be considered a mystic, but there is no doubt that many of the experiences she recounts in her spiritual diary fit squarely in the category of mystical, particularly during the early years of the 1860s.[57] This period, which I am reading as an experience of the dark night of the soul, is not a well-documented period of Butler's life, and her diary only contains two entries from the first four years of the decade. The posthumously published memoir notes that in 1857 the Butler family moved to Cheltenham where George took up a position as a schoolmaster until 1865 (*Memoir* 44). Although Butler describes her life in Cheltenham as much improved because of an "improved climate" and "cessation of material difficulties and anxieties," an entry from 1862 (exact date unwritten) documents

[57] For details of the debate over Butler's "authenticity" as a mystic, please see Diane Neal's "Josephine Butler: Flirting with the Catholic Other" in *Sex, Gender, and Religion: Josephine Butler Revisited* (2006).

the internal suffering that she continued to experience. The entry, entitled "Spiritual Night," stands out because of the uncharacteristically large, penciled, and erratic handwriting that makes up its three pages.[58] The content of the entry confirms what was obvious from its form: Butler was in a distressed mental state when she wrote it. The exact cause of her distress is not mentioned, nor is it possible to discern based on her other writings, but it is clear that once again her pain is manifesting both spiritually and bodily. The tone of her earlier entry is amplified as she begs God to relieve her not only of the blasphemous feelings that overwhelm her heart but also of the sickness in her body that causes her to covet death. Because of the extremity of this entry I am quoting it in its entirety:

> Ah! Dear Lord, I do not cry, nor curse, nor reproach thee tonight. I crawl to thy feet in abject terror & fear. My mouth is dry, & my tongue cleaves to the roof of it with fear. I am faint & I have no words to pray. Dear Lord, dear Lord, dear Lord, take me up. Fold me in thy arm - clap me to thy breast - as a mother her affrighted child. Oh! Dear Lord, I am sick & faint - I could not read the Bible to my children tonight. I was sick & trembling with fear, a great cloud is gathering. A fearful thought, impossible to solve is come to me. Anger, fear, dismay have filled my heart - I see behind their rebellion, unbelief, & wild blasphemy against God, coming out to seize me - & to drive me to open curse Lord. Thou alone canst hold me, & keep me from open sin from this desperate act // "Sin is the law of the world. The devil its master. God an indifferent [word unclear]." Lord, I am

[58] The rest of the entries in Butler's diary are writing in dark black ink, and the handwriting is neat and small.

> blasphemous yet not willingly – I echo these words only - Oh! Dear Lord, if I could lean on thy human breast, & feel the touch of thy loving hand, & ask thee questions & hear Thy voice, then this terror would flee - might I not go to thee? Take my loved ones, & be my Covenant God, & keep them for me, & then slay me. Take me soon . . . Lord, shall I do it? Hold back my hand. Dear Lord, grant me a little oblivion. Put me out of pain. If I take opiates, thou knowest it is terror which drives me to seek oblivion in them – but that will not cure - Dear Lord, I fly to Thy arms. Hold me fast. Lock me up. Sooth my shattered ~~spirit~~ brain. ("Private Thoughts" 1862)

The emotions described in this entry—fear, terror, anger, dismay, unbelief—are all characteristics of a mystical state that the sixteenth century Saint John of the Cross named the "dark night of the soul." For Saint John and many of the mystics who came after him, the "dark night" symbolized a purification process that pushed the soul to the limits of human experience and understanding in order to draw it nearer to God (Rakoczy 200). As Butler recounts, the "dark night" is experienced as an absence of God in which the subject is forced to let go of the comforts provided by the belief in a loving, protective, and parental divinity. In the midst of Butler's suffering, her repeated cries for protection go unheeded, and, in the moment when she seems to need God's comfort the most, she is instead possessed by blasphemous thoughts and a longing to commit suicide. In the mystical tradition, the subject was meant to endure the "dark night" with perseverance

and move forward through the pain in order to move into the light (Rakoczy 203).[59] Butler's desire to escape suffering only pushes her further into it; her desperation culminates into a crisis point in which killing the body or numbing the senses are the only solutions she can see to her internal anguish. The entry ends abruptly at the highest point of desperation with the final words "shattered spirit" crossed out and replaced with the words "shattered brain" in a sentence imploring God for comfort. This correction, which is the only one in the entry, suggests that, while it was very clear she was in crisis, Butler did not exactly know where to locate the origins of her "shattering." The brain, most often used in nineteenth century discourse in connection with the practice of phrenology, was seen as an organ of the body that housed and shaped the mind (van Wyhe, Victorian Web).[60] The spirit, although often connected to the mind, was not seen as being the product of a specific organ of the body, but rather as a separate entity that lived in the body but did not belong to it. By replacing the word spirit with brain, Butler reflects a desire to see her crisis as a break in rational thinking that has not entirely crushed her spirit; however, the account the entry gives does not allow for the workings of the mind to be separate from those of the soul. The mind, spirit, and body are one and the same in

[59] Susannah Mintz's counter-cultural reading of pain as a heuristic site that interrupts and disrupts habitual ways of being in the world provides another way of understanding the generative potential of Butler's dark night of the soul. In *Hurt and Pain* (2013), Mintz explains that "pain is bound up with knowing, in part because it often instigates crises in belief, but also because intense experiences of it can force us to question what we think we know about our bodies, our status in the world, and our relations to others" (4).

[60] For an insightful reading of the ways in which madness and physiognomy were discussed in tandem during the nineteenth century, see Elizabeth Donaldson's "The Corpus of the Madwoman: Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Embodiment and Mental Illness" from the *National Women's Studies Association* journal 14.3 (2002).

Butler's "dark night" and, within the confines of the entry, they remain shattered without a sense of when/if the move back towards wholeness and light will happen.

One of the reasons that critics have been hesitant to label Butler a mystic is because she is remembered as being so heavily invested in the social and the mystical experience is often thought of as being too personal to be political. This assumption is rooted in the misconception that the mystical experience is the end in and of itself rather than the beginning of a transformation that has both personal and collective implications.[61] In particular, the dark night of the soul, because it disrupts all preconceptions about the relationship between God and the world, can act as the birthplace of new ways of being and new modes of understanding. In *Face of the Deep* (2003), Catherine Keller challenges the belief that "the deep"—the dark, chaotic, disordered, nothingness that we see as the opposite of all that is good and ordered in the world—is something to be feared and instead positions it as something to be embraced as the origin of all creation (xv-xvii). She argues that God's forming the world out of primal chaos was just one part of the endless process of becoming that is generated from the deep, and suggests that in "ceasing to fight" and letting the "undertow draw us toward the depths" we will begin to unblock the areas of unknowing that prevent us from growing towards greater unity (xvi). In our futile attempts to erase the chaos of creation, we tend to project "darkness" is onto others, but when faced with our own shadowy origins in a space beyond human understanding that does not allow for rationalization, we have no

[61] The experiences of many of the medieval mystics, including John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Catherine of Siena, led them into the political life where they used their experiences of God to push for reform in the church and society (Rakoczy 192-194).

choice but to face our own position amidst—"not below or above or beyond"—the messy and uncertain web of human relations (xx).

For Butler, the dark night of the soul extended beyond the distressing evening in 1862, and, although she gradually began to see the light, she remained in what could be called luminous darkness until 1865. This period, which was shaped by the death of her only daughter in 1864, was a time in which light and dark were no longer opposites but mutually constitutive forces. In Butler's public memoir, the weight of her sorrow over her daughter's sudden drowning is tempered by an emphasis on the peace she felt knowing her daughter was in heaven. She describes the moment of her daughter's death as if it were a thing of beauty: "Her face, as she lay in death, wore a look of sweet, calm surprise, as if she said, 'Now I see God'" (*Memoir* 52). The calmness that she identifies in her daughter's face is also the calmness with which she approaches mourning. The final entries in her spiritual diary from the year 1865 contain none of the erratic and hurried writing of her earlier entry, and the only mention of her daughter's death is one line that states: "August 1864 was Eva's death." The striking thing about this one line is that, like the entry detailing Butler's dark night, it is written in pencil and stands in stark contrast to the neatly penned entries that surround it. Written in the top left-hand corner in tiny print, the five words serve as a reminder of the presence of darkness even as the words she writes in the entry following it detail her movement from darkness to light:

> Long, long drought. Long drought. Long drought in my soul. Long drought on the earth. How sweet is the sound of abundance of rain. I spread my sails quickly to catch this gale of the spirit . . . Today I stood before the Lord. He granted me an

> audience. He had in his hands the petitions I desired of him. ("Private Thoughts," March 1865)

What distinguishes the experience of darkness that Butler felt in 1862 and the one she describes exiting in this passage is that, in the experience brought on by her daughter's death, she felt as if God was present and responding to her petitions rather than abandoning her in a completely shattered state. God did not, however, restore her to what she would have seen as complete wholeness before the difficult early years of the 1860s, but rather brought her to a new way of being in which her own personal brokenness connected her to those around her. In her memoir she describes the sorrow that she felt after the death of her daughter as giving her "a new direction" in her "life and interests" (*Memoir* 52). In an attempt to work out her own misery, she began visiting women in the workhouses of Liverpool, where she and her family had moved after Eva's death, and worked alongside paupers and prisoners who spent their days picking oakum just to have a place to sleep at night. Although she entered the workhouse with "no plan for helping others," she left with a clear sense that she was meant to work to improve the conditions of the "unhappy girls" she befriended there (*Memoir* 58-59). Her mission to help poor women began to take shape in this period as a means of keeping "the ebb and flow of sorrow" at bay (*Memoir* 59), but as it came into sharper focus she found the bodily and spiritual distress that she had been feeling for many years prior to finding this "active work" lessened.[62]

[62] Butler continued to suffer physical and nervous breakdowns throughout her life, but, by her own account, the ones in the early 1860s were the most severe (Walkowitz 116).

Women and the Politics of Philanthropic Work

Philanthropy was one of few socially acceptable means for middle- and upper-class women to claim a space for themselves in the working world during the nineteenth century. As F.K. Prochaska explains in his foundational text *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (1980), "Whether casual or institutional, charitable work was relatively free from the restraints and prejudices associated with women in paid employment" (6). One of the reasons for this was that the qualities that were thought to be useful in effecting social improvement were those attributed to middle-class women: faithfulness, compassion, self-denial, and adherence to moral codes. The discourse surrounding women's philanthropy was that of extending the virtues of home to the chaotic world outside of the home (Prochaska 6-7). In turn, those outside spaces provided women with the chance to move beyond the prevailing gender norms of their class. By mid-century, it had become common practice for men and women of the upper and middle classes to enter into working-class spaces to act as first-hand witnesses to how the poor lived. Although "slumming it" was for some in polite society a form of evening entertainment or dark tourism, many others were fueled by good intentions, even if the outcomes of their efforts often solidified rather than dismantled the distinctions of class (Koven 1). In *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (2006), Seth Koven argues that slum reformers and rescue workers were neither "saints" nor "hypocrites" as some studies have made them out to be, but rather people caught up in the "altogether messier mingling of good intentions and blinkered prejudices" that made up cross-class relations in the nineteenth century (3).

Butler was one of those reformers; her position in relation to the prostitutes on whose behalf she worked was messy. She was different than many of her counterparts in the slums because she was consciously aware of her own personal investment in entering the workhouses of Liverpool, admitting to herself and others that she was trying to work through her own pain. Nonetheless, Butler's account of how she came to be a social reformer follows the same narrative pattern as other middle-class reformers, positioning the prostitute as the "other" that powerfully laid claim to her heart and forced her to drastically change her life. In her memoir, she describes being so moved by the plight of the women in the oakum sheds that she began inviting "friendless girls" into her home, many of whom were "incurably ill" prostitutes who died in her care (*Memoir* 61-63). From there, she opened two official rescue houses and, spurred on by her newfound vocation, became involved in the feminist campaign for the removal of the legal and customary restrictions on women's employment (Walkowitz 116-117).[63] By the time that she was asked to lead the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1869, Butler already had enough first-hand experience of the impact of the legislation on the lives of prostitutes to have a personal investment in the cause, and she had already established a public platform through her work on employment and education reform (Walkowitz 118). Over the course of the campaign, Butler strengthened her public platform by publishing several addresses, articles, and pamphlets on the topic of the sexual double standard and the constitutional inequalities of the CD Acts (Attwood 15). Her approach to the

[63] It was during this time that she published her famous pamphlet, *The Education and Employment of Women* (1868) as well as her first collection of essays, *Women's Work and Women's Culture* (1869).

prostitutes on whose behalf she advocated was less hierarchal than many other social reformers of the time, yet her writings reflect a similar moralistic desire to "scrub society clean" (Koven 185).[64] In fact, it could be argued that, although she shifted the blame for prostitution from the prostitutes to society itself, she was more invested in the project of purification than many of her contemporaries. While male and female slummers alike expressed an "abhorrence and fascination with dirt" describing it in great detail in their writings (Koven 184), Butler's writing is entirely devoid of dirt—so much so, that the details of the close relationships she formed with poor working women remained concealed in the background of her public story. Although she used the tropes of "motherhood" and "sisterhood" to describe the relationship between the repealers and the prostitutes during the campaign, the familial terms were employed in a highly spiritualized way to denote a female solidarity on a political and ethical rather than personal level.

Butler's deployment of the theme of "spiritual womanhood" to legitimate middle-class women's intervention into the issue of prostitution was more than just a rhetorical strategy; she truly believed that women were called to a God-given role as spiritual and moral guardians, but she also believed that the guardianship should extend beyond the home (Attwood 76). In order for middle-class women to step beyond the domestic, especially when dealing with what Butler called the more "indelicate" aspects of an

[64] I say that Butler was less hierarchical in her approach because she did not keep the same amount of distance from the prostitutes as her fellow reformers. While it was not uncommon for middle-class women to engage in "rescue work," they usually did so by going into already established rescue homes. When Butler began her work with "fallen" and "friendless" women, she did so by inviting them into her own home—a far more scandalous thing for a middle-class woman to do.

already "delicate subject," she suggested they use the same strategy they would when confronted with dirt in their home—get rid of it quickly! (qtd. in Attwood 76). In an article from 1870 in *Shield*, a weekly circular published by the anti-CD Acts Association, Butler argued that women "should treat [prostitution] as a dung heap, if found upon the drawing-room carpet, and unless they removed it quickly they would not be the British housewives one would wish to see" (qtd. in Attwood 76). The language of containing and combatting that Butler uses in this passage suggests that a primary motivating factor behind middle-class women's involvement in the fight against the CD Acts was to wipe out the threat posed to the domestic sphere by deviant forms of femininity and sexuality. In Butler's writing, it is clear that the ideal and hoped for outcome of engaging in the work of "reclaiming" fallen sisters *was* the total eradication of prostitution, which was seen as a moral and social danger; however, it was not as easy or straightforward of a process as a purified version of the narrative makes it out to be. After all, you can pick the dung heap off the carpet, but the stain will remain and continue to stink long after the offensive object has been removed from view.

It was Butler's desire to have respect as a public figure that acted as the impetus for erasing the messiness of cross-class relations from her writing. Even if she had desired it, a total rejection of the ideologies of her class would have only worked against her goal of having the CD Acts repealed because those who were most invested in those ideologies held all of the power. Instead, she maintained an investment in gender and class distinctions but worked at manipulating the fundamental values at their core (Attwood 74). For example, in her pamphlet *Women's Work and Women's Culture* (1869), written

in the same year she become leader of the LNA, she argued for a unification, rather than a dismantling, of gendered forms of philanthropy. After a few years of devoting herself to "rescue work," Butler became critical of the feminization of philanthropy, suggesting that middle-class women were merely "palliating" instead of "uprooting national evils" by providing a safe space for "fallen women" without addressing the systematic prejudices that forced them into prostitution in the first place (*Women's Work* 25). She was also critical of what she saw as the masculine approach to philanthropy—legislating change without providing material support and compassion. Instead, she advocated a balanced approach to philanthropy that combined the "feminine" and "masculine" forms of philanthropy:

> We have had the experience of what we may call the feminine form of philanthropy, the independent individual ministering, of too medieval a type to suit the present day. It has failed. We are now about the try the masculine form of philanthropy, large and comprehensive measures, organizations and systems planned by men and sanctioned by parliament. This will also fail… Why should we not try at last a union of the principles which are equally true? (44)

In order to unite these two genders of philanthropy, Butler suggests that women must step outside of the comfort of their "pleasant drawing-rooms" for more than just short jaunts into the dark streets and workhouses and begin entering the political arena (25-26). The "large and comprehensive measures" that Butler saw as unfairly penalizing poor women had been sanctioned by an all-male parliament, and she speculates about what would happen if "intelligent and educated women" were invited to participate in the legislative

process (26). Butler believed that if middle-class women genuinely worked to break down class barriers by not only venturing into spaces of poverty but also bringing their concerns to parliament they would "bring more light and hope into this dark portion of the world's history than has ever yet been brought to it" (25-26).

The use of the symbolic language of light and darkness in Butler's feminist vision of women penetrating the all-male space of parliament not only gestures back to her own time in darkness before finding active work, but also aligns the oppression of the Victorian prostitutes with that of black slaves in the Atlantic world. Butler's use of the imperial understanding of benevolence as a paternalistic act of bringing light to those who are supposedly incapable of escaping their own "darkness" follows the strategy of the abolitionists from earlier in the century who used colonial rhetoric to call into question, rather than support, slavery. Butler was one of the first reformers of the Victorian period to refer to prostitution as "white slavery" in the early years of the campaign against the CD acts, writing, "The first timid, imperfect recognition by mankind of a portion of the heavenly law decreed the extinction of the slavery of colour; a fuller, higher comprehension of its divine justice has decreed the extinction of the slavery of sex" ("Personal Reminiscences" 153). The metaphor of white slavery was an effective tool in anti-regulation rhetoric because, as Mary Ann Irwin explains, "it organized a number of nameless fears into a unitary moral framework" and mobilized support on the basis of an "evil" that was already almost universally accepted as wrong by mid-century (2). The abolitionist movement of early nineteenth century, of which Butler's father had been a major figure, had already established the slave as a blameless victim of a corrupt

economic system, and Butler's campaign capitalized on that association to argue for the prostitute as an equally sympathetic victim of social forces beyond her control (Irwin 2). Like the abolitionist movement, Butler's reform movement was mobilized on the basis of a progressive Christian vision of a more equal society that came into conflict with older, hegemonic Christian ideologies that gave white men all of the power. The violence she saw as being inflicted through the act of slavery was not just physical and social, but also spiritual. In a diary entry from April 18th 1865, Butler prays for Christ to come "free the slaves" from not only their physical captivity but also from a false understanding of God acquired from their masters:

> I long to have a hundred voices, that with all of them I might pray without ceasing that Christ will come quickly and deliver for ever the poor groaning world: the slaves from all their woes, the victims also and slaves of lust in our own land, the poor women who are driven as sheep to the slaughter into the slave Market of London . . . My children, you care for the woes of slaves, for what they have suffered for 400 years. They have been subjected to every bodily suffering and far worse than that, they have been driven to reject Jesus because he was their Master's God. That is to say their Masters professed to be Christians through all their cruelty and tyranny, and so the faith of the poor negroes was shaken and destroyed. ("Private Thoughts," April 1865)

This passage brings together the three elements of an incarnational theology: the material world, the body, and spirit; however, the unification of spirit and flesh that Butler describes in her vision of an enslaved humanity is not one of bringing God into the world

but of violently severing Him from those who need Him most. The material world, as Butler describes it, is personified as "poor" and "groaning" under the weight of the bodily suffering of its enslaved inhabitants. She situates the suffering of the slaves in the liminal space between materiality and immateriality through metaphoric language: the African slave is left with a faith that is "shaken and destroyed" because he was subject to "every bodily suffering" and the prostitute is described as a "sheep" being "led to slaughter" by the "lust in our land." The embodied form that Christianity takes in a world that condones slavery is positioned as a perversion of God's original intention in taking bodily form. In this nightmarish vision, the "Master" who claims to the agent of God is "cruel and tyrannical" and breeds suffering instead of bringing peace.[65] Butler locates the origins of this perverse incarnation in the profession of a faith that is not lived out through action. In underlining the word "professed," which has both the everyday meaning of "declaring something" and the spiritual meaning of "taking a religious vow" (OED), Butler emphasizes the problems that arise when a faith declared does not match up with a person's engagement in the material world. In the world of the African slave whose master is a tyrannical "Christian," a professed God has taken the place of a living God, leaving no space for the divine to enter the world. Butler suggests not only that this state of affairs is wrong, but also that it does not have to be the same for the prostitutes in Britain; if middle-class women are able to both profess *and* embody Christ, there is potential for God to grow in the material. Her philanthropic goal was to subvert the white

[65] For black female slaves, tyrannical masters literally did "breed" suffering by using them as objects of rampant sexual and reproductive exploitation. For more on this history, see Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds* (2006).

male colonizer as the figure of God's will in the world and replace it with the figure of the benevolent middle-class woman, whose political interests were driven by a desire to live out Christian values to relieve instead of further encumber an already overburdened world.

The cry that Butler puts forward in her vision of an enslaved world for "Christ to come quickly" is deceiving in its emphasis on a time yet-to-come because most of Butler's theology emphasizes the salvation that is available immediately through a Christ who has already been here. Although she acknowledges the need for further deliverance, her whole philanthropic venture is based on the belief that in acting as Christ acted humans can build the "kingdom of God" here on earth. Butler believed that Christian commitment was meant to be lived in the here and now, and was critical of the otherworldliness of conservative Christian theology (Styler 126). In an address delivered at Croydon in 1871, Butler defines faith as a commitment to transforming the world:

> We need a vast and deep renewal of *faith*, vital faith. The word *faith* has come to mean far too much among us a belief in the doctrines of Christianity. The faith I speak of is much more than that. It is a hope, a confident expectation that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of God and His Christ. For lack of this faith we do not, and cannot succeed; and discouraged by the little we have already done, we imagine that little *can be done*; we continue to call *that* common and unclean which God is able and ready to cleanse. (qtd. in Styler 151)

The interesting thing about Butler's assertion that this world *can* and *should* be transformed through an active human faith is that she positions the materiality of the

world as the medium through which the transformation will happen. Instead of seeing what is "common and unclean" as completely outside of God's purview, she suggests a revisioning in order to see it as the material out of which a new world can be brought into being. In other words, instead of seeing the broken bodies of those enslaved in the world as a threat to the purity and goodness of an idealized vision of Christianity, she positions them as the necessary darkness out of which light will be born. Despite Butler's conservative erasure of the prostitute's experience from her official story, her positioning of the groaning world as the birthplace of Christ coming again opens the story to a reading that sees the kingdom of God being created out of the fornication of abject flesh rather than a pure virgin birth. After all, if spiritual meaning and purpose can be found in Butler's distortion of traditional male public self in order to claim a place for women doing God's work on the political stage, is it not also possible that the work of God can be found in the "perverse" labour of the prostitutes?

The Perversion of Un/Godly Labour

In Butler's writing, work is organized into three categories and, although she does not explicitly rank them, they are positioned hierarchically according to their spiritual value. The first and most important is *God's work*, which Butler writes about as the constant labouring of an unseen force that is working in the hearts and minds of human beings, compelling Christians not only to seek goodness but also to build a society based on justice and equality. The second category, which is intimately connected with the first, is *the work that humans do as part of God's work*. This is the category in which Butler

places her own labour, writing about her work on the campaign as "the work of God" (*Memoir* 207). The third category, which sits in opposition to the first two, is the *human labour that is not part of God's work*—material labour that distances humans from the divine. In this hierarchy of work, the prostitute's labour fits into the lowest position in the lowest category. As a figure of perverse morality reduced to purely material value through the act of selling her body, the prostitute was seen as a commodified object devoid of spirit. Part of Butler's mission, as she understood it, was to re-animate the prostitute's supposedly dead body in the Victorian imagination, and the process of doing so required a questioning of what it meant to be "perverse."

In *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (1910), a retrospective memoir of the campaign against the CD Acts, Butler quotes the speech of a French politician who questions with whom the "perversion" of prostitution lies, saying "[Yes], the prostitute is invariably as morally perverse as you say she is . . . [but] I ask . . . what is your part in the matter?" (119). This rhetorical strategy, which Butler uses throughout her writing, extends the taint of prostitution beyond the prostitute through the language of perversion with its connotations of being "wicked, evil, and debased" (OED). There is also, however, a less moralizing connotation to the word "perverse," which simply suggests that something is "contrary to an accepted standard of practice" (OED). In the final pages of *Personal Reminiscences*, Butler celebrates this form of perversion—the "turning aside" from what is presumed to be a "correct course of action" (OED)—in lines of encouragement written to repealers working throughout Europe. The three lines of verse, which are separated from the rest of the words on the page through indentation, position

Butler's own labour clearly in the realm of the perverse: "Let this be all our care / To stand approved in sight of God, though worlds / Judge us perverse" (244). It turns out that perversity on earth is a matter of human judgment, and God can approve of certain actions and attitudes that others may misinterpret or misunderstand. By encouraging "perversity" in her fellow workers, Butler calls into question the validity of a hierarchy of labour based on conventional social values. At the same time that she establishes a clear line between her own work and that of the prostitutes, she undermines it by questioning which forms of labour are "rightfully" deemed outside of God's blessing and those that are simply misunderstood because they are contrary to established norms.

It is significant that Butler does not place the sexual labour of prostitutes into the category of "the devil's work" as many of her contemporaries had done, but instead resists such an easy abdication of responsibility by presenting it as part of a dehumanizing system of social relations. As Rebecca Styler explains in *Literary Theology by Women Writers* (2010), it was not exclusively gender inequality that Butler was protesting in her campaign, but also the exploitative relationships caused by the "materialism" of Victorian society. Reading Butler through a Marxist framework, Styler argues that Butler saw her work as "a great spiritual battle" to overturn an "entire ideology which commodifies the human being" (138-139). The "alienation" that Butler identifies at the heart of prostitution is the alienation of the worker from her essence, which, within the Christian framework is her spiritual connection with God. Butler's strategy in fighting the alienation of sexual labour was to push the prostitute upwards on the hierarchy of work by making her into a figure of redeemable fallenness. When Butler does mention the

prostitute in her writing, it is in an attempt to gain public support by making an admittedly large systemic problem into a manageable figure whose transformation can be complete or at least imagined as completable. Unfortunately, in attempting to re-animate commodified flesh, Butler inadvertently reinforces such alienation by pushing the body out of view and replacing it with a wholly spiritualized and completely de-sexualized version of acceptable femininity. In her posthumously published memoir, Butler tells the story of Marion, the first of many sick prostitutes to come live in the Butler home and to experience a spiritual conversion there. The version of Marion's story that Butler tells is formulaic in its portrayal of a young woman who, "untaught" and "unacquainted with the Scriptures," had fallen victim to male lust only to be later saved by a benevolent Christian who recognized within her a "seeking look" and introduced her to the gospel (*Memoir* 64). Following the pattern of the conversion narrative perfectly—confession, conversion, redemption, and sanctification—Marion's story is shamelessly didactic in its insistence that the fallen can, and should, be "reclaimed."[66]

In the story of conversion that Butler tells, Marion not only becomes a Christian in the three months leading up to her death, but also becomes saint-like in her understanding of the divine. Describing one priest's encounter with Marion in the days before her death, Butler writes:

> A well-known divine came to visit us, and hearing of our poor invalid, kindly offered to see and converse with her… When he joined us again downstairs [after

[66] As Jane Jordan points out in "Josephine Butler's Biographical Sketches of Prostitutes," the conversion narrative has a long history, but it became especially popular in the nineteenth century during the evangelical revival (27).

> visiting Marion] his face was radiant, and he spoke, not of any teaching or comfort which he might have conveyed to her, but of the help and privilege it was to himself to have held communion during a short half hour with a dying saint, so young, yet so enlightened, and so near to God. (*Memoir* 65-66)

In this scene of deathbed enlightenment, the roles are reversed as the priest becomes student to the repentant sinner; however, this is only made possible through an omission that Butler makes in her account of Marion's life. In telling Marion's story to the holy man, Butler admits that she said "nothing of Marion's past life" because, she explains, "saintly man though he was, he probably had not faith enough to do justice to her and to himself in the interview if he had this knowledge" (*Memoir* 65). Approaching the reader in much the same way as she approaches the holy man, Butler omits the details of Marion's life prior to the moment of her repentance from the narrative even while alluding to them indirectly through the discourse of "reclamation." This suppression of the female subject's worldly experience was typical of the genre of the conversion narrative and, as Jordan points out in "Josephine Butler's Biographical Sketches of Prostitutes," it was a strategy employed throughout her writing to "persuade" her readership of the "approachability of outcast women and the practical efficacy of rescue work" (26). In series of five short sketches published in the *Methodist Protest* (January-May 1877), Butler recounted the tales of five fallen women, including that of Marion, and each of them followed the same formula, ending with a professed conversion and

acceptance of death (Jordan 28).[67] The death of the repentant prostitute at the end of these stories acts is meant to erase the bodily evidence of the prostitute's labour. The baseness of the prostitute's mortally ill body, most often overcome by a disease brought on by her labour, is transformed through Butler's words into a disembodied vision of saintliness.[68] The absence of the prostitute's labour in Butler's writing is at its core an absence of the body. Butler reclaims the prostitute's soul, but only at the expense of erasing her body from the narrative of Christian incarnation—a narrative that by its very nature requires both body and spirit.

In Butler's *Personal Reminiscences,* everything about the prostitute before she was "reclaimed," including not only her sexual liaisons but also her relationships and connections outside of her labour, is placed on the dark side of the dichotomies that structure the narrative of middle-class "rescue." She is described as being "fallen" (91, 119, 135), "lost" (85-86), and "friendless" (iv, 159, 172), with the details of those states omitted, so that the focus is on her restoration to a state of "respectability," "morality," and "purity" (85-86). In part, what Butler was doing in omitting the prostitute's sexual past, was attempting to treat so-called fallen women with respect and dignity, but, instead of sidelining just the scandalous aspects of their pasts, she effectively erased *all* of who

[67] The first two of the sketches were originally published under the title "The Dark Side of English Life" in *Torch; a journal of literature, science and the arts* in April 1868; they were republished in *Methodist Protest* in 1877 with three additional sketches. They now only available in the archives at the *Women's Library* in London. I am indebted to Jane Jordan for her reading of these sketches.

[68] The "redemptive death" was a typical nineteenth-century plot device used to quell the threat of bodies that risk destroying the middle-class illusion of female "purity." The prostitute could only become the heroine after her corrupting body was killed. See Lynda Nead's *The Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (1988).

they were before they fit into a middle-class norms of appropriate femininity. The use of the language of "fallenness" and the accompanying story of seduction, betrayal, and victimization at the hands of an immoral man that structured the fictionalized past of the repentant prostitute served to neutralize the threat posed by a working-class figure whose moral, sexual, and economic values did not conform to middle-class standards. Although she used the rhetoric of an "all-encompassing female solidarity," Butler was disdainful of women who refused to be "reclaimed," some of whom were not only resigned to their trade but also proud of it (Attwood 82). In her campaign, she made distinctions between "those who were innocent feminine victims and those who were active agents in their own moral degradation" as well between "the old depraved and hardened prostitute and the tender lately-seduced woman or the poor little child who has never known a decent home" (Attwood 80, 82). The difference between the "innocent" and the "hardened" prostitute was her agency in the matter: even if she was innocent when she first entered the trade, if she refused to be reclaimed and continued to work consciously at selling her body for money, she was considered too far outside of the scope of middle-class sympathy and, as a result, labeled "depraved." While the reclaimed prostitutes only make an appearance in Butler's text in their sanitized forms, those who refused to be reclaimed do not make an appearance at all, raising the question: Who were these women? And, how can Butler justify her criticism of their refusal to be reclaimed when she herself also refused to be reclaimed by middle-class notions of proper femininity?

The Haunting Power of Commodified Bodies

The answer to the above question is that, in the context of Butler's story, the prostitutes who refuse reclamation are the absent figures on whom the whole narrative is built, and Butler's own claim of agency is only possible through a denial of the validity of their labour. In order to explain how the disavowed bodily labour of prostitutes acts as the concealed structuring principle of Butler's story, I turn to Gerald Prince's classic work of literary theory *Narrative as Theme* (1992), in which he makes a distinction between the "unnarratable" and the "disnarrated." While the unnarratable encompasses "everything that according to a given narrative cannot be narrated" because it "transgresses a law (social, authorial, generic, or formal)," the disnarrated encompasses "all the events that do not happen though they could have and are nonetheless referred to by the narrative text" (28-30). The absent presence of the prostitute's labour in Butler's text fits squarely within the bounds of both of these categories; it is unnarratable because it does not fit into the gender and class norms of Victorian society, but it is also disnarrated in the sense that it hints at the multiple ways that the narrative could have gone but did not. So far, I have discussed primarily the unnarratable aspects of Butler's relationships with the prostitutes, but the disnarrated is also of interest because it has a significant impact on how we understand "a narrator, her narratee, and their relationship" by opening up an alternative of "choices not made, roads not taken, [and] possibilities not actualized" (Prince 35).

In the context of Butler's story, the "un-reclaimed" prostitute who refused to leave what Butler understood to be the darkness of fallenness raises questions about what would have happened if Butler had lingered a little longer in her own darkness. From the

entries in her diary, it seemed as if death would have been Butler's only escape, and that is certainly what she predicts for the unrepentant prostitute, but there is also a hint of a type of bottomless freedom that exists in the darkness. At the same time that she calls out for deliverance from God, Butler also asks for freedom from the suffering she is experiencing through "oblivion" ("Private Thoughts" 1862). The desire to be lost in the depths of darkness to the point of being "unaware or unconscious" (OED) is essentially a desire to be free of the power, control, and possession required in the subject position she occupies. In the mystical tradition, the darkness acts as a type of "third space"—the "in-between of the divine and the world"—that undoes any certainties we use to order the world, including those that we use to distinguish ourselves from others (Keller 211, 230). Butler's move out of darkness through her rescue work after the death of her daughter represented a move back towards order and certainty. As she "reclaimed" prostitutes, she was also able to reclaim a solid, singular, and unitary self through an erasure of the chaos that had provided the original space of recognition of her inter-subjective connection with "fallen" women. The "un-reclaimed" prostitute, therefore, serves as a reminder of the infinite layers of intersubjectivity and by extension, to use the language of Catherine Keller, the infinite layers of possibility inherent in a "relationality of intertwining (or folding together) rather than cutting edges" (231). The unwritten laws of Victorian social and literary conventions dictated that many of the edges of Butler's tale had to be cut off, particularly those regarding the sexual liaisons between prostitutes and their clients but also those that revealed the extent of the spiritual/material liaisons between prostitutes and middle-class women. But the hints of the disnarrated possibilities that arise out of the

erasures in the story allow us to detect ambivalences in Butler's self-portrait that destabilize her apparent devaluation of the sexualized working woman.

Let us return for a moment to the scene that opened this chapter of Butler sitting in the window of her home in Oxford having a vision of an "un-reclaimed" woman crying out during the night. The setting of the vision is particularly important as Butler emphasizes that it took place at a moment when "twilight was deepening into night" and the "hot summer weather" was making the air feel "sultry" (*Memoir* 33). The sense of confinement created by the humidity in connection with darkness is suddenly interrupted by "a woman's cry" that comes through the open window into the space of Butler's home (33). The cry is immediately interpreted by Butler as the cry of oppression, or, as she describes it, the cry of a woman "aspiring to heaven but dragged back to hell" (33). What happens in the next moment, however, contradicts the certainty with which she interprets the women's cry as one of total despair. Although she tells us that her longing to leap from the window and flee with the woman arises out of a desire to help her find "some place of refuge," we already know from what Butler has told us about the woman's situation that she will never likely be able to escape the conditions that force her into prostitution (*Memoir* 32-33). Butler is, therefore, leaping into an unknown darkness out which there is possibly no escape. Instead of feeling oppressive, the tone of the passage changes from hot confinement to the cool freedom of flight after Butler imagines leaping. She emphasizes the landscape outside of her window, describing the "slight summer breeze" rustling through the "tall trees" that now contain a "whisper of the future" (33). The voice, originally interpreted as a cry from hell, takes on new meaning as she hears

within it "a note not wholly of despair" (*Memoir* 33). What she describes here is not a moment of divine illumination in which light comes from outside and penetrates/eliminates the darkness, but a moment when a small amount of light emerges *from* the deep. For a moment, Butler ceases to be the righteous bearer of God's light and becomes the receiver of it through the voice crying out in the darkness. The roles are reversed as the "un-reclaimed" woman lays claim to Butler and compels her, even if just imaginatively, to step into the darkness, where she experiences a different type of light—one that is not the enemy of darkness but its co-creator in the quest for freedom.

Even though Butler's vision is disembodied in the sense that she does not actually leap from the window, the freedom that she experiences is very much conceptualized as a bodily freedom. There are very few moments in Butler's narrative in which we even catch a glimpse of any type of female corporeality. As Sidonie Smith has argued, until recently, women writers had to "write out of their bodies or write off their bodies in order to gain an audience" ("Identity's Body" 272). This latter constraint was certainly the case for Butler, who not only wrote off the prostitute's body but also figuratively covered her own body with religious piety and social propriety in order to gain legitimacy in the public sphere. This attempt to "neutralize the body," however, only served to ensure that the body remained present, albeit in a hidden form, within the text. As Smith further explains:

> Autobiographical practice, then, is one of those cultural occasions when the history of the body intersects with the deployment of female subjectivity as the woman writer struggles with multivalent embodiment. And so some kind of

> history of the body is always inscribed in women's autobiographical texts—muted or loud, mimetically recapitulative or subversive. (271)

The history of the body that is written into Butler's text is, furthermore, a classed history in which the bodies of middle-class women are valued above those of working-class women because of their status as pure, respectable, and moral.[69] The "perverse" body of the prostitute is erased so that the spiritualized body of the middle-class woman can enter the public sphere. Although Butler's body makes no real appearance in the text, it is able to move into new spaces (both narratively and physically) because the threat of bodily exposure posed by the prostitute's presence in the story has been eliminated. The prostitute's eradicated body, therefore, becomes the very ground upon which Butler's narrative of her "great crusade" against the CD Acts, and by extension her self-formation as a public figure, is written. The vision of her leaping from the window provides an essential counter-narrative to this official story because it positions the "perverse" body *alongside* the middle-class body in the quest for freedom. As we imagine Butler running alongside the prostitute through the dark night, the two women become indistinguishable, and the body that exists in the darkness outside of the confines of middle-class norms becomes the means of their mutual escape. The vision is fleeting—enduring only a couple of minutes—but Butler tells us it had a lasting impression, remaining with her throughout her life (*Memoir* 33). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the woman living in darkness,

[69] Butler experienced both verbal and physical threats because she spoke publicly about the plight of prostitutes, but, because of her class status, she was shielded and protected from any real abuse. In one city, she was secretly ushered from her hotel to a safe house to avoid an angry mob that had formed in the streets (*Memoir* 102). Her ability to "hide" (i.e. shield her body from view) when under threat was a privilege that working-class women, especially prostitutes, did not have.

who represents both Butler *and* the unrepentant prostitute, haunts her official autobiography with the possibility that true freedom exists in a total rejection of dominant ideologies of gender and class, especially those that write off the body and the possibilities of a new type of inter-subjective incarnation offered by its perversions.

In Avery Gordon's seminal text, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), Gordon writes about "ghosts"—those specters of "repressed and unresolved social violence" that make appearances when "the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained"—as figures that transcend time (xvi). Haunting, she suggests, is one way that we are being notified that "what's been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed towards us" (xvi). As we move into Chapter Two, the haunting power of the disavowed working-class body will become more overt and explicit as the "ghostly specter" is given a voice through the diaries of a Victorian maid-of-all-work. Hannah Cullwick's diaries tell the story that is only hinted at through the absences in Butler's tale of not only a repressed female body but also of a potentially radical theology that privileges sexual corporeality as a site of spiritual rebirth. While Butler's autobiographical writings remain safely within the realm of Victorian decency by making claims about middle-class women working in the public sphere but avoiding the indecent act of poor women selling their bodies, Cullwick's diaries shamelessly venture into the realm of the perverse. Writing outside of the confines of middle-class respectability, Cullwick is able to enact what contemporary feminist theologian Marcella-Althaus Reid calls an "unclothing" of theology by positioning bodies

and sexualities at the center of God's ongoing work in the world (89). Let us turn now to this next chapter to see the ghost we have been following in this chapter materialize into a figure of strong, fierce, proud, and scandalous female working-class labour.

CHAPTER TWO ~ ON HER KNEES: HANNAH CULLWICK'S EROTIC SABBATH

Instead of beginning this chapter with an epigraph, I would like to begin by evoking an image: that of Hannah Cullwick—a Victorian maid-of-all-work—posing as Mary Magdalene in a studio photograph. The photograph, taken by James Stodart in 1867 as part of a larger series of photos for middle-class barrister Arthur Munby, depicts Cullwick in full-body profile wearing nothing but a flowing white shift, tied at the waist, with one breast exposed, kneeling in a position of prayer.[70] Cullwick's strong bicep and large hands stand in direct contrast to her exposed breast and, combined with her strong jaw line, small lips, and long straggly hair, create a striking image of androgyneity. Her eyes, looking upwards toward the sky, are clear and supplicating with a hint of uncertainty. In her diary, she attributes this uncertainty to an awareness that her body does not suit the image that she is meant to be portraying. Describing that day in the studio in 1867, Cullwick writes, "[Stodart] took me in a kneeling position as if praying, with my hair down my back & looking up. The side face was good for it, but the hands was too big & coarse he said, so it wouldn't do as a picture. And so it's best for me to be done as a drudge what I am . . ." (Stanley 76).[71] Accustomed to being photographed "in her

[70] Although the copyright on Stodart's photograph of Hannah Cullwick has expired, the photograph is now owned by Trinity College, Cambridge and cannot be reproduced without their permission. For the purposes of this chapter, I will endeavour to describe the photographs I discuss in detail and provide a citation for where they can be found. A clear, full-page copy of "Hannah as Magdalene" (1864) can be found in Carol Mavor's *Pleasures Taken* (1996) on pg. 76.

[71] When quoting Hannah Cullwick's diaries from Liz Stanley's edited collection, *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant* (1984), I will cite Stanley in order to distinguish from the manuscript diaries that I will also be drawing on extensively in this chapter, which I will cite as Cullwick and include the diary entry date.

drudgery," wearing working clothes and covered in dirt from her long day of labour, this photograph represents one of Cullwick's first forays into playing a role outside of her class status for the pleasure of her middle-class beau. The erotic elements of the cross-class relationship between Cullwick and Munby, which included role-playing, gender bending, and sadomasochistic dynamics, are captured in this photo not only through Cullwick's androgyneity but also through the slave-collar that hangs around her neck. When asked to remove the "steel chain & padlock" for the photo Cullwick was forced to admit to Stodart that she'd "not got the key," to which the photographer responded, "Ah, there's some mystery about that" (Stanley 77).

The mystery of the slave-collar was revealed in 1950 when this photograph and hundreds of other pictures of working-class women were found alongside Hannah Cullwick's diaries in Munby's deed-box at Trinity College. In the last couple of decades, the erotic elements of the secret relationship between Cullwick and Munby have fascinated critics; however, as this Magdalene photograph suggests, another element of their relationship that still remains largely a mystery was their spiritual connection. Although Cullwick expresses discomfort at the pious position that she had to assume for the Magdalene photograph, she often adopted this position beside Munby during their evening prayers together. She also assumed this kneeling position on a daily basis to wash Munby's feet. It is this pose, which holds deep spiritual significance in the Christian tradition because of Christ's willingness to wash his disciples feet as a sign of servitude during the last supper, that I will be using in this chapter to open up a new way of reading Cullwick's relationship with both her labour and her middle-class lover: What does it

mean for a woman whose "hands [are] too big and coarse" to properly represent Mary Magdalene in a photograph to embody not only the repentant sinner but also Christ himself in her daily labour?

In the last chapter, I argued that Josephine Butler attempted to hide the "dirty" labour of working-class women in her autobiographical writings; Hannah Cullwick does the exact opposite in her diary by putting her own labour on display for the purposes of being seen. Keeping a diary upon Munby's request, Cullwick proudly writes about the size, strength, and endurance of her body as well as the dirtiness and difficulty of her labour. Scholars writing before Liz Stanley published her select edition of Cullwick's diaries in 1984 often dismissed Cullwick as simply Munby's "puppet," claiming that her diaries reflected only Munby's desires and contained little of Cullwick's own subjectivity. Taking a feminist approach in her introduction to the diaries, Stanley argues that Cullwick was far from being just a product of Munby's creation, but, rather, that she cultivated her own voice and even carved out a space for her own desire for freedom and fulfillment through their relationship (18-19). Compelled by the complexity of this reading, which breaks down the powerful Victorian dichotomies of master/servant, man/woman, middle/working class, and oppression/liberation, several critics have now done gendered, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and critical race readings of the relationship between Cullwick and Munby (Huff 111).[72]

[72] In the most recent article on Cullwick's diaries, "Dressing the Part: The Body in/of the Diaries of Hannah Cullwick and Arthur Munby," Cynthia Huff offers a comprehensive summary of these critical readings, which includes: Julia Swindells's "Liberating the Subject? Autobiography and 'Women's History': A Reading of *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*" (1989); Martha Dana Rust's "In the Humble Service of Her Emancipation: Hannah Cullwick's Maid-of-all-Work Diaries"

The most influential of these readings, found in Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995), reads Cullwick and Munby's relationship through the lens of sadomasochism, focusing on that way that Butler's ability to "play" both "maid and mistress," "drudge and lady," "black and white," and "woman and man" for her "master" (144-145) gave her the ability to negotiate the boundaries of power. What Cullwick was doing, according to McClintock, was entering into the visual field of representation in a way that exposed the "contradictions in the social formation of middle-class life," particularly the Victorian association between female sexuality (or, in the case of middle-class women's asexuality) and labour (77). By playing with the versatility of the body and what it signifies, Cullwick was able to subvert the middle-class gaze and thus gain a limited amount of agency through her subjection. Building on McClintock's reading of the performative and theatrical elements of the "spectacle of female labour" (100), this chapter explores the implications of touching as a way of moving past the limitations inherent in the modes of visuality that structure Cullwick and Munby's relationship. Focusing on the transgressive dimensions of cross-class touch, I will be reading Cullwick's foot washing ritual as an act of love that allows the working-class female body to be defined beyond the visual. The act of touching is inter-subjective in a way that the act of seeing or being seen is not, and, therefore, allows for an exchange between bodies that escapes a regime of representation that fixes working-class women to the realm of the

(1994); Barry Reay's *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror and Body De-formation in Victorian England* (2002); Martin A Danahay's "Male Masochism: A Model of Victorian Identity Formation" (2006).

material.[73] By washing, caressing, and kissing Munby's feet, Cullwick uses the body and its tactile interactions to infuse an everyday act of labour with spiritual meaning. This repeated act carries biblical resonances that disrupt Cullwick's servile posturing by adding a perverse surplus to the act of touching Munby's feet. Read in a biblical register, her performance levels hierarchies by emphasizing mutual corporeality and vulnerability: the working class female body is rendered divine through imitation of Christ's act of self-debasement. At the same time, this gesture purports to save Munby and Cullwick from a bourgeois alienation that attempts to arbitrarily assert the value of one kind of body over another.

In the introduction to her edited edition of Cullwick's diaries, Liz Stanley labels Cullwick a "deeply religious woman" on the basis of her adherence to the doctrine of salvation through service (16-17); however, immediately after labeling her in this way, Stanley notes that Cullwick was not religious in the conventional Victorian sense. As a servant, she would not have been able to observe the Sabbath or attend church on a regular basis—two essential components of middle-class religiosity (Stanley 16). Rather, Cullwick was obligated to work around the schedules of those for whom she laboured in order to have a fulfilling spiritual life. Although Stanley notes that "Hannah… attended

[73] My reading of the transgressive potential of touch in the Victorian era has been greatly influenced by Ann Marie Gagné's PhD thesis on the connection between tactility and inter-subjectivity in the Victorian era. In her project, entitled *Touching Bodies/Bodies Touching*, Gagné argues that, in nineteenth century discourse, the labouring female body was defined largely through the voyeuristic eye of the marketplace, and transgressive touch was a way for women to resist the objectification they experienced in a public sphere defined by the visual (2). Although I follow Gagné's lead in privileging tactility as a site of inter-subjective connection in my reading, I also recognize that other critics have attributed a similar transgressive potential to sight—a position that I will explore through Nicholas Miertzoeff's distinction between "visuality" and "the right to look" on pg. 100.

churches of all denominations, whenever possible" (17), the spiritual space that Cullwick created for herself in the midst of her life of labour is not foregrounded in the selections that Stanley includes in her edition of the diaries.[74] In order to explore Cullwick's spiritual practice and routines, I had to turn to microfiche copies of her original manuscript diaries—a daunting task when faced with all seventeen volumes of handwritten text.[75] The task was slow and painstaking until I began to see a pattern emerging: Cullwick wrote about her faith most often on Sundays.

This is an obvious pattern when considering that the little free time that servants had was often on Sunday afternoons, and Cullwick used that time both to attend church and to visit Munby. Within the privacy of Munby's home on the Sabbath, Cullwick was able to touch his body—an act considered inappropriate not only in public but also within the middle-class home where the boundaries of social space were maintained through the absence of touch. Although not an explicitly sexual touch, Cullwick's hands on Munby's feet creates an erotic charge that perverts the everyday power dynamics between masters and servants, offering Cullwick a type of forbidden tactile knowledge that she interprets as spiritual. The transgression of Cullwick's touch is that it transforms sexually explicit labour into a type of worship directed not only at Munby but also at a God who lives in and through selfless acts of intimate and vulnerable inter-corporeal connection. It is the

[74] In making her selections out of the "several thousand quarto pages" of Cullwick's diaries, Stanley chose to focus on "Cullwick's working life and relationship with Munby", which she felt were the most important aspects of the diary for Cullwick herself and best conveyed the "tone and feel of the totality" (26).

[75] Unlike the other archival research included in this thesis, I was able to read Cullwick's diaries here in Canada thanks to the University of Toronto Library, which had microfiche copies of the seventeen volumes.

erotic spark created through the intimate touching of bodies that allows both Cullwick and Munby to experience the divine love of God, whose saving power allows Cullwick to transcend the limits of time and space that structured her day as a servant in middle-class homes.

A Humble Servant

The inter-tangling of Munby and Cullwick's stories in the archive of diaries, letters, photos, and sketches that Munby left behind has meant that most readings of Cullwick have drawn from both Munby and Cullwick's diaries. In this chapter, I will be focusing exclusively on Cullwick's perspective. Since Cullwick began keeping a diary at Munby's request, critics have questioned whether we can truly gain a sense of Cullwick's perspective from her writing. There is no denying that writing itself was not seen as an act of liberation by Cullwick, who describes diary keeping as a chore that merely detracted from her work (279); however, as Liz Stanley points out in her introduction to Cullwick's diaries, this does not mean that her attitudes, understandings, and feelings were absent from the text (9). In fact, the later diaries, written when Cullwick had more privacy, move beyond simply describing the tasks of the day to reveal more about her feelings towards the relationships in her life (Munby, fellow servants, employers, family members) and the nuances of her labour. While the subjectivity found in middle-class autobiographical works by women has often been described as "relational," meaning that the self defines and creates itself in relation to others, Cullwick defines herself primarily through her relation to labour, and it is through labour that she mediates her relations with others.

The prominence of labour in Cullwick's self-definition has partly to do with her Christian worldview, which, following a hierarchical model of human relations, understood people to be born into the social category chosen by God and, as such, expected them to fulfill the duties set out for their position. For working-class women, those duties involved serving the middle and upper classes, most often in their homes as cooks, governesses, and maids. Cullwick chose to remain in the lowest position of domestic service throughout her life, believing that being a maid-of-all-work offered her the "freedom" of "true lowliness" (85). Even though the Christian notion that "the meek shall inherit the earth" served to maintain a social order that did not favour the interests of the working classes, Cullwick maintained a commitment to it that extended beyond a sense of religious duty or promise of heavenly reward. Throughout her diaries, Cullwick repeatedly and forcefully asserts that she likes labouring and thus her desire to serve others should not be read exclusively as an oppressive by-product of indoctrination. As we move through the chapter, I will be foregrounding the tension between indoctrination and desire inherent in Cullwick's self-positioning as a "humble servant": How is it possible for freedom to be found in a doctrine of service that places working-class women in a position of subservience? Where is the divine in this markedly unequal exchange?

Over the twenty-year span of her diaries, Cullwick took up over a dozen different "places" in middle-class households and always chose to work as a lower servant (scullion, kitchenmaid, and maid-of-all-work).[76] The social status and wealth of the "masters" and "mistresses" of the households varied considerably—some were

[76] Stanley provides a concise summary of these positions (often difficult to keep track of when reading Cullwick's diary) in Appendix 1 of her edited edition.

professionals, others merchants or lodging-house keepers—as did the type of work they expected from Cullwick. But the one thing that most of the households had in common was a daily routine of morning and/or evening prayer. While some servants resented prayer time, Cullwick, who most often attended Anglican churches but did not concern herself with denominational divisions, seemed to enjoy attending prayer. The most noticeable feature of Cullwick's diary is the meticulous lists of chores that she records in almost every entry; those lists, which in the early years of the diary sometimes made up whole entries, are often punctuated with the words "to prayers." An example from March 4th, 1865 reads:

> Black'd the kitchen grates - lit the fire - fill'd the boxes & shook the mats – got me wash'd & the breakfast ready – swept & dusted a flue upstairs & the kitchen – to prayers & carried breakfast up – wash'd our things—answered the door bell & got kitchen dinner - cleaned at two - swept the floor . . . (*Diaries*)

The inclusion of "to prayers" in this list of chores reminds us that Cullwick's labour is happening in relation to the schedules of those she is serving. While Morning Prayer was the first event of the day for most of the "masters" and "mistresses" of the household, servants were responsible for multiple chores before coming to prayer and were expected to return immediately to work after prayer. Depending on the household, they were also expected to be clean when attending prayer—an inconvenience for servants who spent most of their day doing dirty work. In an entry from February 1st 1872, Cullwick describes being "too dirty" to attend evening prayer: "I forgot to say how black I got last night with cleaning after the weeks & bricklayers—I didn't go to prayers, for I was too

hot, too black, & too busy, & at work till 11" (*Diaries*). It was rare that Cullwick did not attend evening prayer. Even when she visited Munby on Sunday evenings, she was sure to return home before the prayer bell rang (usually between ten and half past ten).

Critics have described evening prayer as one of the most effective instruments of social control within the Victorian household because it allowed "masters" to ensure that all women and servants were in for the evening and not out fraternizing.[77] It was also a way for employers to ensure "religious conformity within the household" (Horn 126). According to Pamela Horn in *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (2004), it was a common belief that the "head of the house" was responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of his servants as well as his family, and family prayer time ensured that servants were conforming to the denominational practices of the employer regardless of their own beliefs (126). In this way, evening prayer functioned as an instrument of what Nicholas Mirzoeff characterizes as "missionary visuality," helping a "masculine overseer" to naturalize his vision of the social order from an imagined position of heroic and virtuous leadership (475). In "The Right to Look," Mirzoeff makes a distinction between "visuality"—the exclusive claim of those in power to be the sole authority in arranging the relations of the visible—and the "right to look"—the universal and common right of those not in power to look beyond what they are told is the established order to create their own vision (473-474). On the surface, it appears as if Cullwick is unable to see beyond the social order; she expresses no resentment at having to attend evening prayer

[77] See Elizabeth Langland's "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel in PMLA" (107:2, 1992), p. 296; Leonore Davidoff's *The Best Circles: Women and Society in Victorian England* (1973), p. 36.

or be back in the home at a certain time in the evening, and even describes the bell calling them to prayer as a welcome relief at the end of long day (Cullwick, *Diaries*, Feb. 3 1865). In fact, she embraces her subservient position so fully that she forcefully and proudly insists multiple times in her diaries that she is not simply a maid but a common "drudge." On July 31st, 1864, after taking up a laborious position as the only servant at a lodging house, Cullwick rejoices in her new situation: "I have so much to thank God for in bringing me to Margate—for putting me in such a different place to what I have been before, that is giving me the opportunity of being a real maid of all work as well as a drudge" (*Diaries*). By identifying herself as both a "maid of all work *as well as* a drudge," Cullwick highlights her investment in servility. While many women engage in the everyday labour of a servant, Cullwick proudly embraces drudgery—"servile labour; wearisome toil; dull and distasteful work" (OED)—as the ultimate form of service. It is, paradoxically, this extreme investment in her position within the social order that provides her with the "right to look" and, by extension, a vision of an alternative social order in which she is the spiritual authority.

As a servant, Cullwick occupied a position of visible invisibility within the middle-class home by being an obvious presence, but one who was not meant to be acknowledged except with regards to the labour required to keep the home running. This invisibility allowed Cullwick to become acquainted with the private lives of her employers not only through the intimate familiarly she developed with their belongings through cleaning, washing and cooking but also by being the silent observing presence in the background of most gatherings (private, familial, and public) within the home. What

she observed in her employers, particularly the ladies, was a propensity towards pridefulness, which she regarded as not only a major character flaw but also as a hindrance on the path to salvation. In "Hannah's Places," a short autobiographical piece that Cullwick wrote about her working life for Munby in 1872, she fondly recalls one of the many times in her career when her own humbleness stood in direct contrast to that of the people she was serving. Recalling the drudgery of her work in the Margate lodging house, she recounts:

> … there was lots o'fresh lodgers come through the summer – [I was responsible] for carrying luggage up & down, laying carpets as the ladies wanted'em, & one proud one stood over me as I knelt & was crawling on the floor once. Instead of her showing me how with her hand she kick'd me with her foot & pointed. I dare say she thought I *sh'd* feel hurt & vex'd with her but I didn't. I was glad she thought me humble enough without kicking again. (Stanley 46)

Throughout the diaries Cullwick repeatedly emphasizes her own humbleness by comparing it to the pride of the ladies that she serves. In this instance, the "proud one" literally stands above Cullwick and kicks her, inflicting a bodily pain that is caused by direct contact between the "proud" middle-class body and that of the "humble servant." This contact between bodies reaffirms the social order, but, for Cullwick, it also subverts it through a privileging the spiritual virtue of humility rather than the worldly givens of class. Rather than feeling "hurt & vex'd," Cullwick rejoices in her own humbleness and draws attention to the cruelty and absurdity brought on by the pride of her superiors.

Subscribing to the counter-cultural logic of Christian service, which positions freedom as a release from the inner compulsion to accrue authority and power, Cullwick invests in humility as the key to salvation. As we saw with Josephine Butler, many middle- and upper-class Victorians adopted an ethic of humble service through charitable work and philanthropic ventures, but most did so in a disembodied way, avoiding the type of engagement in the material that was for working-class people an integral part of their everyday labour. Christ's proclamation that he came to earth "not to be served but to serve" (Matthew 20:28) was one that Cullwick took literally and adopted as her own motto. After taking on a position as an "upper servant" in 1867, which required her to oversee other servants, Cullwick vowed never to do it again, writing in her diary: "I was *born* to *serve*, & *not* to order" (Stanley 85). She was openly disdainful of other servants who aspired to cross class boundaries, declaring that one lady who used to be milliner before she married a gentleman would have been better off to remain in her trade because "then sh'd o' bin thought of as Miss so & so the Miller" rather than being "despised as a Missis" (Cullwick, *Diaries*, 10 Oct. 1871). From Cullwick's vantage point, the despised subject is the person who requires being served by others rather than the one who gets kicked while on her knees laying carpets for them. She felt that working-class people were in a much better position for becoming Christ-like than their superiors because they had more opportunities to humble themselves in *both* body and soul.

Ironically, Cullwick's humility becomes a source of pride as she elevates herself spiritually not only above the ladies that she serves but also her fellow servants who aspire to upward mobility. This paradoxical position becomes less contradictory when

considered alongside Christ's promise in Matthew 23:12 that "whoever exalts herself will be humbled, and whoever humbles herself will be exalted." As Christ's death on the cross attests, the exaltation that one receives after humbling oneself does not necessarily bring with it any kind of material reward. In fact, in a society that valued individual success in the public realm and familial care in private, Victorian servants often experienced more suffering than reward because the terms of their labour allowed for neither a lucrative career nor a close family life. McClintock suggests that Cullwick's extreme investment in servanthood was the symptom of a type of "deferred recognition"—the belief that her labour was a form of "spiritual capital" that held "value in heaven" (158). While it is true that Cullwick was looking forward to the heavenly rewards she would receive on account of her humility, she saw the spiritual value of her drudgery as not entirely otherworldly. The erotic Sabbath that she creates for herself on Sunday afternoons in Munby's home—and the ritual of foot washing at its core—puts her labour in a position of being not only acknowledged but also exalted as a desirable alternative to a social order based on bourgeois sight.

On Her Knees in His Sight

From the beginning of their relationship, Munby was fascinated with watching Cullwick labour and would go out of his way to see her at work in both private and public spaces. Initially, Cullwick was just another one of the many working-class women that Munby observed and documented in the 1850s and 1860s. As Barry Reay explains in *Watching Hannah* (2002), "Munby was a compulsive voyeur of working women"; he

spent most of his spare time lurking around working-class areas, such as London Bridge (a thoroughfare for young working women) and the theatre district (a zone of prostitution and trade), where he would not only watch working-class women but also follow them, sketch their likenesses, quiz them about their lives, and sometimes even "befriend" them (Reay 16-20).[78] According to Cullwick's account, this was exactly what happened when she first met Munby on the streets of London in 1854. She was on her way home, "crossing for the back street on the way to Grosvenor St.," when "a gentleman spoke to [her] & [she] answered him" and by the next year he was visiting her regularly and they had begun to establish the rituals that would define their relationship (Stanley 40). Although he continued to pursue other working-class women as documentary subjects, Cullwick became the center of Munby's voyeuristic fantasy life because she was willing to perform multiple roles.

The dozens of photographs in Munby's collection of Cullwick "performing" various forms of labour—farming, gleaning, collecting coal, foraging for wood, selling fish, cleaning boots, washing dishes—testify to her versatility as a subject, and the staged aspect of these photographs draws attention to the theatricality of their relationship. As McClintock points out in her analysis of Munby's voyeurism, "it was not so much the actuality of female labor that captivated Munby, but the *representation* of labor; labor as spectacle, as photograph, as language, as diary, as sketch, as script, as theatrical scene" (147). The front steps of the middle-class home provided the perfect setting for a

[78] Munby's fascination with working-class women also compelled him to visit rural areas and the industrial centers of the North to document women labouring on farms as well as in mines and factories (Reay 19).

theatrical scene that did not require staging, and, as Barry Reay explains, the audience of people passing by offered Munby the dual pleasure watching Cullwick labour *and* watching her being watched by others (31). As Cullwick got down on her knees to wash the flagstones outside of employers' homes, she was also in a position to observe those watching her labour. In a photograph from 1872, she is pictured with her face turned towards the camera as she scrubs the front steps of a London home.[79] She is dressed in a cotton work dress, striped apron, and bonnet and is kneeling with her back to the viewer, giving the impression that she is looking over her shoulder at us while she works. Her large work boot, which sticks out from under her skirt, and strong arm look as solid as the flagstone that she is scrubbing, but her face hints at a slight distrust of the viewer. This public performance of the maid's normally private cleaning rituals was one that Cullwick enjoyed because it brought her out of a position of invisibility, but the thrill of putting her drudgery on display was tempered by the unease she felt at having no real control over her status as an object that is viewed by others.

While critics now almost universally read Cullwick as wholeheartedly enjoying playing the drudge, her diaries reveal moments of uncertainty and pain connected with her subservience. In one instance, after receiving no sympathy from Munby over the unfair way she was treated by a mistress, Cullwick lamented: "M. doesn't know all I have to bear [and] how hard it is to be always meek" (Stanley 165). The inner struggle that Cullwick experiences in trying to fully embody meekness at all times also comes through in the account she gives of being watched while washing the front steps. In Munby's

[79] A reproduction of this photograph can be found in Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995) as figure 3.12 on pg. 137.

diary, he recounts with enthusiasm watching two men in a "smart yellow gig" stop to look at Cullwick "kneeling in the road" washing the steps and relishes in the contrast between his own appreciative gaze and the disdainful looks of the "two swells" (qtd. in Reay 32). While also proud of her labour, even occasionally commenting to those passing by that she enjoyed being down on her knees, Cullwick describes feeling uncomfortable with always being "star'd at" with such "pity and despair" (*Diaries*, 27 April 1872). Explicitly linking her own labour to theatrical performance, Cullwick describes the coping mechanism she develops for dealing with the objectifying gaze of others:

> I hate to feel I'm being stared at. That's what I never could get used to a' cleaning the steps, & I have often felt for the ladies coming on to a stage to sing, wondering they don't blush. They say 'use is second nature' but I can only clean outside without minding who looks by being determin'd to mind just what I'm doing & *do it heartily*. (Stanley 285; emphasis mine)

Her decision to play the role of drudge more enthusiastically than expected allows her to claim a place in the spectacle of cross-class relations that is not entirely pre-determined by Victorian social conventions. By purposely blackening her face, crawling on the pavement with her reddened hands spread over the flagstone, and lowering her head as close to the ground as she could get it, Cullwick was able to shift the discomfort she felt at being watched to the viewer, who, although accustomed to seeing a maid at work, would not have been used to seeing one embrace abjectness so fully. Even her fellow servants were uncomfortable with the extremity of her subservience, suggesting that some

of the tasks she did "on her knees" could be assigned to a charwoman.[80] This was a proposal that she rejected, preferring to exercise the little agency that was available to her by playing the role in excess of the part she was assigned. Although she had no choice but to be on display while cleaning the steps, entering into the performance was a choice that she made consciously as a strategy to, using McClintock's words, "gain ritual control over her own very real social disempowerment" (159).

The limited amount of agency available to working-class women within the regime of Victorian visuality, which allowed for cross-class encounters as long as they maintained a clear subject/object divide, was not an issue that Cullwick contemplated consciously but one that nonetheless comes through in her diaries as a tension between power renunciation and the desire for recognition. Early in her relationship with Munby, Cullwick dreamt that she was kneeling in front of Munby as he read her a book when a "gentleman walked in" and "looked astonished to see [her] there." When she asked "Massa" what to do he told her to "lie still" and she was glad to be "laying there" under the window "like a dog" while the two gentlemen spoke (Cullwick, *Diaries*, 28 Feb. 1863). Suddenly, the gentleman in the dream could no longer see Cullwick, and Cullwick was proud that he "didn't seem to notice [her] nor hardly know [she] was a girl laying there" because she was so skilled at making herself invisible (*Diaries*, 28 Feb. 1863). Although Cullwick positions herself as the one who determines whether or not she is seen in this situation, it is the two gentlemen who actually determine what is seen, even in her own dream. Even though the visitor initially sees Cullwick and knows that it is a servant

[80] In the nineteenth century, a charwoman was a live-out, part-time maid who often worked for multiple households on an hourly wage doing the dirtiest chores.

girl lying beneath the window and not a dog, Munby uses his authority as the master of the house to present his vision of the situation as self-evident, and, buying into the same class aesthetic, the visitor has no trouble not seeing what he actually saw. The only agency that Cullwick is able to claim in this situation is that of performing the role that is expected to the extreme and, in doing so, becoming more real than the vision itself. Her ability to perform the role of drudge in a way that surpasses her master's expectations puts a type of "countervisuality" into play that renders the scene slightly uncanny.[81] As she crawled like an animal on the pavement outside of her employers' homes, the familiarity of a social order that positioned working-class woman as always on their knees becomes strange in an unsettling way. It was precisely the incongruity of violating a social code by following it too well that Munby found so pleasurable about Cullwick's performance. What Cullwick found pleasurable about the performance, beyond the way that it deflected from her discomfort, was the way that it allowed her to explore her calling to a life of total humility; however, participating in a voyeuristic scene premised solely on moving the objectifying male gaze out of the secrecy of the home and into the streets only allowed her to do so in a limited way. It was not until she was able to touch more than just the flagstones that she was fully able to transform her self-conscious performance of humility into the ethical act of becoming selfless that she truly desired. The act of washing Munby's feet allows for Cullwick to claim a subjectivity that does not

[81] Here, I am again referencing Mirzoeff, who describes countervisuality as "the performative claim of a right to look where none technically exists" (478). As he further explains, "the 'realism' of countervisuality is the means by which one tries to make sense of the unreality created by visuality's authority while at the same time proposing a real alternative" (485).

deny or renounce its own objecthood—a Christ-like position of self-creation through self-renunciation.

The Erotic Sabbath

In the Victorian home, the precarious sovereignty of the middle-class body was maintained through the temporal regulation of the threatening bodies of servants. The opportunities to inappropriately touch (for pleasure rather than as part of one's labour) the belongings or bodies of "the master" or "mistress" would have been rare in most servants' busy schedules (Mavor 108).[82] As in the Victorian industrial system, the servants' life in the domestic realm was regulated through a process that Elizabeth Freeman calls "chrononormativity": "the use of time to organize human bodies toward maximum productivity" (3). Through the "hidden rhythms" of the household, including the spiritual rhythm of daily prayer, the patterns of labour that privilege the upper classes come to be seen as natural somatic facts (Freeman 3). Cullwick's diary entries structurally mimic the rhythm of her labouring days and Sundays, therefore, stand out as anomalous. Even though the duration and form of the servant's Sabbath was very much determined by the weekly rhythms of the household, the half-day of rest (usually on Sunday afternoons) allowed servants to step outside of the constant labour that structured their daily time. In

[82] In *Pleasure's Taken* (1995), Carol Mavor provides a detailed reading of the transgressive elements of cross-class touch as mediated through the erotic dynamics between Cullwick and Munby (pgs. 106-110). She describes an incident recorded in Munby's diary where Cullwick was hesitant to heed Munby's request to put on "her mistress's ball dress" while her employers were away because she did not want to "profane the Missis's things by touching them" (qtd. in Mavor 107). As Mavor explains in her analysis of this incident, "it was taboo for Hannah to try on her mistress's black and crimson dress because her lower-class body would debase the same fabric that would later rub up against an upper-class body" (108).

the early years of Cullwick's diary, before Sunday visits with Munby became a regular event, Cullwick spent her Sabbath attending church, visiting friends and family, and time alone walking and reading the Bible. Although unique in subject matter, Cullwick's Sunday entries always ended with a return to the cycle of domestic labour, signaled by a return home for evening prayer. Often occupying the same cramped journal page as her list of Monday morning chores, her account of the servant's Sabbath positioned it as a renewal rather than rupture in the temporal rhythms of the household. The details of her Sunday entries changed, however, when she began to visit Munby on a regular basis, becoming focused on a labour rooted in the exchange of rather than the absence of touch. It was at this point that a true rupture in the temporal rhythms of the middle-class household became possible through the consensual flesh- on-flesh contact of two bodies that were not meant to touch.[83]

The unofficial cultural law against touching between the classes in the Victorian era was rooted in a fear of contamination. Valued for its productivity but feared for the marks of labour that marred its flesh, the working-class body was associated with dirt and disease. Dirt on the body—the evidence of manual labour—was threatening because of its transferability; "a dirty body threatens to render a clean body unclean through touch" (McClintock 152-153). Even between members of the middle and upper classes, touch was considered appropriate only when necessary and then highly regulated by the

[83] It is important to note that Cullwick's S/M play with Munby was *consensual*. Many other working-class women were forced to have sex with their employers, and reported cases of rape by "respectable men" of servants had a very low conviction rate. See Carolyn Conley article "Rape and Justice in Victorian England" from the journal of *Victorian Studies* (1986) for a detailed reading of the power dynamics and class politics that allowed for sexual assault to continue as part of master/servant relations.

unspoken laws of etiquette (Gagné 12). With the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s, which responded to the increase in venereal disease amongst soldiers and seamen who had contact with prostitutes, the dangers of touch became systematized and sexualized (Gagné 13). As Anne Marie Gagné argues in her doctoral dissertation, *Touching Bodies/Bodies Touching* (2011), etiquette manuals and the CD Acts came together at mid-century to insist that touch brings not only disease but also immorality (108). The most obvious solution to avoiding the physical and moral taint of bodily contact was to follow the simple rule of "don't touch," making the act of looking the more acceptable means of violating the social codes regulating cross-class relations because distance could be maintained (Gagné 14). Although Munby and Cullwick's relationship began with the voyeuristic thrill of watching, which Munby then shared with other men in the form of public spectacle, it evolved to the more intimate and risky violation of physical contact—the danger of which resided not in the potential for contamination but the potential for connection and its inevitable disruptions underlying that fear.[84]

It is unclear exactly when Cullwick began visiting Munby in his home on Sunday afternoons, but it seems to have started in 1857 (three years after they met) and continued on-and-off until their marriage in 1873. Cullwick's Sunday visits were more frequent during times when she had a "post" in London, which during the 1860s and early 70s was more often than not.[85] In the early years of Cullwick's time in London, Munby would

[84] The consensual nature of their touch made it doubly subversive because they were subverting not only the social rules that prohibited cross-class touch but also the stereotype of the middle-class man who "ruins" servants and other working-class through his unchecked desire.

often meet her at church and they would spend time together out in public. In an entry from November of 1857, Cullwick recounts one of their Sunday afternoons together during which they spent a long time chatting in a park, Munby "sitting on a little bench" and Cullwick "kneeling by him" (*Diaries*, 17 Oct. 1857). After Munby listens to Cullwick tell a few stories about her life, Cullwick recounts feeling "very much pleased with Massa" and wrote in her diary "I could always talk freely to him if I could always feel as free as I did then" (*Diaries*, 17 Oct. 1857). The freedom that she feels comes from the increasing stability of their relationship, but it was a limited freedom, particularly in the public sphere where the intimacy of their relationship had to remain a secret. Contact between their bodies in public was prohibited, and, in order to avoid suspicion, Cullwick often had to walk behind Munby and sit several pews behind him in church.[86] When Munby moved into a new home in Fig Tree Court in 1857, Cullwick began visiting him there on a regular basis, and, as Stanley explains, it was "in effect the closest to a home that she would have" until much later in her life (104).[87] Cullwick's comfort at Fig Tree Court was not, however, born out of rest. In fact, on Sunday evenings, Cullwick laboured in Munby's home as hard as she did at her place of employment. A typical Sunday evening in Fig Tree Court is summarized in the following entry from January 10th 1864:

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[85] 1861-1864 = London; March-Dec. 1864 = Margate; Dec. 1864-Dec 1866 = St. Leonards-on-Sea; Jan.-May 1867 = Margate; 1867-1872 = London.

[86] For example, Sunday, July 5th 1863, "…took the bus to London Bridge. Massa was there waiting for me – I walk'd behind till we came to St. Saviours Church . . . by the river is the only place where I can walk with Massa arm & arm" (Cullwick, *Diaries*, 5 July 1863).

[87] Cullwick moved into Fig Tree Court after their marriage in 1873, but continued to live as Munby's servant. It was not until she moved into her own cottage in Hadley in 1888, where she stopped working for other people and lived until her death in 1909, that Stanley sees her as truly having her "own home."

> Got ready to go to Massa & reached him fore 5. We had a nice evening & Massa tried my strength – I lifted him easily & held the coalbox with coals in nearly straight out with my right hand. So Massa was pleased I hadn't lost strength while he'd been away. I lick'd his boots to as well as cleaning them – got the dinner & waited on Massa & had my tea on the ___– Washed up & filled the kettle & washed Massa's feet – made cigarettes while he read to me – had a little petting & away at 9. (*Diaries*)

The normal chores Cullwick performed in various middle-class households take on new meaning when they enable physical touch that signals affective and sensual connection: lifting coal becomes a source of pleasure when Cullwick lifts Munby's body along with it; cleaning boots becomes an erotic act when there is also the opportunity to lick them; and, filling the kettle becomes a part of a fetish act when it is a precursor to ritualized foot washing. In Munby's home, Cullwick seemingly fulfills the same role as she does in her places of employment, but the pleasurable contact between bodies transforms her labour into a libidinal experience.

Eros, broadly defined, is understood to be a libidinally driven instinct, most commonly used when referring to sexual forms of love (OED). Because of its association with bodily desire and pleasure, eros is most often figured as separate, and even inimical to, the realm of the spirit in contemporary Christian discourse. Feminist theologians Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller have recently challenged this separation in their anthology *Toward a Theology of Eros* (2007) by reclaiming eros as an essential part of our divine nature, and as a vehicle for connecting with others and God. They argue that

the division of eros and agape—a divine form of love modeled on God's self-sacrificial and unconditional love for humanity—into two separate worlds was born out of the fear that eros, which is driven by human desire, would obscure and corrupt the selfless and pure love of God. However, as Cullwick's erotically charged self-sacrificial acts of labour demonstrate, eros can bring agape to a new level. As Burrus and Keller suggest in their introduction to the anthology, agape often "require[s] an overflow of eros to reopen its congested channels or, to shift metaphors, to shatter its repressive defenses" (xv). A symbiotic relationship between eros and agape is scandalous because it opens up the possibility that human love in its embodied and sexual forms is not only a vehicle of divine love but also its co-creator. Rather than being the passive receptors of a heavenly love that comes from above, humans become active agents in their own experience of divine love through the erotic.

When Cullwick and Munby engage in physical acts charged with eroticism on Sunday afternoons, they both make a choice, whether conscious or not, to be transported beyond themselves and meet in the space in-between where the distinctions between "master" and "servant" are blurred. As Burrus and Keller point out, eros encodes a longing for dissolution of the clear boundaries between the self and other (xix-xx). Reaching out and touching another or allowing oneself to be touched is risky because it means acknowledging our need for something beyond ourselves, therefore, destroying the illusion that we can be autonomous and independent subjects. Touch has the power to undo us, and its residual effects—the memory of the feeling, the fear of its loss, the hope that we will experience it again—emphasize the affective dimensions of the physical

experience (Gagné 18-19, 210-211). The spark created by the surrender of one body to the other and the intimacy of the vulnerability necessary to allow for that surrender means that eros lives not just in the body but also between bodies. Erotic touch is never purely physical because of its power to move us beyond ourselves, and it is in this space between subjects that we are able to surpass the human limitations imposed on divine love to see both the Other and God as partakers in the common desire for connection.

Since the assumed "natural rhythms" of the middle-class household in the era of industrial capitalism can only be naturalized through the cooperation of the body (Freeman 16), Cullwick and Munby's violation of the cultural taboo against cross-class touching enacts a type of temporal disorientation. The extent of this disorientation is played out in a nightmare that Munby has about his relationship with Cullwick being discovered by her employers. In the dream, "Mr. Foster" and some "ladies" catch Munby in their home, and, in an effort to explain the "the sort of love that is twixt them," Cullwick got down her knees and "lick'd Massa's boots before them all" (Cullwick, *Diaries*, 21 Feb. 1864). As Cullwick explains in her retelling of his dream, rather than rendering their love intelligible, her actions result in death: "… all at once I seemed to come down ill & they carried me upstairs to my attic & when Massa got up I was dead" (*Diaries*, 21 Feb. 1864). In Munby's dream, time, as lived out through the servant's body, is brought to its ultimate end when Cullwick touches the middle-class body to demonstrate connection, familiarity, and pleasure. In real life, the results of this connection, as it is played in the privacy of Munby's home, is not death but an increase in life; the temporal misalignment caused by their bodily transgressions leads to an opening

up of new possibilities for a community of interdependence that affirms rather than denies relationality across difference.

Feetishism, Eros, and Divine Love

The final photograph that I would like to explore in this chapter is one of the most curious in Munby's collection because it depicts Cullwick in an everyday act of labour, but the person for whom she is performing the labour is conspicuously absent from the photo. Viewers encounter a young-looking Cullwick, dressed in her usual work dress, striped apron and bonnet, kneeling and cleaning a boot that is clearly still attached to a leg.[88] While Cullwick is on full display against the backdrop of a domestic scene (ornate wallpaper, a small cloth-covered table holding a decorated jug, an open wooden doorway), Munby—the assumed owner of the boot—has been cut out of the photo. His absent presence haunts the image, compelling us to ask why it is only his boot tip that has been left in the scene. We know that Munby was not afraid to get in front of the camera with his working-class subjects because in 1873 he was pictured proudly posing beside a Wigan pit woman.[89] We also know that he was not afraid of being seen with Cullwick when she was acting as his servant because she lived as his maid, serving him and his guests, for several years after their marriage. The reason for his conspicuous absence

[88] A reproduction of this photograph can be found in Barry Reay's *Watching Hannah* (2002) as image 36, "Hannah Cullwick cleaning the absent Munby's boot," on pg. 75.

[89] In the 1873 photo he is pictured with Ellen Grounds, a 22-year-old "brow wench" from Pearson and Knowles pits in Wigan. Both Grounds and Munby look proud and almost defiant as they mirror each other's pose (one hand on the hip and eyes staring straight into the camera). See Barry Reay's *Watching Hannah* (2002), pg. 109.

from the photo, therefore, seems to have to do with the specific act of labour in which Cullwick is engaged. In the middle-class home, boot cleaning would have been performed behind closed doors, usually before the family woke up, as part of the invisible labour of the servants (McClintock 166). The lady or gentleman to whom the boot belonged would, in fact, *not* have been part of the scene while the boot was being cleaned. But, in this case, the boot is filled with foot of a gentleman who, although he is not pictured, is very much a part of what is going on in the photo. The contact between Cullwick's hand and Munby's foot, which is cradled in her left as she brushes his boot with her right, not only renders Cullwick's labour visible but also suggests a connection between their bodies that defies middle-class corporeal regulation. An error in photographic development (or perhaps the wear of age) has left what looks like a white, ghostly, fire-shaped cloud arising out of the back of Cullwick's head. This mysterious mark seems to testify to what Munby's absence from the photo was meant to hide: the spark of a binding passion that, like the Christian passion to which it is tied, is premised on the submission of one body to the bodies of others.[90] The position of submission that Cullwick assumes—that of a servant at the foot of her master—is scandalous in its symbolic representation of an erotic love that manifests through the labouring body.

The diverse erotic games that Cullwick and Munby played as part of their relationship have been interpreted primarily through the lens of sexual and commodity fetishism. Leonore Davidoff's foundational essay, published in 1979, was the first to

[90] I am borrowing the language of "binding passion" and its link to the Christian passion from Yvonne Sherwood's article "Passion-Binding-Passion" in *Toward a Theology of Eros* (2006), which I will discussing in more detail on pgs. 124-127.

explore the sexual dynamics of Munby's fascination with dominance/submission, animalism, infantilism, cross-dressing, and dirt.[91] In 1983, Liz Stanley's edition of Cullwick's diaries shifted critical focus from Munby's sexuality to Cullwick's servanthood, but it was not until 1995 with the publication of Carol Mavor's *Pleasures Taken* and McClintock's *Imperial Leather* that Cullwick was granted what Mavor calls "some 'perversions' of her own" (86). One of those perversions, which McClintock explores in detail, is Cullwick's boot-cleaning fetish. In her diary, Cullwick obsessively recorded the number of boots that she cleaned each day and would also ritualistically recount the numbers for Munby during their evenings together (McClintock 171). McClintock reads Cullwick's boot obsession as a response to commodity fetishism, which she defines via Marx as "the central social form of the industrial economy whereby the social relation between people metamorphoses into a relation between things" (170). Rather than seeing boots as just some of the many "things" that she has to spend her life's energies cleaning, Cullwick invests them with new meaning, holding them up as evidence of her disavowed labour (McClintock 170-171). In reading Cullwick's boot fetish as a response to the Victorian erasure of women's work, McClintock downplays the erotic aspect of the fetish. But, when considered in conjunction with Cullwick's repeated desire to wash Munby's feet, it is easy to see that her boot fetish is fueled as much by eros as it is by labour economies.

In *Toward a Theology of Eros*, Burrus and Keller name the currency of eros as contact, the intersection of body parts, which blurs the division between two autonomous

[91] Davidoff, Leonore, "Class and Gender in Victorian England: The Diaries of Arthur J. Munby and Hannah Cullwick." *Feminist Studies* 5.1 (1979): 86-141.

subjects. As Munby and Cullwick play out in an exaggerated way the conditions of their cultural subjectivity through the foot washing ritual, they express a desire for transformation or, to use Burrus and Keller's language, for ultimate otherness (xxi).[92] To explore the spiritual dimension of this desire further, I now turn to feminist theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid's reading of fetishism as a "form of art that gathers together the commonplace and the transcendent" and transforms the body into "a site of religious knowledge" (3). In "Feetishism: The Scent of a Latin American Body Theology," Althaus-Reid makes three main points explaining the connection between eros, otherness, the body, and God. The first point is that God lives in the material and thus can be encountered through the body. Erotic love and pleasure, therefore, become a way of knowing and loving God. The second point is that sexual fetishes, when shared with another (or several others), can become sacramental acts as powerful as those played out in church. The excesses that cling after a fetish act—the feeling of the leather, the smell of feet, the pain left in hands used to scrub—remind us of the immaterial spirit underlying human interaction (10-12). The third point is that spiritual knowledge is experiential. Salvation needs to be "acted out" instead of just named in order for us to uncover traces of an "Other God," an "ex-centric" God whose "underground history of love" beyond the accepted Christian corporeal practices has yet to be told (9). Focusing on the work of Brazilian poet Glauco Mattoso, who in 1986 invited people on the streets of Brazil to participate in *massagem linguopedal* ("tongue-foot massage") to break down social

[92] Burrus and Keller define eros as follows: "Eros is the power or process of divine self-othering through which creation is ever emerging—that which at once differentiates and joins, orders and disrupts. A God in and of between spaces, then, and also a God always incarnating, always submitting itself to becoming-flesh" (xxi).

barriers, Althaus-Reid locates God's love in the acts those who are willing to step outside of their comfort zone to attend to the dirty, smelly, and sweaty feet of the marginalized and excluded. Suggesting that Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet was a form of *massagem linguopedal*, Althaus-Reid transforms "feetishism" into an erotic unveiling of divine love through the synthesis of pleasure, power, and disempowerment (4). What is significant about Cullwick's feetishism is that she engages in it from a position of marginality. She is the dirty, tired, and sweaty worker, but rather than stopping to have her boots washed by one of her superiors, she chooses to be the one doing the washing. In this way, she is an embodiment of both Mary Magdalene, who is rumored to have been the unclean woman who washed Christ's feet with her hair, and Christ, a human who got down on his knees and washed feet to demonstrate the divine love of servanthood.

The story of the sinful woman who interrupts a party to anoint Jesus' feet with oil is told in all four gospels, but the gospel of Luke tells it in the most sensually evocative way.[93] In Luke's version, an unnamed woman from the city who was a known sinner (that is, likely a prostitute) entered the home where Jesus was having dinner without being invited and bathed his feet with oil, tears, and kisses. As Luke tells it, "She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment" (7:38). The note in the *Oxford Annotated Bible* states that the woman likely planned to anoint Jesus' head, as was the custom, but was so overcome by a sense of humility that she instead anointed his feet, which would have been stretched out behind him while he

[93] See Matthew 6:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-49, John 12:1-8.

reclined at the table (NT 91). The Pharisees who were dinning with Jesus were shocked by the contact that the Jesus allowed the woman to have with his body; after all, was holiness not about keeping one's own clean body away from those who are unclean? When Simon, the owner of the house, asked Jesus about why he had allowed the woman to touch him, Jesus answered that her actions had shown a "great love" that the powerful men he had been dining with had failed to show him (7:44-47). Not only had the women given material riches (the alabaster ointment) but also her bodily labour, which, as in the case of Hannah Cullwick, was one of the few things that she had to give from her lowly position. Her actions—the intimate touch of her hands, hair, and lips—reveal the scandal of a divine love that is both incarnate and humble. In this story, the binary opposition between human desire (eros) and divine love (agape) is proven false as Jesus acknowledges that the woman's touch, rather than his own power as a divine figure, is what "saved" her (7:49).

Like the unnamed woman in Luke, who in the popular imagination has become Mary Magdalene, Cullwick's *feet*ishism acts as a conduit for a new form of love that shatters the social distinctions between "clean" and "unclean" bodies. The parallels between the story of the sinful woman from Luke and Cullwick's recounted ritual of washing Munby's feet are unmistakable. In an entry from January 7th 1871, Cullwick removes the dirt from Munby's feet using her lips, hands, and apron in a particularly sensual performance:

> Reached M. by ½ past 5. I was glad to see M. & he was pleasant & I knelt down & *lick'd his boots* after I'd *kissed him* & I cleaned 'em after with the brushes. I

> had a nice evening – did lots o' jobs – then *brushed & washed Massa's feet & wiped 'em* – the jug o' water was upset & I wiped it up with my apron – *crawling about on my hands & knees till I'd dried the floor & my apron was black* – I washed up & cleaned things till it was past ten & I'd to go. (*Diaries*)

Like the Magdalene figure, Cullwick is "glad to see" her "Massa" and the way that she shows her love is through the humble action of "kneeling down" and kissing, washing, and drying his feet. Although there is no alabaster oil in this scene, the image of Cullwick crawling on the floor recalls the sinful woman kneeling behind Jesus and drying his wet feet with her hair. One cannot help but also draw parallels between these two foot-washing scenes when looking at the photograph of Cullwick posing as Mary Magdalene. As Carol Mavor observes, Cullwick's hair in the photo appears greasy; clinging to her head and falling just below the shoulders, it looks "like it really did take part in Mary Magdalene's sensual performance of anointing the feet of Jesus with the musky smelly spikenard" (114). Mavor argues that the eroticism of the photo undoes the "religiosity of the Magdalene" by reminding the viewer that Cullwick's praying hands are also the "heavenly, manly, grotesque, and beautiful" hands that engaged in erotic acts of foot love. It is precisely this reason that I think that photograph *is* deeply religious. Both Cullwick and the unnamed woman in Luke believe that *feet*ishism is a key to their salvation; washing feet is as much (if not more) about securing freedom from conventional interpretations of power and hierarchy as it is about pleasuring their "Masters."

Embodying Christ's Sacrifice

In the Christian tradition, the erotic is intimately tied to suffering and pain. The story of Christ's passion—the ultimate example of one who went down on his knees for another—is built on the basis of the convergence of human desire and divine love. It is most often the violent human desire to inflict pain on Jesus through the crucifixion that is associated with the passion; however, without Jesus' desire to engage bodily with those around him in a human way by eating, drinking, and touching there would not have been a passion at all. It is Christ's scandalous transgressions, such as his willingness to wash his disciples' feet at the last supper, that transforms him from simply a God who became human to one that actively courted the type of submission that is forced on the least powerful in society. In choosing to submit, Jesus complicates a naturalized social order that positions people as either sovereign or subjected. As Virginia Burrus explains, "Where submission is actively courted, chosen, or willed, the complication of agency is intensified to the point of crisis, jamming and repeatedly reversing the distinctions between subject and object, domination and submission, power and resistance" (xviii). By engaging in the world not just as a powerful, loving God but also as a sacrificial human being, Christ occupies the paradoxical position of being at once a figure of ultimate agency and supreme victimhood. This is a position that Yvonne Sherwood summarizes well in her article "Passion-Binding-Passion," writing, "[Christ] is that figure of extreme objecthood that we call victimhood, the subjected subject bowed beneath the weight of life as a burden" but at the same time "he is the Logos writing his own story, inaugurating passion's new, active, sovereign-desiring sense" (171). In political and discursive

contexts where agency is never absolute, Christ's position reflects the human condition, which positions us all as able to act but also subject to varying degrees of constraint depending on our social location (Sherwood 169). Christ's submission suggests that one way to break free of those constraints is to reject the illusion that we can ever be fully powerful, sovereign, or independent. By becoming the ultimate drudge and washing Munby's feet, Cullwick is led into the same in-between space of subjectivity as the one that Christ occupied, where she is both subjected subject *and* sovereign subject.

Although Cullwick positions herself as the ultimate object, more aptly captured in the figure of Mary Magdalene, she is very much an active author-creator in her own passion story. Despite rarely commenting on theological matters, except when praising her own humility, we catch a glimpse of Cullwick's interest in the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet in a diary entry that she wrote after attending a Christian socialist gathering in the 1870s. At the meeting, a woman preached on John 13—the chapter from the fourth gospel that describes a disciple questioning Jesus about his willingness to wash feet. Although Cullwick's commentary is scarce, comprised of a four-word summary and the remark that "she spoke nicely, chiefly on the necessity of coming to Jesus," the fact that she recorded it at all meant that there was something significant about it that stayed with her (Stanley 195). The significance may have been that it was a woman preaching and she spoke well—a common custom in socialist Christian circles at the time but still rare in most mainstream Christian denominations—or that it was a gathering of mostly "working men & very poor folks" (Stanley 195). But, at the risk of over-reading, the significance could also be located in the specific reading that was focus of the service,

which she tells us was the "washing of the feet of Peter" (Stanley 195). The gospel of John is the only gospel to focus specifically on the washing of Peter's feet and, more importantly, on the dialogue between Peter and Jesus about the appropriateness of a divine figure lowering himself to the level of a servant.

In John's account of the last supper, Jesus gets up from the table where he is eating, takes off his outer robe, ties a towel around himself, pours water into a basin, and kneels to "wash the disciples' feet" (John 13:4-5). In taking off his outer garment, Jesus symbolically lowers himself to the level of a slave who would have only been dressed in a tunic (short, undershirt-like garment) to serve his superiors, and by washing his disciples' feet—something only a Gentile, not Jewish, slave would have been required to do—he lowers himself even further to the level of an unclean outsider (Lopinski). The foot-washing act itself is not described in any detail, but its significance is worked out through Peter's objection to the socially debasing act of his Master. Peter's initial refusal to have his feet washed is understandable considering the prevalent cultural attitude towards humility in the ancient world, which positioned it as a sign of weakness (Lopinski). His objection to such weakness, however, indicates that he has not understood Jesus' teaching about love. In his response to Peter, Jesus reiterates that he has come "not to be served but to serve" and, in doing so, inaugurate a new way of living based on self-giving love. As Peter Lopinski explains in his exegetical commentary on the foot-washing teaching, "In declaring to his disciples that 'I... have washed your feet' and that they therefore 'ought to wash one another's feet,' Jesus wraps together in a single sentence the theological interdependence of vertical and horizontal relationality." The lesson is one of radical

servanthood originating with a God willing to debase himself so that others can share the riches thought only to belong to the powerful: since the "Lord" and "Teacher" is willing to engage in the servile task of washing feet so too must the disciples be willing to get down on their knees to serve others. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus insists that humility is at the root of divine love. The selfless love of God is not revealed through grand revelations or gestures but through the everyday occurrence of washing dirty feet.

What passes between Jesus and his disciples at the last supper is not overtly sexual, but it can be read through the lens of the erotic, and, in many ways, it seems to beg for such a reading. The erotic undertones of Jesus' words to Peter, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me," and Peter's eager response, "Then, Lord… not just my feet but my hands and head as well" (John 13:8-9), are undeniable. However, besides the obvious undressing and touching, the eroticism of the scene resides in its positioning as a precursor to the crucifixion—an event premised on the giving of a body over to/for another. The crucifixion and the moments leading up to it, including the washing of feet at the last supper, enact what Yvonne Sherwood calls a "not-withholding" of that which "is closest to us" and that which defines our humanness: our bodies (15). As she further explains, "whenever bodies are given (up), or taken (not withheld), eroticism lurks" (15). Whereas Christ gives his body over to death on the cross, Cullwick gives hers over to labour. Eros is what gives Cullwick's sacrificial impulse a way of expressing itself outside of the socially ordained sacrifices imposed on working-class women by virtue of their powerless positions.

As with Christ's washing of his disciples' feet, Cullwick's washing of Munby's feet is accompanied by little detail of the actual act, focusing instead in the retelling on its significance as a sacrificial act. Her Sunday diary entries describe acts of feetishism that are shocking in their extremity but are recounted as simply a part of her regular list of chores. For example, on March 9th 1871, after waiting outside of Munby's home in poor weather for him to return from an outing, Cullwick greets him by getting down on her knees and, in addition to taking off his boots, which were as "so wet and slushy that they were wet through," she also "lick'd some o' the slush off to show Massa that [she] was good and humble as ever" (Cullwick, *Diaries*, 9 Mar. 1871). After licking the slush and drying his boots, she continued her other chores of "washing the dinner things" and "rubbing M's feet as usual" before heading back to her place of employment (9 Mar. 1871). Despite the casual tone of this entry, the erotic intimacy of Cullwick's interactions with Munby's feet—the rubbing and the licking—stand in direct contrast to the everydayness of the rest of her labour. The fetish act functions to bring together the commonplace and the transcendent, creating a scene of dislocation. As the labouring body and the body in love are dislodged from their traditional anchorings, they merge to become the singular meeting point of two separate bodies and God. Although positioned as a pleasurable experience, this merging is not without pain for Cullwick, who admits that she gave up one life—the one in which she might have had (although it would not have been guaranteed) a family and a home of her own—to take a chance at another in which she saw the potential for something "much deeper" (Stanley 182). She did find something deeper with Munby—a relationship in which she could actively court

submission and transform her labour into an act of sacrificial love—but it was bought at the price of always having to be down on her knees. In Munby's diary, he describes how closely Cullwick aligned her own suffering with that of Christ's through a monogram that she had sewn and hung above her bed that contained the sacred letters IHS (*Jesus Hominum Salvator*), which Cullwick explained to him represented more than "Jesus Saviour of Men": 'Them letters . . . stands for I, Hannah, Slave . . . and I Have Suffered" (Reay 69).[94] And, she had suffered, not just for Munby's sake but also for the sake of all labouring women who have no choice but to give their bodies up.

The thing that connects Cullwick's sacrifice to Christ's is the way that humble submission is transformed into an act of love that disrupts the social narratives that bind being, particularly the structures that dictate what is considered an appropriate way for marginalized women to claim agency. When compared to the disembodied and careful way that middle-class women, such as Josephine Butler, crafted subjectivity, Cullwick's claim to agency through an embodied spiritual experience built on the eroticization of labour is radical. Unlike the Levinasian encounter with "the other" which occurs "face-to-face," foot washing is a bodily encounter that scandalously occurs below the belt through flesh-on-flesh contact (Sherwood 18). Early in their relationship, Cullwick dreamt that she saw "a lady stoop on her knees to lick her husband's boots," so when she woke up Cullwick "knelt down & licked [Munby's] boots so many times and so joyfully that he wondered what it meant" (Cullwick, *Diaries,* 26 May 1865). In her diary, Cullwick explains that she did it to distinguish her love from that of the lady. The distinguishing

[94] I concentrated my research on Cullwick's diaries; therefore, I am indebted to Barry Ray for his reading of Munby's diaries in *Watching Hannah* (2004).

feature of Cullwick's love, besides her obvious enthusiasm for submission, is her steadfast belief that by getting down on her knees she is imitating the original divine-human seduction played out between Jesus and his disciples. Even though Munby positions himself as the authority in their relationship and Cullwick wholeheartedly supports his god-like status by worshiping at his feet, he is much more like Peter than Christ in their interactions.[95] As the enthusiastic recipient of a connection that surpasses his understanding, Munby misinterprets Cullwick's actions as solely for his pleasure. While Cullwick credits Munby with initiating her into the erotics of servanthood, her bodily sacrifice—her "not-withholding" of touch—has as much to do with redeeming labour as it does with pleasing Munby. While other servants live their lives "ashamed o' [their] dirty work," Cullwick embraces "the beauty in being nothing but a common drudge" (Stanley 126) as a way of learning to love others in the selfless way that Christ loved. On her thirty-eighth birthday, after more than a decade with Munby, she prayed that she would always "love him . . . with all [her] heart" so that "in loving him [she] should the more love God" (Stanley 167). In imitating Christ through the washing of feet, Cullwick attempts to do for labour what Christ did for human experience by making it undeniably divine.

The Leveling Powers of Divine Love

Although Cullwick's diaries chronicle primarily her subservience to Munby and her middle-class employers, her behaviour towards family, friends, fellow servants, and

[95] See also McClintock on the illusory nature of Munby's control, pgs. 140-141.

even strangers suggests that she embraced the notion of doing unto others as Christ has done for you in a generalized way. While working at the boarding house in Margate, she washed the feet of an elderly guest, even though he was "ill-temper'd & irritable," because she saw he was sick with fever (Stanley 64). She recounts the transformation that it brought about in the elderly man who was "surprised" by her willingness and "could hardly believe his eyes" as she got down on her knees and carefully washed his feet (64). Like Peter, the man was surprised at the prospect of having his feet washed by an unlikely candidate, but, after letting it happen, he felt grateful and indebted to her for doing the washing. Even though Cullwick did not have any formal religious education beyond charity school, she was firm in her belief that Christ was the way to salvation and that he was accessible to *all*. She did not consider herself theologically-minded, but as she read more and attended churches where the ministers preached for lay congregations, she became firm in her conviction that the road to salvation was simple and did not require specialized knowledge or education.

Cullwick's religious understanding underwent a significant shift in 1864 when she was working for the Knight sisters at a lodging house in Margate. It is not clear which denomination the Knight sisters belonged to, but they supplied Cullwick with religious books and encouraged her to think about the message of the gospel. During her six months at the lodging house, Cullwick recorded more of her religious thoughts than at any other time and grappled with what it meant to be a true "disciple of Christ" (*Diaries*, 29 May 1864). Through a conversation with one of the sisters, Cullwick comes to the

realization that it is not just "learned men" but also "poor fishermen" who carry the gospel message:

> I've wondered who are the great apostles of Christ now. I used to think when I was child that of course all preachers & them that could make a prayer would go to heaven when they died, but now its only lately I've seen clearly. I see its not all preachers who are disciples of Christ, but them who have seen Jesus through the spirit in his glory . . . & tell others of it, whether it be a poor merchant man or the most learned man. (*Diaries*, 29 May 1864)

An important part of this realization for Cullwick is that women, poor women included, have equal access to and knowledge of salvation, even if they do not have book knowledge or theological training; "telling others" about Jesus does not have to happen through words, but can happen through the testament of one's life.

Critics have read Munby as having the greatest influence on Cullwick's spiritual development, describing him as the "anxious warden of Hannah's soul" (qtd. in Reay 73), and it is easy to see how they came to that conclusion. But it is the women in her life that Cullwick credits with providing her with the keys to salvation. In a diary entry from May 29th 1864, Cullwick wrote about her mother's experience of faith: "From some writing I found of my mothers, I see she felt [God's call] before she was 17 & to the last I know'd of her she kept in the faith & it was that inward peace what bore her up through her dreadful trials with my father & his wicked temper" (*Diaries*). Not only does this passage reveal the potential psychological impetus behind Cullwick's relationship with Munby, but it also demonstrates the extent to which the women in her life influenced her

understanding of faith since she was a child. It was her mother—also a housemaid—who gave Cullwick a means of understanding her subservience and finding peace within it through the language of faith. And, later, it was the Knight sisters who taught Cullwick that servants are bound by faith in the same way as their masters. Cullwick's kneeling body, and the invitation it extends to Munby to experience the leveling powers of divine love, testifies to a life beyond the social categories that define flesh. In the rare moments that Munby is actually brought down to his knees alongside Cullwick, most often occurring during prayer, the desire at the root of Cullwick's subservience is laid bare. As the "master" and the "drudge" come before God on the same level, the contradictions in their relationship, which are also the contradictions at the heart of a hierarchical understanding of the world, are rendered visible, making Christ's project of transcending the social categories that define flesh seem possible.

One of the most interesting and seemingly contradictory aspects of Hannah Cullwick's character is that she was a very strong woman, both spiritually *and* physically, and it was that strength that allowed her to be so subservient. Her acts of service were only possible because she was strong enough to scrub the floor and wash the grates as well as lift Munby in her giant arms and carry buckets of water to bathe his feet. The women I will be introducing in the next chapter were not strong in the body, but, like Cullwick, they shared a desire to imitate Christ in their actions and found a means to do so through relations with others. In many ways, Jane Andrew and Ruth Wills would have been seen as more likely candidates than Cullwick in the Victorian era to take on identities rooted in subjection because of their disabilities. But, as we will see moving

through the next chapter, both women refused the “helpless” or “hopeless” labels that others tried to impose by relying on their faith to claim full subjectivity without rejecting corporeal weakness.

CHAPTER THREE ~ MOVING BEYOND CHARITY: THE POLITICS OF BODILY REDEMPTION

She felt that the Lord of this universe fair,
Whose smile kindles life, and whose frown works
despair,
Was her Saviour and friend, on whose love she might lean
Through all her life-journey, in shadow or sheen;
And that while thus reclining all trustful on Him,
Her soul would have light which no earth-cloud could dim (48-54).

—Ruth Wills "The Seen and the Unseen" (1861)

The line that stands out in the above stanza from Ruth Wills' poem "The Seen and Unseen" (1861) is the one that contains only one word: despair. It stands in stark contrast to the rest of the poem, which maintains a tone of contentment and peace as the speaker recounts an encounter with the divine in nature. The "shadow" side of life, also hinted at in this stanza, is eclipsed by the "sheen" added to existence by God's loving presence (52). This vision of working-class life in which despair is acknowledged but rejected as a defining characteristic refutes the dominant Victorian discourse of working-class women as ruined, soul and body, by the conditions of their existence. The idea that women needed to be "rescued" from their bodily labour, especially if it threatened middle-class notions of feminine purity as we saw with Josephine Butler, left little room for the agency exercised by Hannah Cullwick and the two women I will be discussing in this chapter. Both Ruth Wills, the factory poetess referenced above, and Jane Andrew, a working-class farm labourer whose memoir will also be explored, were weak in body due to illnesses suffered in youth, yet their faith supplied them with the ability to claim authority over their own relationships with both labour and God. Writing against the cultural narratives

of charity, which positioned the disabled body as the ultimate object in need of redemptive, paternalistic intervention, Wills and Andrew self-consciously resisted the notion that full personhood was predicated on the strength and health of the body. In Wills' poem and Andrew's memoir, the grace of God comes *through* the broken body not from an outside source desiring to "restore" it. Their writing, therefore, challenges the power dynamics written into the Victorian middle-class ideal of benevolence by affording the "despairing" other the spiritual authority to claim her own self redeemed.

When I came across Jane Andrew's memoir, *Recorded Mercies* (1889), at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, I was struck by the similarity between Andrew's life and that of a factory poet from Leicester—the city I called home during my research—that I had recently encountered in Florence Boos' anthology of Victorian working-class women poets.[96] Although Andrew was a rural farm labourer from Cornwall and Ruth Wills an urban factory worker, both women, born within a decade of each other, grew up in poor households, learned to read and write in Sunday Schools, lost parents at a young age, suffered from physical impairments that made it difficult to labour, and were encouraged to read and write by middle-class allies invested in their well-being. Out of all of their similarities, the one that stood out to me was their faith in a God who revealed himself in the epiphanic moments that make up everyday life.

Subverting the dominant Victorian discourse of disability as a divinely sent path meant to either punish or ennoble the "afflicted" person, the women in this chapter

[96] I am deeply indebted to Florence Boos, who recovered the work of Ruth Wills, for all of the biographical information about Wills included in this chapter, which I have gathered exclusively by reading her anthology *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain* (2008).

refused to subordinate their anomalous bodies to the workings of the soul. To counteract the soul/body binary that generally codes the latter as inferior, often linking it with femininity, these women used autobiographical writing to locate the divine in their daily, corporeal existence. In this chapter, I approach these women's struggles via contemporary disability theology to explore the convergence of autobiography, disability, and Christian faith. Because of their focus on the spiritual dimensions of necessarily imperfect bodies, these contemporary theories are particularly suited to capturing the radical nature of the faith-based challenges both Wills and Andrew presented to normative embodiment. As Susannah Mintz describes, contemporary disability theology focuses on the materiality of divinity by locating God in the "messiness of physicality" rather than some sublime and mysterious "loftier plain" ("Ordinary Vessels"). In a religious vision that celebrates "unruly embodiment" for its power to defy illusions of self-sufficiency and control (Mintz *Unruly Bodies* 4), faith is not about finding comfort and peace *despite* one's disability, or about romanticizing impairment as a divine gift aimed at enhancing spiritual capacities. Instead, for women like Wills and Andrew, faith was about challenging the social stigma of disability by positioning their anomalous bodies as part of, and a testament to, a deeper collectivity rooted in the inherent vulnerability and dependency of *all* bodies.[97]

Rather than making grandiose claims regarding the potential strength, autonomy, or nobility of the disabled body, Andrew enacted a relational ethic that operated through

[97] Although I do not reference Jean Vanier's writings directly in this chapter, my thinking about disability and its relation to humanity's shared vulnerability has been greatly influenced by his philosophies and the time I spent in L'Arche—the community Vanier founded on the principle of shared vulnerability, mutuality, and equality between people of differing abilities. For more on Vanier's philosophies, see *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness* (2008) and *Becoming Human* (2008).

small political interventions in her daily life, challenging the imperative to be productive that was mutually reinforced by capitalism and mainstream Victorian Christian narratives. This project is revealed in my analysis of Andrew's memoir, which I read as undermining the social limitations imposed on "afflicted" bodies under capitalism by articulating an alternative network of valuation that prioritizes inter-subjective connection over productive output. Wills' poem performs a similar feat of subversion: by claiming a subjectivity usually reserved for the "autonomous" male poet, Wills co-opts the language of transcendence and binds it to a compromised materiality, thereby unseating the masculinist binary, and ennobling vulnerability and openness to others in the same gesture.

This subversion of dominant Victorian discourses of disability allows the frail and ailing body to claim itself redeemed on its own terms. Redemption in the Christian context, which broadly refers to the deliverance offered to humanity through Christ's sacrifice, has two key aspects: liberation from sin and restoration to divine life (OED). This chapter will focus on redemption as a process moving *into* right relations with others and God rather than as a turning *away from* the brokenness of the material world. While the two aspects of redemption are connected, the capitalist imperative of production that misplaces the brokenness of the world onto the bodies of those who cannot labour necessitates a re-visioning of what it means to be liberated. As Thomas E. Reynolds explains in *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (2008), because capitalism is built on an "ideology of strength," it creates the illusion that the ultimate form of freedom comes from being autonomous and independent individuals,

which requires a fully "productive" body (82-83). Both Jane Andrew and Ruth Wills endured afflictions that limited their ability to work and often left them dependent on the charity of friends. Yet, by writing about their corporeal experiences of the divine, they found a means of expressing a sense of personal wholeness outside of the economy of exchange and its cult of normalcy. And, in doing so, they also created a vision of redemption as an inter-subjective process that unfolds not by denying the insecurity and weakness at the heart of embodied existence but by seeking the divine spirit that enters human life through our dependency on others and God.

Jane Andrew's Challenge to the Victorian Model of Charity

The dynamics of charity in the nineteenth century were built on an emotional exchange, and beleaguered figures that evoked the strongest emotions in the middle classes were seen as the most in need of philanthropic intervention. They were also, not coincidentally, the characters that posed the most threat to middle-class identity. As Audrey Jaffe explains in *Scenes of Sympathy* (2000), the recipients of Victorian sympathy—the fallen woman, the suffering working-class child, the disabled factory worker—were rendered social types in the spectacle of charitable exchange because the middle-class perceiving subject was always trying to solidify his/her own precarious social place between "high" and "low" in Victorian Culture (9). By becoming solidly, even if just temporarily, the one who controls the discursive and visual field of representation through affective reactions, the middle-class subject claimed power over the other while maintaining the guise of benevolence. On the surface, the sympathetic

exchanges that played out in fictional depictions as well as everyday life were meant to signal recognition and connection between subjects of different classes, but, as Jaffe points out, often had the opposite effect of "effacing both of its participants, substituting them for images, or fantasies, of social and cultural identity" (4). One of the most prominent figures that dominated the Victorian imagination was that of the "afflicted" or "defective" body (Holmes 4). As Martha Stoddard Holmes argues in *Fictions of Affliction* (2004), because disability was often employed as a literary trope to "crank open feelings," emotional excess was affectively linked to impairment (3). The afflicted body—a visible representation of suffering—was the perfect object of sympathy; however, its resistance to being "fixed" or "cured" through the interaction acted to constantly undercut the illusion of control that the scene was meant to create.

In *Recorded Mercies* (1899), Andrew describes the dynamics of charity from the perspective of the recipient. In doing so, she shifts the focus away from her non-disabled benefactress and onto her own life, which risked being effaced or rendered anonymous in the Victorian charitable model outlined by Jaffe. Her narrative is at once conventional, characterizing Elizabeth Smart as a kindly benefactress to a poor invalid woman, but also unconventional in its positioning of the invalid as the author of spiritual insights normally reserved for the giver. As we will see through my analysis, Andrew fits the part of the perfect recipient of Victorian sympathy, offering Smart not only a worthy object of patronage but also an important moral lesson in fortitude and gratefulness. Yet, in her rare first-person account of life as a recipient of Victorian charity, she foregrounds the frail, pained body, rather than the economics of the charitable exchange, as a site of spiritual

meaning making that produces what Susannah Mintz calls in *Hurt and Pain* an "openness to transformation" (74). By aligning her corporeal experiences with the suffering of Biblical characters, in particular the Old Testament heroine Ruth, Andrew discursively transforms a cross-class relational connection defined by inequality into one defined by spiritual intimacy and inter-subjective understanding.

Although *Recorded Mercies* tells the story of Jane Andrew's life, it is clear from the outset that it is not just a memoir about a poor working-class farm labourer. Inside the regal looking green cover with gold lettering, the first page immediately links Andrew to her benefactress with the extended title: "Recorded Mercies: Being the Autobiography of Jane Andrew, Living at St. Ive, Liskeard, Cornwall; Also, Reminiscences of her Valued Friend, The Late Mrs. Daniel Smart, of Cranbrook." The first page also connects the women in a legacy of charity through a note included after the title: "Compiled by her younger daughter as an affectionate tribute to her mother's memory. Any profit arising from this book will be given to Mr. Robert and Miss Jane Andrew." As the title indicates, Andrew frames her life story in terms of her relationship with Elizabeth Smart, while Smart's daughter, who commissioned the memoir, ensures that her mother's story is also told through an introductory note, a short biography, and two of Elizabeth's letters, all of which highlight her extreme generosity. This framing adds a didactic tone to the text that is captured in the young Miss Smart's expressed hope that readers will find the memoir both "interesting" and "profitable." Her desired readership for the memoir was clearly middle-class people, who might be inspired to follow in Elizabeth's example of proper Christian behaviour with regards to charity and relations between the classes. However,

the class tensions between the two women, which manifest through Andrew's resistance to being objectified, undercut any pretensions to a seamless and straightforward relationship between giver and receiver in the memoir, and function to unseat Smart from the position of moral authority her daughter tried to establish.

Affliction is at the center Andrew's memoir as the defining characteristic of her embodied life and the catalyst for her relationship with Smart. From the outset, she establishes herself as a poor invalid, who, in her mid-teens, was "laid up" as the result of an unnamed illness for fourteen years (7).[98] The two women initially met, shortly after the death of Andrew's mother, while Andrew was visiting a doctor in a nearby town about her illness. She was introduced to Smart through Christian friends, and she describes Smart's reaction as follows:

> My appearance struck her—my being in bad health and dressed in black—and caused her to inquire who? And what I was? I, not caring to converse with her, went into another room, when she enquired of my friends all particulars about family and myself. They told her of my mother, and the circumstances of the family. She immediately said to my friends, "Take care of her, and whatever she wants get it for her; and I will try to see her to have a little conversation." This she did, and we soon found a home in each other's hearts, in telling of what the Lord had done for us. (11)

[98] In *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth Century Britain* (2004), Mary Fawley argues that the Victorian "invalid" was a popular character type in literature of the period precisely because s/he embodied the excitement/fear of one who was able to defy middle-class values of work and productivity. She explains that the paradoxical positioning of the invalid as one who embodies spiritual fortitude and insight at the same time as projecting a sense of fatigue and illness can be read "as evidence of the inability of nineteenth-century society to reconcile its expectations of progress with evidence of degeneration" (251).

In this first meeting, Andrew interrupts the middle-class gaze by removing herself from the "scene of sympathy." Recognizing that she is not only a "who" but also a "what" in the exchange, Andrew attempts to refuse the objectification brought about by Smart's stare by leaving the room, but it continues nonetheless as her friends recount "all particulars" about her life. It is in this moment that Smart steps into the role of benefactress, carving out an identity for herself by offering to "take care of" an afflicted and impoverished other. But, as Andrew notes, the subject-meets-object dynamic between the two women is short lived, interrupted by what Andrew names as a heart connection brought about by sharing their experiences of God.

The charitable relationship that developed between Andrew and Smart played out on a spiritual rather than physical level as the two women had very little face-to-face contact with each other over their thirty year friendship. Unlike many of her philanthropic contemporaries, who went into the slums to see, smell, and touch the suffering of others, Smart had little first-hand experience of Andrew's suffering. The two women stayed in touch via letters, in which they shared the details of their lives and encouraged each other to have faith in hard times. The intimacy of the connection they developed is evident in the opening of one of Smart's letters, dated December 26th 1844, where she writes, "My dear Jane, I have perused your letter with much pleasure and can well enter into the workings of your mind. They are painful…" (51). Rather than rejecting the idea that her benefactress could "enter" into her mind, a proposition that could be read as overly presumptuous or paternalistic, Andrew embraces this intuitive connection as means of inviting Smart to witness the spiritual dimension of her corporeal pain. In fact, in

Andrew's account of their relationship, she highlights those moments when Smart feels, senses, or dreams that something is wrong in Andrew's life. The transgressive dimensions of cross-class physical touch, which I highlighted in Munby and Cullwick's relationship, are here extended to telepathic touch.[99]

The first of Smart's dreams occurs two and a half years after their first meeting, during which time Andrew had become "more and more afflicted" (13). Sensing her friend's turmoil, Smart dreams about Andrew "two nights running" and, seeing her in "very great trouble," decides that she must "interfere in the case" (13). When she finally travels to see Andrew, she receives physical confirmation of what she had already seen intuitively, proclaiming: "That is the face I saw in my dream" (14). She responds to Andrew's "afflicted and weak body" by arranging for Andrew to live with a married brother and agreeing to pay her room and board. In Andrew's retelling of this incident, Smart's psychic vulnerability acts as a catalyst for transforming Andrew's pain into not only a shared experience and but also a shared responsibility.[100] Paralleling Butler's experience of haunting, which I explored in Chapter One, Smart's dream signals that a form of social violence, in this case the effacement of disabled people's lives in the

[99] Because of its ability to break through corporeal boundaries, Victorians saw telepathy as a threat to social norms. Signaling a type of fluidity between subjects that could not be contained through social regulation, telepathic connection, often depicted as a feminine power, threatened to "contaminate" the material world by drawing attention to its inherent instability (Gagné 23-24). See pgs. 111-115 in Chapter Two for my discussion of the transgressive elements of cross-class physical touch. For more about the Victorian understanding of telepathic touch, see Ann Marie Gagné's doctoral dissertation, *Touching Bodies/Bodies Touching* (2011).

[100] In *Hurt and Pain*, Mintz suggests that the "interrelational dynamics that make pain" ensure that it can be "if not directly shared, then somehow collaboratively experienced" (165). Although she focuses on the interdynamics of *physical* touch, her notion that one can be directly and sensibly affected by the pain of another also applies to Andrew and Smart's psychic connection.

charitable exchange, is making itself known through psychic haunting, which the women interpret as a form of divine intervention.

The haunting continued throughout their relationship, even after Smart moved further away to the British south shore and started a family. After her marriage, for some unnamed reason, Smart's wealth diminished considerably, and she could not continue supporting Andrew in the same way. The memoir does not recount the specifics of how Smart felt about this new experience of economic vulnerability, but Andrew states that she stopped telling her benefactress about her own financial troubles, knowing that it would only cause more distress (34). This withholding of information did not, however, prevent Smart from sensing on an intuitive level Andrew's distress. As Andrew recounts,

> I had not the heart to tell her our trouble, feeling it would only be a trial to her mind. But the following morning I had a letter from her, and an order for half-a-sovereign, and saying in her letter that her mind had been greatly exercised that we had been in trouble. (The morning she had written that letter our cow died.) She told me in the letter, that morning she had been pleading with the Lord to open up some way for her own circumstances, and her mind was turned upon us, and she felt she must pray for us, feeling we must be in trouble. (34)

Once again, Andrew's pain is transmitted to Smart through the mysterious workings of "mind" and its telepathic abilities. However, in this passage, Andrew openly locates God at the heart of their intuitive connection; "the Lord" acts as an intermediary who sees and hears Andrew's suffering when Smart is not there to witness it. It is also "the Lord" who transforms an intuitive call to witness into concrete action by opening up "a way" for

Andrew to send money. Even though Andrew is the obvious beneficiary of God's grace in this case, God's intervention is not one-sided as Smart's "circumstances" also improve through her benevolence towards Andrew. After her initial gift of half-a-sovereign, she receives a surprise gift from her father of "forty pounds," which allows her to send an additional "two pounds ten shillings" to Andrew (35).

Interpreted on a purely material level, this reading of monetary gain as a divine reward for ethical behaviour is somewhat problematic, but understood in the context of the immaterial exchanged going on under the cover of charity it can be read of an acknowledgement of the contributions Andrew makes to the relationship. The affective resonances of Andrew's corporeal pain not only create a bond of friendship between the women, but also push Smart to surrender her middle-class attachment to subjectivity and vulnerability as individual matters. Smart's dreams and intuitive feelings give substance to an inter-subjective space structured by a vision of spiritual equality that is often obscured by the social hierarchies of material life. Far from being an unreal or utopian space, these dreams are the traces of a relationship of shared vulnerability that is more fundamental than the power structures of Victorian charity. As Thomas Reynolds points out in *Vulnerable Communion*, charity functions on the basis of difference: the giver has "resources" (physical, monetary, spiritual) that the receiver does not (114). Although *caritas* (pure, disinterested, and selfless love) is celebrated as the most genuine form of love in Christian theology, it can become the most distancing form of love in practice when interpreted as requiring "no real relation, no vulnerability, no zone of mutual encounter" (Reynolds 115). In Smart's case, the affective, visceral upheaval caused by

her psychic connection with Andrew did not allow for the somatic integrity necessary to maintain distance. It is almost as if her own subconscious was providing the materials necessary to help heal the social rift that could prevent her from seeing and interacting with Andrew as a true sister in Christ. It is difficult to say for certain how Smart understood her relationship with Andrew since we can only hear her voice through the two letters included at the end of the memoir. However, it is clear from the content and tone of those letters that Smart struggled to reconcile the deep spiritual friendship she developed with Andrew on the basis of a shared experience of the affective resonances of corporeal vulnerability with the ingrained class hierarchies of her day.

In the letter from December 26th, 1844, which is filled with affection and genuine concern, Smart reveals the limits of her ability to empathize with Andrew. Her distance from the conditions of Andrew's life is evident as she chastises Andrew for not trusting God to provide:

> My Dear Jane, . . . You say you can trust the Lord with your soul, but cannot trust Him for your daily supplies… Temporals call for the continued exercise of faith… I feel your forlorn situation, and like you to tell me all your troubles. If I cannot remove them, I may instrumentally endeavour to direct your mind in a right channel. (50-51)

Once again, Smart locates her connection to Andrew in feeling. She can "feel" Andrew's "forlorn situation," but there is also a limit to how much she can witness in this way. In this example, the very real difference between the two women's "circumstances" on the level of bodily necessity is laid bare. Smart's exhortations to have faith, even when the

needs of the body are being neglected, reveals the extent to which she does not understand the gravity of Andrew's poverty. As she encourages Andrew to look forward to the "happy day when mortality will be swallowed up," she attempts to pacify Andrew's pain not only for her friend's sake, but also her own (50). While Smart's experience of the connection between God, herself, and Andrew happens almost entirely on an intuitive level, Andrew's experience is rooted in the more elemental needs of the body, which cannot as easily be pacified through recourse to a non-materialist spiritual ideology that advocates turning heavenward. Lingering in the background of Smart's exhortations to look towards the world-to-come is the question of why more bodily suffering is required of the working classes than the middle classes. In order to give concrete shape to the "ghosts" haunting Smart's mind, Andrew draws attention to the ways in which social and economic precarity are produced by exploitative systems. Connecting her own story to that of the Biblical character Ruth, who is also oppressed and ignored by the economic system of her day, Andrew invites Smart to transform an experience of psychic witness into social solidarity.

"Where You Go, I Go": Disability and Inter-Subjective Redemption

In *Vulnerable Communion*, Reynolds argues that capitalism functions on the basis of a "productive imperative" that "pressures human bodies to exhibit qualities that perform in ways that are useful and thus generate capital" (88). In the Victorian era, the socio-cultural obligation to produce meant that there was, broadly speaking, only two recognized categories of female embodiment: the marriageable (i.e. reproductive) body

and the working body (Holmes 34-35). These were overlapping categories for many working-class women, but for a women like Andrew, whose disability prevented her from fitting into either category, the productive imperative ensured that there was no space of social value for her anomalous body to occupy outside of that which was imposed by middle-class discourse. In the limited scope of Victorian industrial capitalism and the bourgeois ideals that shaped it, disabled women were seen as a responsibility at best and a liability at worst.[101] In a system built on an economy of exchange, those who were labeled as having nothing to give were marginalized and shamed for their supposed dependence on the system (Reynolds 89). The main storyline of Andrew's memoir, which recounts Andrew and her brother's struggle to acquire and maintain a small farm, offers another vision of social life in which dependency is not a shameful thing, but instead a fundamental element of the inter-personal relationships necessary to create communities based on equality and acceptance.

After several years of living in temporary situations with various family members, Andrew and her unmarried brother, Robert, successfully secure a tenancy that offers them both a home and a living. Judging from the reactions of Andrew's friends to her news that they would be moving to Ley Farm, the idea of an afflicted woman and her almost equally afflicted brother taking up a tenancy on a fully working farm was considered preposterous by Victorian standards. As she recounts,

[101] Bessy Higgins from Gaskell's *North and South* is a prime example of a working-class woman, who, unable to work due to industrial illness, transforms from being an asset to her father into a dependent, thus further impoverishing an already struggling family.

> Many of our Christian friends felt it was a great undertaking for my brother, as he was not very strong in body and in mind. A very dear friend and cousin wrote me a letter, when he heard of it (knowing my health was so bad I could do no work) and asked me the question, "Whether it was Elijah's Raven, or Jonah's ship?" (28)

This question becomes central to the story of redemption that Andrew weaves through her memoir because it positions the afflicted body at the heart of a redemptive process built on dependence. While Elijah trusts God to send ravens to feed him during a time of drought and famine, Jonah, who tries to flee from God by jumping aboard a ship going to a distant land, is thrown overboard and tortured to the point of surrender.[102] In both of these stories, corporeal affliction becomes a vehicle for recognizing a deeper dependency that is easily denied in the individual quest for success. Andrew ultimately decides her situation is "Elijah's raven, and *not* Jonah's ship" because she, like Elijah, has been obedient to God's will for her life rather than objecting to His plans. Her choice to align herself with Elijah signals that she does not see her disability as some type of divine test or punishment, nor does she understand the move to the farm as a misguided act of self-protection, but rather as an opportunity to "be fed" spiritually by God.

The exchange that Andrew has with the steward of Ley Farm, who is also skeptical about her tenancy, reveals the extent of Andrew's faith that she will be both

[102] The prophet Elijah, who is chosen to testify to God's power over the god Baal to the Canaanites, is forced to depend on God to nourish his body during a three-year drought that is brought on the land. In turn, the starving Canaanites come to believe in God when Elijah proves that He is the only god who can bring them the life-giving rain that they need (1 Kings 17-18). Jonah's trials are equally bodily as he physically flees from God to avoid the divine commission that he has been given by jumping on a ship bound for a distant country. Jonah's body, which is thrown overboard into a raging ocean, eaten by a giant fish, and then burned to the point of sunstroke in the dessert heat, is repeatedly tortured and then saved by God (Jonah 1-4).

spiritually and physically nourished, rather than thrown overboard, by moving to the farm. The exchange she has with the steward is characteristic of the Victorian attitude towards "non-productive" bodies:

> [When the steward arrived] he said, "I have come to see Mr. Andrew about Ley Farm. Are you the sister that is going with him, if he goes there?" (For I was a poor, invalid-looking creature, not fit to look after a farmhouse, he supposed.) So I said, "I am the sister to go there if he ever goes there." So he said, "Do you think you are quite qualified to manage a farm-house?" I replied, "Sir, I am not equal to the work; but as to the management, I have always been reared up to it." (26-27)

Unlike the scene of sympathy, in which Andrew's body is evaluated on the basis of its worthiness as an object of compassion, this cross-class interaction is one in which Andrew's body is scrutinized for its productive value. In responding, Andrew both affirms the stereotype of the poor invalid by acknowledging the "creaturely" nature of physical appearance and rebuts it by suggesting that, although she cannot labour, she is still able to contribute to the running of the farm.

This oscillation between complicity and resistance was typical amongst disabled writers in the Victorian era who, as Holmes points out, were unable to escape the "master narratives of 'affliction' written by their larger culture" (135). The figures of the unmarriageable woman, the innocent invalid, or the spiritually chosen sufferer were the only recognizable subject positions available to Andrew (Holmes 36-37, 149), which made it impossible for her to articulate her life outside of the limiting representations. She does, however, manage to resist her cultural position by emphasizing what limited agency

she is able to claim. The words that Andrew chooses in response to the property steward's question about whether or not she will go with her brother to Ley Farm ("I am the sister to go there") echo the words that Ruth spoke to Naomi in the Old Testament: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay" (Ruth 1:16). It is no coincidence that Andrew chooses these words; by writing herself into the role of Ruth, Andrew claims an active role in a story of redemption that would normally position her as a passive victim.

The Book of Ruth tells the story of three women who are left in similar circumstances to Andrew after the death of their husbands. Naomi and her two daughter-in-laws, Orpah and Ruth, find themselves without familial or financial protection during a time of famine in a foreign land. Naomi decides to return to her homeland of Bethlehem, where it is rumored that God is providing food for His people. After some time on the road, she encourages her daughter-in-laws to turn back and return to their people in Moab, but Ruth refuses, declaring her allegiance to both Naomi and God with the words: "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Although Ruth's act of loyalty and faithfulness ultimately becomes the women's saving grave when she wins the favour of Boaz (a wealthy landowner in Bethlehem who also happens to be a distant relative), the security she gains is bought at the price of a prolonged period of insecurity. From the famine and long journey to the hard labour in the fields that she is forced to endure upon arrival in Bethlehem, Ruth's redemption is worked out through bodily hardship and is ultimately gained through her commitment to maintaining relational bonds. Moreover, although it Boaz who acts as the official "redeemer" in this story, it is Ruth who is celebrated for restoring her family to a place of comfort and safety. The story

highlights the structures of care put in place to help those in the margins of society; while Naomi and Boaz act in accordance with the kinship customs of their culture, Ruth moves beyond obligation to demonstrate absolute faith in the goodness of God's divine providence. The words "Where you go I will go" not only publicly confirm her faith in God, but also set her on the path of becoming an agent in a collective form of redemption.

There are numerous parallels between the Book of Ruth and Andrew's story, all of which center on the notion that the process of redemption plays out through everyday acts of faith. Like Ruth, Andrew is failed by a social system that positions marriage as the only real legal and financial security for women. She is forced to depend on her unmarried brother Robert who, like Naomi, is not suitable as a guardian because of his own "affliction."[103] As mentioned above, the choice to move forward alongside her brother without knowing whether the tenancy they were about to take up was going to be "Elijah's raven or Jonah's ship" (i.e. whether they would be fed or thrown overboard) is an act of faith that brings rewards, but not without a struggle. Even after finding favour with the steward and taking up residency at Ley Farm, Andrew and her brother still live in poverty because, with only one person working the fields, "there was but little money" (27). The toll that this labour had on Robert's body continued to cause concern amongst their friends, but, like Ruth, Andrew remains steadfast in her belief that it was the "Lord's hand" that had brought them to the new place (32). In her assurances that God's providence was at work in her life, Andrew repeatedly uses the second person plural "we": "I felt confident that the Lord could move us from where *we* were… but *we* had to

[103] It is not clearly exactly what is wrong with Robert, but Andrew mentions several times that he was not suitable for hard labour because "he was not very strong in body and in mind" (28).

travel on the same course for seven years before deliverance came" (18). As Andrew presents it, the key to redemption is not just choosing to go faithfully wherever God leads, but doing it together with whatever unlikely companions God places in one's life.

Extending the Invitation to "Go"

When read in the context of the book of Ruth, a celebrated story of female companionship, Andrew's words "I am the sister to go there," which she speaks in reference to her brother, can also be read as invitation to Smart to embrace the relationships of dependence that characterizes the journey to Ley Farm. By the end of the memoir, Andrew has settled into the farm and she and her brother have developed a strong community of Christian friends, but they continue to suffer through an equal number of "bad harvests as good" (39). Although Andrew understands herself to have been, like the Israelites, delivered to the Promised Land, she remains disabled and poor.[104] Because of her disability she is still dependent on the charity of friends and cannot labour. Yet, in her memoir, she describes finding a sense of peace and a community in which she feels she has a place. Ley Farms becomes a type of spiritual retreat for Christians during the autumn harvest time, and Andrew becomes not only a host of the "Harvest gatherings" but also a spiritual leader who encourages others to see "all that He has done for us" even during bad harvests (37). She does so not only through

[104] In the opening pages of her memoir, Andrew compares herself to the Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years: "But God, who led the Children of Israel forty years through the wilderness, and fed and taught them, had laid me aside by sickness for fourteen years to teach me myself, and to bring me to know my interest in Christ alone, from His own Spirit's power, through the Word" (7). After settling at Ley Farm, she celebrates "all that God had done for them" in bringing them to the farm (37).

words but also through the testament of her life, which offers an essential counter-narrative to the capitalist story of freedom as something that is earned through strength, self-sufficiency, and independence. On the final page of her account, she names redemption as a daily occurrence that manifests through weakness: "As the outward man decays, so the inner man is renewed everyday" (43). In creating a vision of the ailing body as a space of renewal in the everyday, Andrew locates redemption squarely within the material realm as a process of shared vulnerability and relational inter-dependence. By narrating her life as a journey of redemption (i.e. a movement from turmoil to peace), she follows the generic conventions of spiritual autobiography that were popular in the nineteenth century.[105] But, rather than focusing on the end result of the journey—the eternal realm—she emphasizes the journey itself, articulating it as a communal process of coming to accept the imperfect materiality that gives shape and meaning to deeper spiritual realities.

In the end, Smart died before her afflicted friend, and Andrew lived to tell the story of their friendship through an account of her own life. This significant departure from the Victorian standard of middle-class people telling the stories of working classes lives was subversive in and of itself, but the way that Andrew framed their relationship as one of mutuality and focused on her own spiritual insights also significantly re-wrote the dynamics of charity that it was meant to be celebrating. What Smart and Andrew's

[105] As Peterson explains in *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography*, the "women writers readily adopted the traditional model of spiritual autobiography" from the seventeenth century onward and relied heavily on the use of Scripture—a convention of the genre—to merge their own words with the "divinely inspired words of biblical authors" (6-7). The structure of the spiritual autobiography arises out of a Christian perspective on human experience, which, as Peterson describes, "views life as a journey or progress toward the eternal realm" and "considers spiritual reality all-encompassing" (7).

unusual psychic friendship allowed them to do was create an alternative female community, originating within the established structure of charity but transforming into an inter-subjective relationship of mutual love and pain, which gave Andrew the means to affirm the "afflicted body" in writing and provide an alternative to the patriarchal model of dependence. The existence of this memoir, now long out of print but still remaining on the shelves of the Methodist Archives in Manchester, means that regardless of whether or not Andrew and Smart intended their journeys of redemption to be so closely intertwined, they will be forever. And, Andrew's afflicted body, which was the origin but not the ultimate source of their connection, endures to offer a counter-narrative to the limited middle-class vision of charity as the best (and most Christian) model of redressing the violence of social system that evaluates bodies according to their economic productivity.

Ruth Wills and the Materiality of Transcendence

In this last section of Chapter Three, I return to look at the poem by Ruth Wills that opened the chapter, which I positioned as offering an alternative to the figure of the despairing and hopeless working-class woman. Here, I continue that reading, using Wills' poetic language of transcendent materiality, to solidify Andrew's vision of the divine making itself known through an imperfect world. Like Jane Andrew, Wills resisted the Victorian stereotype of afflicted women as burdens to the social system because of their inability to produce surplus value. She did this by exceeding social expectations of a

working-class woman by writing poetry in addition to her daily labour in a factory.[106] While Andrew's affliction left her unable to labour outside of the home, Wills' physical lameness caused by a paralytic stroke in infancy (Boos 34) was not severe enough to cause invalidism. In fact, Wills had such a long career as a mender in a hosiery warehouse that in 1877 her employer gave her a gold watch to commemorate 50 years of service, but, over the many years that she laboured, her career was often interrupted by slow productivity and poor health (Boos 34). Having discovered a love of poetry as a teenager, Wills began writing poetry in her 30s and successfully sold several poems for publication in local periodicals to supplement her meager income (221). Through her initial publications, she gained notoriety as a factory poet—a new literary figure that was gaining popularity in the nineteenth century—and later published two editions of poetry: *Lays of Lowly Life* (1861) and *Lays of Lowly Life: Second Series* (1868) (Boos 219). Out of all of the women in this study, Ruth Wills is the only one who self-identified as a literary figure, claiming for herself the status of one who engages in manual *and* intellectual labour.[107] Both Florence Boos and Meagan Timney identify Wills as a poet who aspired to improve her social standing by imitating the poetic forms of the upper and middle classes, often writing about worlds she had never seen and situations she had

[106] In doing this, Wills commits what Rancière calls "la transgression poétique" by breaking with the daily rhythms to engage with a forbidden language reserved for those who do not labour (22). See pgs. 19-22 of my Introduction for more details.

[107] As Meagan Timney points out in her doctoral dissertation, *Of Factory Girls and Serving Maids* (2009), poetry was a popular choice of literary expression for working-class women not only because it was a "more pragmatic genre than prose," not requiring hours of leisure time to write, but also because the language of poetry gave the working-class women the means of "figuratively reshaping the world around her" through an aesthetic that allowed her to move beyond material demands (8-9).

never encountered (Boos 223; Timney 9-10).[108] Although her poetry as a whole is not autobiographical, the poem that I am exploring as a complement to Andrew's memoir can be read as an autobiographical snapshot, describing a moment of quiet contemplation away from the daily grind of labour in Wills' life. Upon first reading, it is easy to mistake "The Seen and the Unseen" as an escapist fantasy—the "fair maiden" of the poem retreating to a "lone forest hill" in order to experience a transcendent wholeness not available in factory life (1-2). But Wills makes clear that the vehicle of divine manifestation *is* material life and that the body, whatever its state, is a conduit for God's "Light and Love" in the world (10).

Despite their shared vision of embodied redemption, the way that Wills expressed her faith in writing was different from that of Andrew, who also testified to God's saving power within the suffering of everyday life. In a short autobiographical piece published in *The Working Man* on May 5th 1866, Wills describes her life as one of "dreary and monotonous work," which is only made bearable through the "proud consciousness" of earning her own bread *and* the "beauty and brightness" of the world of poetry (qtd. in Boos 233). Unlike Andrew, who wrote mainly out of a sense of duty to her dead friend, Wills wrote because she found that it gave her life meaning by allowing her to escape, if only temporarily, the hardships of labour. The Christian themes in Wills' verse have been downplayed in favour of reading her poems as a deification of poetry itself because she imbues them with the ability to "open the soul," bring about "new worlds," and illuminate

[108] For example, she has a poem called "Zenobia" (1868) about the third-century queen of Palmyra and another called "Koziell" (1868) about a Polish uprising in 1863.

existence with "hope and love" (Boos 233).[109] However, she also writes about the transcendent experiences brought about by poetry as connected to the Christian God. Her own awakening to poetry happened in conjunction with what she calls an "awakening of the entire consciousness" that left her feeling "anxious to be at one with the good Father above" (233). She describes her first encounter with Milton's *Paradise Lost* at the age of fourteen as an epiphanic experience:

> It seemed as if heart, and mind, and soul were aroused all at once, and all things in earth and sky wore a new aspect, and spoke to me with a new voice. When I read Milton's matchless poem my whole soul responded to its unearthly music. I was enraptured, and could scarcely sleep at night for the echoes of the wondrous melody. (233)

In this moment of illumination, the body remains noticeably absent while the heart, mind, and soul are brought together as a poetic trinity. While God is not located directly at the head of this trinity, his presence is assumed through the "unearthly" and "wondrous" language evoked. Likewise, the body lingers in the background of this visionary experience as the material through which poetry is experienced. All of the feelings that Wills describes, even those occurring on the level of the soul (arousal, response, enrapture), turn out to be bodily in nature: she is not able to sleep—a primary somatic function—because of the internal arousal of what her eyes have read. This is not to say

[109] Responding to the critical misconception "that poor women in the nineteenth were constrained by their piety," Boos downplays the religious commitments of female working-class poets, focusing instead on what she identifies as their "moral and ethical" commitments (38). While I agree with her assessment that very little working-class poetry by women of this period was "doctrinal" in nature, I disagree with her assertion that, as such, the appeals to "the Christian deity" found in Ruth Willis's poems are more "rhetorical, metaphorical, or formulaic" than religious (38).

that the epiphanic experience can be explained completely through the body, only that the soul's experience *is* the body's experience even if we are more apt to describe encounters with the divine though the language of the immaterial.

In a poem reminiscent of the Romantic era, Wills translates an experience of sitting and observing nature from the "brow of a lone forest hill" into a numinous encounter with "a Presence divine" (lines 1, 32).[110] As the title "The Seen and the Unseen" suggests, the primary theme of the poem is the connection between the visible, material world as manifest in nature and the invisible world of the divine that is perceived as underlying it by the visionary poet. Underlying the cathedral-like forest with its "canopy" of "dark pines" (8-10), "pale purple splendors" at sunset (19) and a "crystalline ether so deep in its calm" (23), Wills identifies an almost pantheistic spirit that animates both the "heart of nature" and "her own" (4). Drawing on pagan folklore she writes herself into the position of a "priestess of old / lone waiting expectant a god to behold" (25-26), but when the god appears it is the Christian God. The "Father most high" (30) and "Lord of this universe fair" (48) does not, however, appear on a physical level, but reveals Himself through the "soul of the maiden":

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[110] An obvious comparison is to Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798), in which an attentive poet surveying a natural scene notices a godly spirit permeating the material world:

> " . . . And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things" (94-103)

With the One Light and Love was her being pervaden.

Life, joyous, exultant, beat high in her breast:

Her spirit had found its true center of rest. (38-40)

Once again, Wills is brought into unity with the divine as an experience of the spirit, but the body plays an important role as part of the "being" that is pervaded. The invisible spirit of the "One Light and Love" does not have a conduit without the physical body: where would the "life, joyous, [and] exultant" beat without the breast? The last three stanzas of the poem continue to praise the "Lord of the universe fair," whose "smile kindles life" through the sensory experience of the poet (48-49). The "unseen" is exalted for its powers to animate, transform, and bring peace, but its invisible work would not be possible without the corporeal.

While it is easy to see God's connection to nature in the poem, which Wills treats with reverence, His connection with the body is less obvious. We are told that the maiden "climbed the steep path" (3) to "set her gaze" on the beauty of the forest (15) where she "sat musingly still" (4) and felt the "warm heart of nature beat close to her own" as the "dark pine threw down its ripe cones at her feet" (8) under a "canopy over her head" (10). Yet, the narrator's embodied experience gets lost in the otherworldly language, tone, and mood of the poem, despite its positioning as the vantage point through which we come to understand her epiphanic experience. Perhaps this is because, contrary to what one might expect of a factory poet, the body that Wills presents to us is not a labouring body but a contemplative body, and, read autobiographically, a *disabled* contemplative body. In writing herself into the poetic position normally occupied by educated, upper-class men,

the narrator asks for us to recognize the "productive" value of her body beyond its labouring capabilities. Much like romantic poets who served as her models, Wills promotes the value of her body as being located in its ability to channel, as Wordsworth describes it, the "spirit" that "rolls through all things" (101-03). In this way, she calls us to recognize the immanence of a god whose otherworldly powers are dependent on human experience and interpretation to become pertinent realities in everyday life. The moment that the narrator encounters God in "The Seen and the Unseen," her body becomes not just a conduit but also an expression in and of itself of God's grace:

> The Father of Spirits had stooped to His child.
> The stream of her gladness waxed bright in its run
> As a breeze-rippled river that sings in the sun…
> Love floated around her like sunshine… (42-44, 47)

The inter-subjective encounter at work in this scene of bodily resurrection is not between two humans and God, as it was with Jane Andrew, but between a human, God, and the natural world. By merging the natural world with the narrator's embodied experience of the divine, Wills extends the relationship of inter-dependence established in Andrew's redemptive process to the material world outside of the body.[111] God is, therefore, unfolding in both Wills' body and nature, creating, what Lisa Isherwood calls in her incarnational theology, an "intimate, interdependent and co-creative trinity" (36).[112]

[111] In *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), Stacy Alaimo develops the idea of "trans-corporeality," which she defines as "the movement across bodies and nonhuman nature," to theorize the type of symbiotic relationship of mutual creation and dependence between the body and the outside world that Wills hints at here in her poem.

At the end of "The Seen and the Unseen," the narrator climbs back down the "steep hill-path" and re-enters the "earth's thrall" (55, 59), but the God that she encountered in nature remains close as an presence experienced through the "aromas" and "melodies" of "amaranth flowers" and "leafy bowers" (57-58). The metaphorical language that Wills uses to describe God's presence in the world captures the nature of a God who is both transcendent and immanent. Thomas E. Reynolds explains this seemingly paradoxical position:

> Transcendence should not be seen as connoting merely an abstract separation or domineering distance from the world, though metaphors of height and power might suggest this. For the term bespeaks a certain kind of experience in the world, a certain way of the world that attests to something more than or different from the commonplace and mundane. Something sacred or divine comes to pass, designating itself apart from the ordinary. It is a mistake, then, to see God's transcendence as something removed from or outside the world. God's presence is near, experienced within the world. It overflows in the ordinary. (147)

For Jane Andrew and for Ruth Wills, God's presence was experienced through the ordinary life of the body and its connection to the divine force that animates all material life. The politically subversive aspects of their Christian beliefs, which allowed them to understand themselves outside of the social limitations imposed on afflicted bodies under capitalism, also provided them with the knowledge that there was "something more" or

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[112] It is outside of the scope of this project to go into the ecocritcal elements of this theology; however, the co-creative relationship between God, humanity, and the material world suggested by Wills' poem could provide productive avenues for critiquing the lack of ecological awareness in Christian theologies focused on the world-to-come.

"something different" that could perhaps "come to pass" out of their inter-subjective relations. In Chapters Two and Three, I have been suggesting that that divine "something" could be a new political order rooted in solidarity and incarnational living. In the following concluding chapter, I will be using the writings of women from the socialist newspaper *The Labour Prophet* to solidify the elements of this religio-political vision, which arising out of working-class musings of labour and the divine, seeks to break down class and gender divisions.

CHAPTER FOUR ~ THE LABOUR PROPHET & HOPE FOR A NEW RELATIONALITY

> *"After this there passed before her a procession of all the peoples of the earth. There were none missing. She saw those people who had grown strong in the service of mankind, and those who had grown heartsick in the service of self; … those whom ambition had made infamous, and those who by meekness had swayed the world. She saw them all, and her soul knew them by name. Then, as she looked at them she wondered, for she saw that in the breast of each was a heart, and on the heart was the scar she knew, for the heart of each was her own."*
>
> -Maud M. Key, "The Heart of the World" (1895)

To open this final chapter, I would like to return to where we started in Chapter One: with a woman sitting in a window having a vision. The scene above, as described by Maud M. Key in the June 1895 edition of *The Labour Prophet*, is reminiscent of Josephine Butler sitting in her window that warm summer night when she heard the cry out in the darkness, except, in this allegorical piece, the woman is consciously aware of her connection with the spirits populating her vision. The vision begins with a description of the hearts of three different types of people: the first, that of an old labouring man, which "glowed like red gold"; the second, that of a "young" and "powerful" woman, which was "a shrunken, wizened, deformity"; and the third, that of a little child, which was as clear as "crystal through and through" (87). Yet, the point of the vision is not to highlight the differences between the man, woman, and child, but their connection through the common possession of a heart wounded by capitalism. On the hearts of all of the people who appear in the vision, including the "peoples of the earth" described in the above quotation, the visionary sees a scar that she recognizes as part of her own woundedness. As she comes to realize that "the heart of each was her own," her heart grows bigger, the scar disappears, and she becomes one with "the Heart of God" (87).

The scene that Maud M. Key sets in "The Heart of the World" perfectly captures the central tenents of belief of the Labour Church—a Christian socialist movement that began in 1891 and spread rapidly through Northern England during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Founded by John Trevor, a Unitarian minister who experienced the orthodoxy of Christianity as too confining, the Labour Church's primary goal was to dethrone the god of wealth not by the usual socialist means of economic reform but by "bringing Light and Truth to the souls of men" through "free spiritual activity" ("The New Faith" 37). Responding to both the economic depression of the 1880s and the openness to new expressions of faith that characterized the last half of century, the Labour Church Movement offered an alternative to traditional forms of Christianity by suggesting that God dwells in the world, not beyond it, and that the socialist movement is part of His naturally unfolding plan to bring society to a place of universal equality.[113] In the opening service of the Labour Church in Manchester in October of 1891, Trevor situated his new religion solidly within a socialist framework by preaching about the failure of the existing churches to support workers and arguing in favour of a new "church" to support the labour movement's inherently religious nature (Bevir 218).

The early editions of the church's monthly periodical, *The Labour Prophet*, equally emphasized the religious nature of socialism and positioned the Labour Church as a "living gospel" through which God was bringing about the justice promised in the New

[113] There has been very little scholarly writing about *The Labour Prophet*. Besides two articles from over thirty years ago, Stanley Pierson's "John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement, 1891-1900" (1960) and Stephen Yeo's "A New Life: The Religion of Socialism, 1883-1896" (1977), Mark Bevir is the only scholar to explore the conjunction of religion and socialism in *The Labour Prophet* in detail. His book, *The Making of British Socialism* (2011), was crucial in shaping my understanding of the Labour Church Movement and its place in the political, social, and religious climate of Victorian Britain.

Testament.[114] In an essay entitled "Why is the Labour Movement a Religious Movement?" in the August 1892 edition, the author, whom we are only told is "a weaver," aligned the mission of the Labour Movement directly with that of Jesus by celebrating its focus on emancipation:

> Surely the Labour Movement is a religious movement in the highest sense, as it is working for the benefit of the poorest of us. It is "God in us working out our salvation." Any movement having for its object the emancipation of the labouring classes must in itself be a righteous movement. The freeing of wage-slaves, the lifting up of the fallen, helping upward and onward the poor and distressed, is a religion that would have received the support of Jesus Christ Himself. (62)

The image of Jesus as a "simple-minded Galilean" who "threw up his carpentering" to fight against economic and social oppression was a popular one in Labour Church rhetoric (Trevor qtd. in Harris 125). However, as the weaver's essay points out, salvation in the Labour Church was not achieved through Christ's redeeming sacrifice, but through the efforts of a living God who was working to make all human engagement with the world Christ-like. While this emphasis on the immanent nature of God and the divinity of all humankind differentiated the Labour Church from traditional forms of transcendent Christianity, it also aligned the movement with liberal forms of social gospel that were brewing underground in the writings of women such as the ones included in this dissertation. In this final chapter, I will use the writings of socialist women in *The Labour*

[114] I found the early editions of *The Labour Prophet* (1892-1895) at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, and the later editions (1896-1897) in the British Library in London. Many thanks to the archivists at both of these sites for helping me find and copy the sources.

Prophet to draw together the strands of the incarnational feminist theology that I have highlighted emerging in the lives and labours of Victorian working women to create a unified picture of the radical politics of class and gender emancipation underlying their collective vision.

The Labour Church was unique among socialist groups at the end of the century for including writing by women that addressed both class and gender oppression in their periodical.[115] At the time, socialism was still highly andocentric, concerning itself primarily with the rights of male workers, and socialist women struggled to define a role for themselves in a milieu that was resistant to mixed-sexed politics. As Julie Hannam and Karen Hunt note in *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (2002), the open hostility that they faced was the result of both gender bias—the idea that political leadership was inappropriate for women because it distracted from their primary duties as wives and mothers—and fear that, by introducing the question of gender, women would distract from the class struggle (80-81). In order to address these objections, socialist women were forced to make gender a part their political identity regardless of whether or not they saw women's emancipation as central to their politics. Their method of balancing their politics as socialists and as women varied from one person to the next, but there was one thing that they universally agreed upon: that their aim was distinct from that of the

[115] Although women's voices were featured in short articles and letters in the official newspapers of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) during the 1890s, the topics they covered remained, for the most part, safely within the limits of andocentric socialism (Hannam and Hunt 61). This was not the case for the women's voices found in *The Labour Prophet*, which was not attached to a specific party and could therefore afford to explore issues that risked offending readers.

"bourgeois women's movement," which focused on patriarchy as opposed to capitalism as the primary cause of oppression (Hannam and Hunt 17). The writings of fin-de-siècle socialist women as a whole focused on the question that was already circulating in wider socialist discourse of how to bring about a society based on solidarity, equality, and community by transforming material conditions; the women writing for *The Labour Prophet* added a spiritual dimension to the debate, naming the "Spirit of God" as the driving force of that transformation.[116]

The reason that I am including their writings as the focus of my concluding chapter is that they overtly articulate a political vision of human solidarity and material equality arising out of the workings of a God who is both a labourer and a feminist. In doing so, they create a political framework for the radical theologies underlying the writings of Butler, Cullwick, Andrew, and Wills. It is not my intention to subsume the personal theologies of each of these women and the specific contexts out of which they arose into a uniform Christian socialist-feminist politics, but to highlight the collective religio-political vision that I see arising in their autobiographical accounts. That vision is built on three primary beliefs: 1) God is immanent and, therefore, body and spirit are one; 2) all women, regardless of socio-economic status, are living embodiments of Christ and, as such, even the most unlikely forms of female labour can be understood as participating

[116] It is important to note that, although *The Labour Prophet* provided a space for women to challenge the conventional separation of women from public life and explore the connections between feminism and socialism, the total number of articles written by women in the six years that it was in circulation amount to only a fraction of the total publication. A rough estimate based on my own reading of the newspaper is that women wrote fewer than five percent of the articles. Since their ability to publish in socialist periodicals was limited, socialist women often turned to fiction (plays, short stories, and novels) to explore the more controversial issues in women's lives, such as "personal relationships, marriages, and sexuality" (Hannam and Hunt 60).

in God's unfolding plan for equality in the world; 3) when used to emphasize the relationships of interdependence at the heart of human existence, the Christian narrative of incarnation holds within it the potential to dismantle the hierarchies and material disparity caused by capitalism. Remaining within the spirit of productive cross-class conversation, I will be drawing on the writings of two well-known socialist women, Fyvie Mayo and Isabella O. Ford, as well as the writings of Maud M. Key, Dorothy Scott, R.L. Gorton, and Grace Andrews—all women whose biographical information has not been documented in the historical record.[117] Although they may have been middle-class women (and, in the case of R.L. Gorton, perhaps not a woman at all), their non-existence in the story of the Victorian feminist struggle for female labour rights aligns them with the working-class women in this study. It is my argument that the revolutionary potential of female labour put forward by the women of *The Labour Prophet* translates what was largely a personalized struggle in the autobiographical accounts of working-class women into a political framework that has the power to present a collective challenge to the structural inequalities created by modern capitalism. Furthermore, I argue that this challenge, which combines solidarity and service, is one that that is worth re-animating in our continuing contemporary quest for gender and class equality.

[117] Fyvie Mayo, also known by her pseudonym Edward Garrett, was an author and poet of moderate success who became known in social reforming circles as a socialist, pacifist, and anti-racism campaigner (Moore 72). Isabella O. Ford was a well-known pioneer of women's trade unionism and a founding member of the Independent Labour Party (Holton 121). I could not find any biographical information for the other women included in this chapter.

God's Unifying Immanence

The story from which the epigraph of this chapter was taken resembles not only Josephine Butler's vision of flight but also Ruth Wills' poem of redemption because it locates women at the center of divine revelation as well as emphasizing the connection of all human hearts through God's immanence. Believing that God was present in material life, the Labour Church encouraged its members to seek out the divine spark in all things (Bevir 281)—an invitation that allowed women to become "theologians" in their own right through their everyday engagements with the physical world. In "The Heart of the Hills," Grace Andrews tells the story of a lonely young woman who, living in desolation, tries to seek God by removing herself from the world. Fleeing her village, the woman heads to a "mountain peak" to escape human society and find peace (74). But, what she finds instead is a God who, present in "all times and in all seasons," calls her to return to the village and learn to find him in the midst of the "chaos" and "disorder" of life (74). In the context of the Labour Church, the call for the young woman to abandon the distinction she makes between an otherworldly divinity and everyday life is part of a larger call for church members to embrace a material spirituality. The words that close the final paragraph of the story, "Her life, God's life, was there," emphasize a triune relationship between individual humans, an all-encompassing godhead, and the world in which none of the three stands above the other. This vision of a collectivity built on the belief in an immanent God who unifies and equalizes is the vision at the root of the labouring practices of the women in this study.

The recognition of the unity of body and soul that I identified in the labour of Hannah Cullwick, who washed Munby's feet as a means of expressing divine love, is explicitly named in *The Labour Prophet* as an essential element in communing with God. In an article in the July 1894 edition of the paper, Fyvie Mayo identifies labour as a form of worship, going as far as to say that anyone who labours is in fact a "worshipper of God" even if they deny him "with their lips" (93). Criticizing worship in traditional churches for expressing a longing for connection rather than working to create it, Mayo advocates an embodied engagement with the divine by working alongside God as he labours in the world. Rather than naming Jesus as the exemplar, Mayo cites God as humanity's "great Fellow-Labourer":

> It is not by your own will that you breathe; it is not by our will that our hair is growing. The Great Labourer is doing all this for us—"the Father worketh hitherto." But of my own will I speak to you—and of your own will you listen. Therefore, "the father worketh hitherto, and now *we work* also!" (93)

Although the image of God as the Great Labourer, arising from the story of creation in Genesis, also existed within mainstream forms of Victorian Christianity, the notion of his ongoing labour having spiritual as well as political implications was unique to the Labour Church movement. A God in complete solidarity with working men and women, labouring alongside them as part of daily life, erases the hierarchies established by hegemonic powers invested in the idea of God as "King," "Taskmaster," or "Judge" (93). Unlike the middle-class gospel of work, which sacralized labour on the basis of its potential as a personally ennobling practice (i.e. a means of self-improvement, a way of

refining individual moral sensibilities), the Christian socialist idea of labour locates its sacred value in its status as a shared activity that connects humans to others and God. The value of labour is, therefore, not judged on the basis of individual profit but rather on the basis of its collective benefit. In Labour Church terms, this means that the work of someone like Hannah Cullwick, which benefits Arthur Munby uniquely, can also be understood as having wider political implications by participating in an unseen, divinely-ordained plan to undermine the hierarchies of capitalism that, collectively, God and his fellow labourers are working to unfold. This theologically inspired project is in keeping with, and perhaps even reveals something of the disavowed essence of, the allegedly secularist Marxist politics, which mobilizes collective labour with the aim of undermining class divisions. The Labour Church movement infuses the counter-intuitive, deeply subversive Marxist vision of undermining capitalism *through* labour with divine purpose.

Women as Revolutionaries

In Josephine Butler's autobiographical writings, we encountered a woman struggling to claim a place for herself in the public sphere as a reformer and social justice advocate. She was, to use the language of the Labour Church, attempting to participate in the workings of the spirit by "bringing Light and Truth to the souls of men (sic)" with regards to the plight of prostitutes ("The New Faith" 37). But, as I point out in Chapter One, the patriarchal narrative framework and language Butler used to deliver her message failed to capture the complex role that the prostitutes played as fellow labourers in her mission to have the CD Acts repealed. While socialist discourse was also deeply

patriarchal in the nineteenth century, Isabella O. Ford—a well-known trade union activist and women's rights advocate—chose to reject, rather than play into, the patriarchal lineage of socialism in order to claim a place for women in politics. Writing thirty years after Butler, she was part of a new generation of feminist women who, building on the work of their predecessors, felt relatively free, by comparison, to claim a space for themselves in public life. Responding to the complaint that women are too "stupid," "tired," and "selfish," to care about labour politics, Ford reminds *Labour Prophet* readers about the "unflinching ardour and heroism" of women involved in past revolutions by tracing the origins of an already existing women's history of radical leftist politics out of her own biography (162). Emphasizing the matrilineal origins of the socialist movement, she writes:

> From my childhood, owing to my mother's influence, I have believed in Revolutions. I have known we must never be afraid of "the younger generation," never scoff at, or think irreverently, of our upheavals of thought. My mother, and some of her people, knew and aided some of the noblest reformers the world has seen; so that when patriots and revolutionaries have been denounced, and when they were women, reviled as only women can be reviled, I have known that they were in the right, and that they were our saviours. (162)

Aligning the older generation of feminists with Christ and his counter-cultural social agenda, Ford positions socialist women as a natural outgrowth of God's desire for human freedom. She writes about freedom as coming to fruition through the efforts of visionary women not afraid of being reviled for their steadfast belief in women's equality. Drawing

on her own Quaker upbringing, in which men and women were considered "absolutely equal" before God, Ford urges her socialist counterparts to stand up against the "silly sneering" still being leveled at women and make a space for them within socialist politics. She is able to claim openly what Butler was forced to couch in masculinist, exclusionary terms: God uses women to bring about revolutionary change in the world and, as such, they should be given the freedom to speak, write, labour, and connect in whatever ways they feel led, even if those ways violate social norms.

In "The Wife's Sunday Out," an article written from the perspective of a labouring man's wife in the February 1892 edition of *The Labour Prophet*, "Dorothy Scott" addresses the criticism that was often leveled at women that they "don't care" about the labour movement.[118] Suggesting that women are not, in fact, indifferent, but simply less enthusiastic because they are not given the opportunity to be involved, Scott encourages the male readership to "change places" with their wives "next Sunday" and allow the women to "fill the hall" at the socialist meeting (15). Playing on the "absurdity" of her suggestion that the men stay home to attend to the domestic while women go to a political meeting, Scott encourages socialist men to stop complaining that women do not care and begin bringing them to meetings instead:

> Tell us not that your wives don't care; tell us not that they are unsympathetic.
>
> They do care; they do want to know all about these unions and Eight Hours Bills .

[118] As the editor of *The Labour Prophet* noted in the April 1892 edition of the paper, the name "Dorothy Scott" was an assumed named, which allowed the author to remain annonymous. Some of the other anonymously published articles in the periodical also seem to be penned by women who wanted to keep their identities secret. For example, "The Workman's Wife" from the March 1892 edition—an article that highlights why socialist politics also benefit women—is attributed only to "one of them."

> . . If you let them come along side by side with you, life will be ten times better and more worth living. (15)

The positioning of women as both "wives" and "comrades" walking with their husbands "side by side" towards a better future is a theme that runs throughout the early years of the Labour Prophet. In a short story entitled "The Agitator's Wife" by an unidentified author in the February 1894 edition, the wife of an injured union man comes to the rescue of striking Dockers by raising their impoverished spirits and rousing popular support for their cause. Taking the place of her sick husband in the committee room, Mrs. Arnold strategizes throughout the night, organizes collection boxes, and sends women out in the morning to collect money for the starving wives and children of the striking men. By convincing the town doctor and, by extension, many of the other middle-class people in town to support the striking workers, Mrs. Arnold "turns the tide" of the labour dispute, which ends three weeks later "on the old terms" that the workers had wanted (28). In this story, the characters encounter the exact situation that Dorothy Scott had set out in her article two years earlier: the husband and wife switch places so that the man stays home and the woman enters the political world; however, this time, the scenario is not presented as absurd and is allowed to play itself out to the fullest. Mrs. Arnold is presented as a comrade who not only walks "side by side" with her husband, but is also allowed to walk in alone to meetings and sit at the table with those making the decisions. For violating the social norms that limited female labour to the domestic realm, Mrs. Arnold is repeatedly labeled an "extraordinary woman" by the other socialists in the story.

The women included in this project all violated the social norms of female labour in their own ways: Butler by seeking and finding a public vocation; Cullwick by enjoying her labour too much; Andrew by not labouring at all; and Wills by turning manual labour into literary labour. What they all had in common was the steadfast belief that God was motivating and shaping their transgressions. Although framed exclusively to support socialist ends, R.L. Gorton's article "Britomart, The Lady Night" from the August 1895 edition of *The Labour Prophet* encourages women to courageously follow their divinely inspired inner motivations, even when faced with the most "adverse criticism" (124). Using the example of Spenser's Britomart from *The Faerie Queene*, Gorton celebrates women who have "the courage to learn, the courage to venture, and the courage to follow [their] ideal[s] to the end" (125).[119] Even though Britomart was an emblem of chastity in the epic poem, she was also known for her perseverance and strength in her relentless quest to free a male knight from captivity. By celebrating this obvious gender role reversal, R.L. Gorton encourages socialist women to take on an attitude of self-

[119] Gorton positions Britomart as a type of "New Woman"—a controversial figure of female self-sufficiency and independence that became the poster girl of the nineteenth-century women's movement. Many articles in *The Labour Prophet* dealing with gender also address the debates surrounding the New Woman that were occurring not only in socialist circles but also in society at large. For example, Caroline D. Martyn's "Women in the World" (LP, June 1895, 97-98) and Isabella O. Ford's "Woman in the Labour Movement" (LP, Dec. 1894, 161-162). Ford's article concludes with the radical suggestion that the labour movement should not only strive to include, but also to *create* the New Woman: "Surely the New Woman, the intelligent, questioning human being, is the one we want in the labour movement; and, surely, therefore, one of the chief objects of that movement is to produce such a woman" (162). For more about the figure of the New Woman and the gender bias "new women" faced in the political realm at the end of the nineteenth century, see Sally Ledger's groundbreaking book *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997) and Ann Ardis's *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990).

confidence and righteous determination normally reserved for men even in the face of ridicule:

> The women who feel a compelling voice within urging them to some new vocation or to lift up their voice against the sins of the age meet with slander and ridicule for their portion. The world… mistakes their motives. Let Women Pioneers learn from Britomart to listen only to the voice within—despising the world's detraction. (125)

In comparing Britomart's inner motivations to those of "pioneering" women in the nineteenth century, Gorton claims a space for women like the ones in my study in an ongoing history that recognizes women's visionary impulses as central in bringing about revolutionary change. Each of the women whose autobiographical writing is considered in this dissertation understood herself to be fighting against a different "sin of the age" (i.e. unfair legislation, middle-class pride, social exclusion, economic precarity), but at the root of each of their struggles was a belief in the possibility of transforming the structures and discourses that attempt to naturalize social and economic inequality. The strength of their convictions—the ability to follow the "compelling voice within"—came directly from their faith that God was the source of the inner voice leading them towards a more ethical way of living and engaging with others.

Unity in Difference

Unity across difference was one of the key messages of the Labour Church, which prided itself on being a classless movement. John Trevor and his followers believed that

the labour movement was not meant to cause "strife" and "antagonism" between the classes, but, instead, meant to "unite members of all classes in working for the Abolition of Commercial slavery" ("As Others See Us" 146).[120] Although expressed in highly masculinist language, this progressive view of cross-class relations, with its emphasis on the "common universal Brotherhood of humanity" (176), articulates the vision of solidarity I have been arguing is at the heart of incarnational living.[121] While capitalism promotes what the Labour Church calls "unbrotherly competitive strife" (176), the women in this study all worked for what they believed to be the common good, even when social conditions forced them into positions of subjection. Although not always able to identify the universal quality of their individual experience of oppression, they all self-identified as part of a larger body of people united by a shared belief that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female" (Galatians

[120] As discussed in Chapter One (see pgs. 73-76), the plight of industrial workers was often compared to the plight of African slaves in the Victorian era. Rhetorically drawing on a struggle for justice that, by mid-century, most Victorians agreed was a righteous one, reformers and socialists began using the language of slavery to highlight the oppressive conditions of life that many working-class people were forced to endure under capitalism. Also called "wage slavery" or "industrial slavery," the metaphor of "commercial slavery" was used to highlight the control and power the factory system exerted on the lives of workers, who had little autonomy because of their immediate and total dependence on the meager wages they earned. As Joseph Persky explains in "Wage Slavery" (1998), "the factory system took over the workers' time, micromanaged their activity, disciplined them for infractions, and destroyed the order of their lives . . . Although the slave was owned while the worker was rented, they both worked not as independent producers for the market, but as dependent agents subject to direct and, on many occasions, coercive discipline" (628). It was part of the Labour Church's mission statement to emancipate not only the workers but also labour itself from the "economic oppression and social injustice" that held them both "in bondage" (LP, Aug. 1896, 123).

[121] Although easily read as exclusionary, John Trevor is intentional in his situating of women squarely within the "brotherhood of man." In the final lines of an article about May Day in the May 1895 edition of *The Labour Prophet*, he emphasizes solidarity between the sexes as key to labour movement success: "The people are brothers all, Tyrants alone are our enemies. May this day of international brotherhood . . . be as the dawning of the day of social redemption for the disinherited of both sexes!" (70-71).

3:28). The interdependence of all humans, a fundamental (albeit often denied) condition of our existence, is given a language through Christ, whose physical body is sacrificed in order to create a collective body of people. The body of Christ, a theological term used to describe the unity of believers, has been treated in many Christian sects as exclusive, but in the Christian socialist vision of the Labour Church it is radically inclusive, encompassing all of humanity. Linking the gospel message directly to the socialist notion of "human brotherhood," Labour Church members prided themselves on returning to the "true message of Christ" of emancipation for all oppressed people on the basis of the "inherent worth and dignity of everyone who comes into this world" (Grubb 174).

This vision of universal equality put forward by the Labour Church in words was not as easy to put into practice, especially when it came to women and minorities. Although I have been emphasizing the progressive vision of the movement, it is also important to note that, like the women in this study, members of the movement struggled to live out their ideals, often doing so imperfectly due to difficult circumstances and enduring prejudices. In a July 1895 article, "The Brotherhood of Man," Fyvie Mayo draws attention to these prejudices by criticizing the labour movement for excluding migrant workers in their definition of "fellow labourers." Drawing on both Christian and socialist principles, Mayo takes a solid stance in favour of extending solidarity to the European labourers entering the British workforce at the end of the nineteenth century. Reminding readers that the worst kind of selfishness often comes from those who imagine themselves to be unselfish, she argues for the equality of all workers regardless of origins:

> When we claim our own right to labour, we must not forget that others also have the right to labour. Every facility or opportunity which we claim is ours only because it is the equal right of every human being. We are only justified in contending for our rights because we are contending for theirs also. Above all, may every working man and woman lay to heart that no true worker anywhere is the enemy of other workers. (147)

Rallying workers around the common enemy of the "idler" whose interests she describes as being "always inimical" to "the rights of workers," Mayo positions labour as the ultimate unifier, making all other differences inconsequential. She argues for the extension of the socialist principle of the "brotherhood of man" not just to women but also to all people regardless of race or nation. Inviting readers to support an organization that was seeking to extend "brotherhood" across national borders, Mayo encourages socialists to adopt its ideology inside Britain:

> The motto of the society is "Fellow Workers," and it explains itself briefly as "Unity our basis: Love our principle: Truth our method: Justice our aim." It has a president and a council, including people of both sexes, and of many countries, creeds, and classes. (148)

The four principles that Mayo advocates—unity, love, truth, and justice—represent a combination of Christian and socialist values, but, as Mayo reminds us, they have no meaning if not lived out in both belief and practice.[122] What makes the women's writing

[122] Particularly in the later years of *The Labour Prophet*, women were extending the principles of the Labour Church beyond the socialist movement to include concerns over foreign policy, British military intervention, and even animal rights. For example, Maud Vernables Vernon's "In a

in this study subversive is not the belief system at its core, elements of which were shared by many Victorians, but the way in which their writing was grounded in lived, unpredictable, and messy experiences of interpersonal relationships that cut across social demarcations.

Clearing Vision

In the end, the Labour Church movement was short-lived, lasting only until the First World War with its numbers decreasing rapidly over the first decade of the twentieth century.[123] In *The Making of British Socialism* (2011), Mark Bevir attributes its downfall to a crisis of identity caused by its insistence on being a movement defined by both political principles and religious beliefs (296). As he explains, the belief that God was working through the labour movement in a naturally unfolding way meant that any attempt to politically strategize beyond simply spreading and living out the gospel of socialism risked undermining the primary and distinguishing principle of the Labour Church itself (Bevir 296). As the official socialist parties, with their concrete aims and

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Distant Land" (LP, May 1895, 71); Mrs. Mona Caird's "The Sanctuary of Mercy" (LP, March 1895, 33); and Mary M. Mark's "No Concern of Ours" (LP, February 1896, 25). Although it is outside of the scope of this project, it is interesting to note that the women writing for *The Labour Prophet* not only brought gender into Christian socialist discourse, but also introduced the question of race into conversations about worker solidarity. In "Brotherhood of Man," discussed above, Mayo addresses the growing xenophobia in Britain brought about by an influx of migrant labourers at the end of the nineteenth century. The perceived threat of migrant workers led to an rise in racism and the eventual creation of the 1905 Aliens Act—the first legislation to control/limit migration, especially Jewish migration, into Britain from eastern Europe. For more on this history, see Panikos Panayi's *An Immigration History of Britain* (2010).

[123] While at its height in 1895 the movement had 50 churches all over Britain, there were only 20 Labour churches by 1902 and, after a brief period of revival in 1906 following the electoral success of the Labour Party, the Labour Church ceased to exist completely by the outbreak of the First World War (Bevir 290).

tangible political agendas, gained strength and numbers, many Labour Church members turned their attention to the exclusively political side of the labour movement. Refusing to deny the spiritual component of their socialist politics, the Labour Church movement died out, and its death has been recorded in socialist history as a triumph of secularization (Bevir 290). Although it is undeniable that the movement's decision to remain in the liminal space between religion and socialist politics led to its demise, it would be inaccurate to conclude that that space was, therefore, subsequently filled with an exclusively political vision.

In "Women and Socialism," a pamphlet published in 1907, Isabella O. Ford echoes many of the sentiments she expressed in an article about women in the labour movement in *The Labour Prophet* from more than a decade earlier. Although she does not explicitly name "the spirit of God" as the driving force of positive change in the world, her appeal for readers to see beyond the immediate and recognize an undercurrent pushing humanity towards greater equality bears unmistakable echoes of Labour Church discourse:

> We think now that we understand and worship love, justice and compassion, but understanding of them is a mere blurred vision compared with what, in the future, it will be when men and women stand together, helping and teaching one another as equals and friends, instead of as now often living alongside one another as strangers, sometimes even as enemies. Our lives at present are mostly quite different from our ideas . . . [but] slowly our eyes are opening . . . (14).

The notion that society is progressing towards a future of equality, mutuality, and solidarity that humans can only partially comprehend with their limited vision has its precedence in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul reminds the Corinthians to rely on love as a guiding light because "for now we see in a mirror, dimly" what we will later "know fully" as we mature in our humanity. The love that Paul advocates is a selfless love for others inspired by a God who works to transform material reality through the heart. As Ford points out in the above passage, understanding the "idea" of love, justice, and compassion is only a partial fulfillment of the vision of an equitable society; the key to moving from understanding to lived reality is, as Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians, embodying the principles in our everyday interactions even if we cannot fully see their impact. And the story of a God who came to earth to serve others would have given the women in this study the strength to live out their convictions. The stories motivating social movements of the twentieth century have become more diverse, arising from varied personal, religious, national, and social narratives of freedom from oppression, yet the approach advocated by Ford and the other women in this study of "standing together, helping and teaching one another as equals and friends" (14) continues to resonate as an indispensible element of the social progression towards universal equality.

Service and Solidarity

The incarnational feminist theology that I have argued emerges in the writings of Victorian working women during the last half of the nineteenth century is rooted in both service and solidarity. Each of the women adopted an ethic of service in her own way.

Butler understood herself to be serving both God and the prostitutes through her work, but she was only able to make her service public by hiding the connection she felt with the prostitutes. Cullwick physically and mentally took on the position of the lowest servant even when she did not have to as a way of navigating a space in which she could both fulfill her role as Munby's partner while still remaining true to her Christian vision of solidarity with the poor. Andrew challenged the role of the passive working-class recipient in Victorian philanthropic exchanges despite the fact that her disability offered few other socially acceptable roles by becoming a spiritual companion to her benefactress. In claiming her own spiritual authority, she successfully renegotiated the hierarchies implicit in the middle-class narrative of service. Wills likewise redefined service by fulfilling and exceeding the demands of her labour to include modes of self-expression and fulfillment normally reserved for middle-class subjects without denying her bodily vulnerability. Each of these women creatively challenged dominant notions of service to express an embodied solidarity that transgresses oppressive social divisions. Informed by a Christian vision of the inter-relational nature of human existence, the women were able to foster a collective sense of community across class difference, prompting a deep rethinking of the basic opposition between service as a middle-class ideology and solidarity as an expression of exclusively working-class interests.

These two distinct modes of relationality, which were solidified during the nineteenth century as the *modus operandi* of separate classes seeking an alternative to capitalist individualism, are presented by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* (1958) as diametrically opposed. Williams argues that the idea of service arises out of a

bourgeois understanding of the nature of social relationships wherein there will always be hierarchies that need to be managed rather than dismantled (329). As he sees it, the "unselfishness" of serving others exists within a larger "selfishness" of maintaining the *status quo*, which is why service by those in power has historically taken the form of civilizing and colonizing (329). While service has been presented to the working classes as a form of solidarity, Williams argues that it is inferior to true solidarity, which, arising out of the labour movement, is built on a working-class ethic of "active mutual responsibility" and "common betterment" (333). Overall, this project affirms Williams' thesis by suggesting that equality can only be achieved through solidarity, but it also calls into question the firm line that he draws between two forms of ethical and political engagement that become quite complicated, nuanced, and entangled in practice. Written into the distinction he makes between solidarity and service is the assumption that those who are "in service" (i.e. employed to serve the middle and upper classes) would or never could freely choose to be "of service" from their positions of subjection. Even though it is true that it is impossible to divorce the ideal of service entirely from middle-class ideology, the women in this study prove that service can also be subversive. As I have shown, it is the biblical examples provided by not only Jesus, but also Mary Magdalene and Ruth, of a servanthood rooted in the relinquishment of power and self-interest for the sake of a collective good that provided Butler, Cullwick, Andrew, and Wills the counter-narrative necessary to re-claim the revolutionary potential of service.

The autobiographical accounts included in this project have demonstrated that, when rooted in a desire for connection and a genuine willingness to move beyond the

confines and comforts of one's own subject position, service can act as a catalyst for cross-class solidarity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines solidarity as "the quality of being perfectly united or at one in some respect, especially in interests, sympathies, or aspirations." Williams locates the roots of working-class solidarity in a common feeling grounded in an egalitarian practice of self-giving that is not aggrandizing or vertical but horizontal in its orientation. Despite Marxism's general suspicion and even dismissal of organized religion, we can identify a parallel horizontality in the gospel itself. The vision of service that Jesus puts forward is a radically equalizing one wherein even a god is required to labour for others in the way of a servant. In Luke 22:27, Jesus says to his disciples, "For who is greater, the one is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." Subverting the false social logic that naturalizes hierarchies, Jesus calls for solidarity between those who "sit at the table" and "those who serve" on the basis of a shared belief that God, as exemplified by his son, desires equality for all. Although the message seems relatively simple, both Marxism and Christianity have struggled to realize their vision of universal equality. This struggle is not the result of a flaw in their informing visions, but rather a sign of the power of capitalism and patriarchy in an inherently broken world where the dominant social structures make it difficult to live selflessly.

In light of not only their common struggle but also their shared belief that equality is both desirable and possible, Marxism and Christianity, as a combined force, can give us hope and inspiration for the social struggles we continue to face in the contemporary context. In a comment in *The Labour Prophet* from October 1895, Fyvie Mayo observed:

"it is terribly hard to be unselfish in a crowd where we are fighting for dear life" (147). The terms of the struggle for life have changed over the last hundred years, but our human reaction to protect our individual interests when times get tough has not. Precarious labour, long work hours, insecure futures, generalized indebtedness, and an erosion of the social welfare system—oppressive conditions that working-class women have lived under throughout history—are now steadily extending to wider segments of the population. In an era where social hierarchies are becoming increasingly entrenched even while the illusion of their eradication grows, we might look to the kinds of liminal and sometimes uncomfortable but productive spaces that the women in my study carved out for themselves in daily life to draw attention to but also challenge their own subjection. What would happen if, instead of allowing the pressures of capitalism to divide us, we followed the example of these women and lived fully from a place of belief in a unifying human and divine connection that lies deeper than the individual struggle for life?

EPILOGUE

During the time I have been writing this dissertation, two significant events have occurred that particularly speak to the themes I have raised. The first was the worldwide Occupy Movement, as it unfolded in London, England. Here, anti-capitalist protesters gathered and camped on the church-owned grounds outside of St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral after being prevented from occupying the London Stock Exchange. Initially the church was supportive of the protesters, refusing to cede to the city's pressure to evict them from church property. However, four and a half months later, on February 28th 2012, after much internal and external controversy, church officials gave permission to the government to send in police officers to forcibly dismantle the camp ("Occupy London: timeline"). Although the eviction was largely peaceful, the sense of betrayal was palpable amongst protesters, many of whom pointed out the hypocrisy of an institution claiming solidarity with the poor while siding with the rich under the guise of restoring order and peace.[124]

One year later, to commemorate the anniversary of the start of the Occupy encampment outside of St. Paul's, four female protesters chained themselves to the base

[124] *The Guardian Newspaper* documented the protesters' reactions in the days following the eviction on their news blog. The tragedy of the situation was captured well through the words of an Occupy spokesperson named George Barda: "We were hoping the cathedral would provide some sort of sanctuary for us on the steps but that wasn't to be . . . it shouldn't be surprising - given that seven out of the nine trustees of St Paul's are ex-head of this bank or this asset management company - that they have sided roughly with the corporation and not with genuine Christian principles..." ("Occupy London Protesters Evicted," Feb. 28, 2012). Another notable reaction was that of Jonathan Bartley, the director of the Christian think-tank Ekklesia, who told *The Guardian*: "The tragedy is that while Christians were praying on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral, the cathedral gave permission for them to be forcibly and violently removed. The cathedral has backed and colluded in this eviction" (Ball and Quinn, Feb. 28 2012).

of the pulpit during an evensong service in the Cathedral (Topping, "Occupy Protesters Chain"). The image of the women, all wearing white, chained together, trying to deliver a message counter to the one being spoken from the pulpit, stood in stark contrast to the masculine face of the Anglican Church during the Occupy Movement.[125] The photos that accompanied articles about the Church's response to the protests were mostly of white, highly educated, middle- and upper-class men, wearing religious vestments that were meant to signal their power and authority in making decisions about what is best for society ("Occupy London: timeline").[126] The four women, whose lack of power was signaled by their position at the foot of the pulpit, delivered their message through the Bible verses scrawled on their bodies and an open umbrella placed in front of them that read: "Throw the money changers out of the temple!" In a longer statement delivered to St. Paul's, they further explained: "In the fight for economic justice Jesus threw the money changers out of the temple, but you invited them in and instead evicted us" (qtd. in *Metro News*, "Occupy Protesters Chain"). The embodied protest of the women, one of whom pushed herself out of her wheelchair to lay prostrate on the ground below the pulpit, was made all the more powerful when they bowed their heads respectfully during

[125] See Neil Sears' article "Occupied… Again!" in *The Daily Mail Online* (Feb. 14, 2012) for detailed photographs of the female protesters as well as a link to a video taken during their protest.

[126] Although they had differing views of the protest, some supportive and others not, the public "faces" of the Anglican Church during the protest were all men: Dr. Giles Fraser (Canon Chancellor of St Paul's), Reverend Graeme Knowles (Dean of St. Paul's), Richard Chartres (Bishop of London), and Rowan Williams (Archbishop of Canterbury). For the last twenty years, female clergy and their supporters have challenged the masculine face of the Church of England by fighting for changes to ecclesiastical legislation that would allow for women to be appointed as bishops. The lengthy and painful struggle finally came to an end in July of this year (2014) when the church's national assembly voted in favour of allowing female bishops.

the times of prayer in the service. In showing this respect, the women, who may or may not have been Christians, attempted to garner respect for feminist concerns too often excluded from the Church's doctrines and practice. In fact, one of the main reasons that they claimed to have staged the protest was that the dean of the Cathedral was refusing to meet and speak with them about the eviction, effectively excluding them from official religious discourse (Topping, "Occupy Protesters Chain"). This example from the Occupy London Movement illustrates the contemporary recurrence of the tensions I have identified in the lives, labours, and writings of the Victorian women included in this dissertation. The illusion of control maintained by the powerful, who, in this case were the masculine leaders of the Church of England, continues to be undercut by women presenting embodied challenges to oppressive economic and social systems.

A second significant event that occurred while I was writing this dissertation was the appointment of a new pope, Pope Francis, whose popularity as "the people's pope" was solidified for many through the images of him washing the feet of women, people with disabilities, and prisoners during a Maundy Thursday ritual that was normally reserved exclusively for men (Gallagher, "Pope Francis Washes"). Despite critiques from some quarters, Francis's acts have largely been celebrated as progressive gestures of inclusion, Christian humility, and service. Francis himself celebrates his actions as being in line with those of Christ: "Jesus made a gesture, a job, the service of a slave, a servant . . . And he leaves this inheritance to us: We need to be servants to one another" (qtd. in Dockterman, "Pope Washes Feet"). Acknowledging the progressive elements of Pope Francis's inclusive notion of service, we might also pause to remember the largely

uncelebrated work of Victorian working-class women like Hannah Cullwick who supply an unacknowledged historical precedent for imitating Christ in this way. Figures like Cullwick are emblematic of the unsung legions of ordinary men and women for whom these kinds of acts of service constitute part of their everyday existence and struggles. I have witnessed these acts, many of which have been directed towards me, on a daily basis as I have struggled to finish this dissertation, relying on a network of friends, family members, neighbours, colleagues, and church members to "wash my feet" with hospitality, kindness, support, and unconditional love. Does Pope Francis not co-opt what is already a central part of many relational networks of care, garnering popular acclaim for gestures whose material realities actually lie elsewhere?

This appropriation is underscored by Pope Francis's silence regarding the Vatican's crackdown on the largest association of American nuns, known for their work in social justice, for their alleged promotion of a "radical feminist ideology." While members of the *Leadership Conference of Women Religious* (LCWR) were originally censured under the reign of Pope Jean Paul II, they had hopes that the new Pope, whose social values were closely aligned with their own, would remove the censure (Walshe, "Throwing Nuns"). But, once again, the Church has recently chastised the women over plans to honour feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson. The main complaint that continues to be leveled at the nuns is that their work on issues of poverty and justice does not always allow them to remain steadfast to the Church's conservative stance on issues of abortion, same-sex marriage, birth control, and women's rights overall (Walshe,

"Throwing Nuns").[127] Once again, the image of a benevolent, male Christian authority trying to do what he thinks is best is undercut by the image of a nun wiping tears from her eyes as her daily labour and philosophy of service is dismissed on account of the limited vision of a religious institution clinging to outdated and patriarchal doctrine.[128]

By drawing attention to the struggles and contradictions faced by Victorian women trying to reconcile their lived spiritual experience with paternalistic religious institutions and economic structures, my research reveals these two contemporary events as part of a longer history of struggle between governing powers and the people who resist and challenge oppression. The women in my study drew strength from the Christian emancipatory narrative, which offered them a vehicle for imagining a different world. At the same time, the institutions that codified and managed that narrative completely eschewed and excluded their perspectives. My contemporary examples show the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church making gestures of inclusion that are well meaning but still largely paternalistic and somewhat shallow, failing to address the root causes of class and gender oppression. In both cases, the church's "benevolence" and "charity" comes across as a political tool to appease both dissenters and those in power rather than a genuine form of service rooted in solidarity. When faced with this reality,

[127] I am indebted to Sadbhb Walshe for her reading of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the LCWR as mediated through the new pontiff in "Pope Francis is Throwing Nuns Under the Bus for Sharing his own Beliefs" (*The Guardian*, May 8, 2014). See also Tina Beattie's article "Pope Francis has Done Little to Improve Women's Lives" (*The Guardian*, Aug 27, 2014) for more about the Catholic Church's continued conservatism on issues of women's rights.

[128] The photo by Ed Reinke that accompanies Walshe's article in *The Guardian* is of a nun in full habit standing in a large group of fellow nuns, wiping tears out of her eyes. There is no indication whether or not this is actually a photo of a member of the LCWR, but it creates a strong contrast nonetheless.

we can draw strength from Josephine Butler, Hannah Cullwick, Jane Andrew, Ruth Wills, and the women of the Victorian Labour Church, who, in words *and* praxis, did not bulk at challenging the institutions and governing structures of their day. Now, perhaps more than ever, we are in need of an incarnational politics rooted in the everyday practice of creating solidarity and inter-subjective connection to successfully reclaim not only our religious spaces but also bodies and labour from the corrupting influence of modern day money changers.

While researching and writing this dissertation I have developed a strong bond of solidarity with the women about whom I am writing. The individualized pressure of compiling a project of this magnitude can feel lonely at best and downright isolating at worst, but in the moments when I felt the most discouraged I would remember the steadfast faith of the women who believed that God was guiding and shaping their labours. When I started this project I thought of myself as doing a service for women whose voices had been neglected by history, but from the moment that I started reading their autobiographical writings I realized that this project was going to be a mutually beneficial endeavour. During a time that I have been struggling to discern my own calling, Butler has provided a model for fearlessly following where God is leading, even if the path is sometimes dark and other times clouded by the pressures and prejudices of social life. Likewise, Cullwick has provided a model of female strength through her willingness to engage bodily and spiritually in messy relationships that do not conform to class and gender norms but do bring her closer to the divine. With Andrew and Wills, it has been their ability to embrace vulnerability as the basis of their connection to others

and the world that has inspired me allow some of my own vulnerabilities to surface, opening up a space for me to serve in solidarity and experience a new kind of love. And, finally, I will never forget the day when I came across *The Labour Prophet* at the Working Class Movement Library in the North of England and realized that my Feminist-Christian beliefs were transforming to include a deep investment in class politics. Thank you to the women of *The Labour Prophet* for reminding me that the spirit of God is at work in the world on behalf of the oppressed, and that we, as women, are playing a key role in the unfolding revolution leading to greater justice and equality.

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