

‘An entirely different order of writer’:
a re-evaluation of Dinah Mulock Craik

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Abstract

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Dinah Craik is generally considered a conservative author of ‘domestic’ literature, yet, as this thesis argues, she wrote forthrightly on the key socio-political topics of the day, almost invariably challenging the mainstream viewpoint. Drawing from a broad range of Craik’s journalism and fiction, the thesis considers in particular how the reconfiguration of gender boundaries suggested in her work, is radical in its insistence that the requirements for virtue and fulfilment are essentially the same for both sexes.

Chapter One examines one of Craik’s periodical articles, ‘War-sparkles’ (1855), an exceptional piece of journalism which encapsulates many of the key themes and values defining her work. Chapter Two explores Craik’s representations of masculinity. The hero of *John Halifax, Gentleman*, is commonly perceived as the product of an over-idealised view of men, but it is clear from the many essays and novels in which she vehemently condemns male conduct, that his portrayal is a reaction against the failure of the middle-classes to live up to the reformist ideals he embodies. Craik’s concept of gentlemanliness is explored further through her use of the figures of the clergyman, doctor, author, and disabled man, each illustrating her engagement with specific contemporary issues central to the construction of masculine identity. Chapter Three considers how Craik’s encouragement of female self-dependence through education and employment, and exposure of the damaging effects of ‘the want of something to do’, openly subverts the prevailing view of marriage as the only path to fulfilment, and reflects her generally pessimistic vision of domestic life. Her portrayals of self-reliant working women provide positive role models for her readers, but also reveal her understanding of the anxieties of single life. Craik’s sympathetic depictions of women who do not conform to the Victorian model of acceptable femininity, whether through physical impairment, race, or ‘fallenness’ are, it is suggested, further evidence of the progressive stance that makes her work so distinctive and compelling.

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Chapter One : Introduction

Studies from Life

The March 24th 1855 edition of the popular *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* included, as its leading article, a piece by a young writer named Dinah Mulock, who was soon to become better known as 'the author of *John Halifax, Gentleman*', and later as Mrs Craik. Entitled 'War-sparkles', the piece is a topical commentary on the war raging in the Crimea, in which British forces had been actively engaged for over a year and thousands of lives had been lost, either through battle, or more often, through disease contracted in the military hospitals.¹ The article provides a valuable perspective on a war in which the battles' names – Alma, Balaclava, Sebastopol – still resonate in the twenty-first century, and which provided inspiration for one of the best known of war poems, Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade* published in *The Examiner* in December 1854, three months before Craik's article. Its interest extends much further than its relevance to the literature of war, however. The horrors of the Crimea, made known to the general public more rapidly and graphically than had been possible for any previous conflict, brought into sharper focus two of the most important issues of the Victorian age – the questioning of class hierarchies, and, through the work of Florence Nightingale, the debate over the role of women. Craik uses this essay to express her views on these topics – views which directly challenged traditional social structures and which she incorporated and developed throughout her writing. A highly effective piece of journalism, the essay reveals a writer who was acutely perceptive of, and responsive to, the broader socio-political and cultural environment, and who clearly relished the independence and influence her work

¹ See Clive Ponting, *The Crimean War: The Truth Behind the Myth* (Pimlico: Random House, 2005); Hugh Small, *The Crimean War: Queen Victoria's War with the Russian Tsars* (Slough: Tempus, 2007).

allowed her. With its skilful blend of fact and fantasy, it is both a celebration of the power of the press, yet an acknowledgment of its limitations and dangers.

Although the piece was published anonymously, as was the usual practice for the periodical press in the 1850s, Craik had already made a name for herself at this stage, having had several articles, short stories, children's tales, poems and reviews published in *Chambers's* and other periodicals including *Fraser's* and *Household Words*. She was also a successful novelist. Her first work, *The Ogilvies*, published in 1849 when she was twenty-three, had been well-received, and was followed by *Olive* in 1850, *The Head of the Family* in 1852 and *Agatha's Husband* the following year. At the time 'War-sparkles' was published, Craik would have been working on *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), the novel that would bring her international recognition. Throughout her life, she continued to utilise both novel and periodical to interpret and comment upon a wide variety of significant contemporary topics.

The opening paragraph of 'War-sparkles' makes its primary purpose clear in suggesting that 'one of the saddest things about the war' is that the continual inundation of 'News from the Crimea' means 'we gradually get used to it':

We shudder, glow, or weep over it: but in a heroic, poetical, picturesque way, as it were a tale that is told; we find it hard to be received as a naked reality. (83)¹

That war has become almost a source of entertainment is suggested in the article's ironically-tinged title, which likens the impact of news from the battlefields to

¹ 'War-sparkles', collected in *Studies from Life* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1861; references to Collection of British Authors Series, Vol. 876, Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1867).

‘fragments of charred wood thrown for miles’ from the war’s ‘great fire’, occasionally, and from a safe distance, ‘startling us with a visible sign of how great is the unseen burning’ (83). Demonstrating a modern awareness of the potentially desensitising effect of the press, Craik sets out to counteract it by considering the topic from a fresh perspective, thereby encouraging readers to reflect on the ‘naked reality’ of war.

The essay describes a train journey from Waterloo station, to an unnamed ‘country station’ (104), during which the author’s ‘observations’ on the war are prompted by encountering three different levels of army personnel – a rabble of ‘half-tipsy’ raw recruits on the platform, who board her train, bound for training camp at Southampton (84), and a recruiting sergeant and young officer who share her carriage. Through her reflections on these soldiers, Craik disparages the weaknesses of the British army, in particular the quality of recruits in the upper and lower ranks, and considers the part class structures play in this failure. She was not, of course, the first to make such damning assessments. The catastrophic strategies of the officers, general lack of preparedness and poor treatment of troops had been scrutinised in journals and daily newspapers (particularly in *The Times*), and savagely satirised in *Punch*.¹ Craik’s skill lies in the way she shows the consequences of such failures in terms of personal suffering, tempering outspoken criticism with sympathy for the individuals involved, and demonstrating an understanding of how the army’s failings reflected wider social problems.

¹ See *The Crimean War in the British and French Satirical Press*, Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University, 2008 <<http://lts.brandeis.edu/research/archives-speccoll/events/crimeanwar/Intro.html>> [accessed November 18th, 2008].

The implications of class run through the essay, not only in terms of how it affects the efficiency of the army but how it permeates society as a whole. As Craik wrote in a later essay, ‘every class is rising and trying to force itself into the one above it’, and consequently having to negotiate the social codes which such aspiration demanded.¹ Railway travel, with its division of passengers into first, second and third class citizens, seemed to underline the acceptance of an unequal society, but also indicated that money could give access to a superior social position. In *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Craik suggests that the acquisition of wealth through industry can be morally sound as well as socially advantageous, but in several other works, including the novel *Young Mrs Jardine* (1879), she is critical of the materialism and pretensions of the *nouveaux riches*. The young officer described in ‘War-sparkles’ demonstrates such petty snobbery in his emphatic dismay at finding himself by mistake in a second-class carriage. Although he is at the top of the social and military hierarchy, he is depicted as an empty-headed fool, speaking in an affected ‘drawl’ (95), and more concerned with the design of the uniform than with the war itself. His comment of approval regarding a new regulation allowing officers to grow beards – “shaving is such a monstrous inconvenience” (99) – as he strokes his virtually non-existent moustache, makes him a figure of mockery, but such evidence of his youth also evokes pathos. This is tempered, however, by his account of taking part in recruiting parties on his country estate, where, with dog and gun, “pretending to be out shooting”, he has had “capital fun” (97) flushing out poachers who are forced to enlist.² The country shoot becomes a metaphor for the fields of war, where the gentry are exposing the infantry, of little more status than game birds, in an unequal battle to meet their death.

¹ Craik, ‘My Brother’s Keeper’, in *Sermons out of Church* (1875) Reference to fourth edition (London: Daldy, Isbister, 1876) pp.170-211 (p.177).

² This would have been an alternative to the usual punishment of hard labour or transportation. See D.J.V. Jones, ‘The Poacher: a study in Victorian crime and protest’, *The Historical Journal*, 22.4 (December 1979), 825-860 (p.856).

Although the 'boy-officer' (97) is described humorously, Craik makes clear that the consequences of such a man having authority over other men's lives is disastrous.

It is the lower class recruits of the kind coerced into enlisting by the young officer, whom Craik encounters on the platform. Outnumbering the 'few decent young men' are the 'shambling clod-pates [...] the off-scouring of respectability, which is always drafted into "our military defences"'. Although the author acknowledges that such a recruit, 'oftentimes, to the great surprise of Respectability, becomes not so bad a defence after all' (86), the suggestion that the British army is partly made up of the criminal class counters its generally more heroic representation in the press – in an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* in November 1854, for example, troops are described as the country's 'bravest and its best'.¹ Some of the new recruits, Craik comments, will have been duped into enlisting after being plied with drink, a weakness which can be blamed on the wretchedness of their lives – if 'ploughmen [had] wages enough to keep body and soul together [...], they need not take to poaching first, and to the ale-house and "listing" afterwards' (104). This sentiment, which could be interpreted as unpatriotic in wishing to discourage men from joining up, reveals Craik's awareness of the broader consequences of social inequality. She understands that the army's deficiencies are the result, in part, of the inhuman living and working conditions of the working classes from whom it is largely comprised, and that crime frequently stems from poverty. This was an unusually liberal attitude for the time, and one which she went on to develop further in, for example, *A Life for a Life* (1859).

¹ 'The War and the Ministry', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 76 (November, 1854), 599-618 (599).

In contrast to her derision of the young officer, Craik admires the reserve and manly demeanour of the non-commissioned sergeant, ‘only a step above the grade of a common soldier’ (94), whose ‘set, bronzed features’ (93) tell of his service in many far-off parts of the empire, “Malta – Canada - West Indies – Calcutta” (94), places he lists as ‘carelessly’ as an ‘omnibus-cad’ calling out the stops on his London route (92). The article’s title takes on another meaning in the description of the sergeant’s regimental badge, the ‘bursting ball’ upon which the lamplight ‘sparkles merrily’ (93). This emblem, the ‘flaming grenade’ badge, worn by both the Royal Fusiliers and Grenadiers,¹ becomes a sinister symbol of the fate that the author imagines for him, and conveys both the superficial glamour and the deadly reality of warfare. Craik’s hope that his ‘air of goodness [...] and even woman-like sweetness when he smiles’ (94) are an indication that his adventures have not degraded his character, reveals an approval of ‘feminine’ qualities essential to Craik’s own concept of manliness, but quite different from the usual contemporary representation of masculinity, particularly in terms of military and imperial heroism. Also contentious is the implication that working in the empire – generally represented as character-building – can damage a man’s moral development. In the sergeant’s face, Craik finds confirmation of her ‘favourite truth – that, granted certain conditions, which are denied to few – a man’s career lies in his own hands, and he is – exactly what he chooses to make himself’ (94). Her meritocratic belief that self-improvement is possible no matter how unpromising the original circumstances, given its fullest expression in *John Halifax, Gentleman*, is, however, qualified by a realistic acknowledgement that, for most, choices are restricted, and that her wish that ‘our army were so nobly democratic, that every private had it in his own power to become a general’ (104), is unlikely to be

¹ See *The Crimean War Research Society*, <<http://cwrs.russianwar.co.uk>> [accessed April, 2009].

fulfilled. Despite his considerable experience and skills, the sergeant would never be able to achieve the rank of the novice officer, whose commission would have been bought by his father, and who is, in both the army and in civilian life, his 'superior'.

Just as the young officer is a caricature of the upper-class fool, the fourth occupant of the carriage, a genial farmer, is representative of the 'John Bull' type of Englishman, the personification of national character, patriotic, essentially conservative, and middle-class. In *Punch* cartoons of the period, he is portrayed, like Craik's fellow-passenger, as 'plump [...], rosy [...], good-humoured' (89).¹ Reinforcing the stereotype, the farmer is reading a copy of the journal. Although his 'thoroughly honest English profile' (89) is described approvingly, his indifferent and patronising response to the author's views on the ill-preparedness of the young officer for the horror of what lies ahead – "these things are [...] very unfortunate, but how can we mend 'em?" (101), and on Florence Nightingale's involvement in the war – "'t isn't a woman's business'" (101) – marks him as complacent and lacking 'a keen sensibility for either suffering or heroism' (102). The repetition of the 'John Bull' epithet makes clear that it is not just an individual who is being criticised, but the type of 'thick-skinned' (102) Englishman who is too comfortable himself to question class and gender hierarchies.

Craik's measured declaration, that 'anything is a woman's business which she feels herself impelled to do, and which, without losing her self-respect, she feels capable of doing' (101), reveals a progressive attitude towards women's employment, explicated

¹ *The History of John Bull* < <http://www.historic-uk.com/cultureuk/JohnBull.htm> > [accessed 10th March, 2009].

in her series of essays, *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*, (first published in *Chambers's* in 1857), and a recurring theme throughout her work.¹ Her 'elud[ing]' (102) of her fellow-traveller's question as to whether she herself feels 'capable of doing like Miss Nightingale' (101), and her very careful response in general terms that there are probably very few women who would choose such a life, still fewer who are capable of fulfilling it; but when the two are combined, I see no reason on earth why any woman, high or low, should not undertake the duty, and be revered for doing it, (102)

indicates her sensitivity to how women's opinions were scrutinised, criticised and taken out of context. Craik may perhaps be pre-empting any accusation of hypocrisy in advocating nursing as a suitable occupation for other women but not for herself. Until Nightingale made public her involvement in improving its status, nursing was generally considered a lower-class occupation, in which 'drunkenness and promiscuity were common'.² Although many, including *The Times*, supported Nightingale's activities as a patriotic duty, Craik's article suggests that attitudes had not changed considerably amongst the conservative 'John Bulls'. Although her reference to women 'high and low' makes it clear that she approves of its being elevated to a profession, her careful answer perhaps indicates that she may have shared Elizabeth Barrett Browning's view that nursing was 'not [...] the best use to which we can put a gifted and accomplished woman [...]. If it is, why then woe to us all who are artists!'³

Craik had herself, of course, chosen writing as a way of making the 'best use' of her talents, but, in her case, it was also motivated by the necessity to earn a living.

¹ Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts about Women, Chambers's*, 2nd May- 19th December, 1857; further references to collected edition (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858).

² Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: the Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.31.

³ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letter to Mrs. Jameson (February 24th 1855) in *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Vol. 2., ed. Frederic G. Kenyon (London: Smith, Elder, 1898), pp. 110-111 (p. 111).

Although she was born into a reasonably prosperous household, as the daughter of a non-conformist minister and a mother who had inherited some money of her own, her father had lost his employment as a result of mental instability and was admitted to an asylum as a ‘pauper lunatic’ several times during her childhood, the longest period being between 1832 and 1840, when Craik was aged six to fourteen years.¹ Craik’s mother supported the family by running a school with her daughter’s help. After her death, Craik was, at nineteen, too young to claim the modest inheritance which had been put in trust for her and her brothers, and she was left to provide for them by means of her writing.² Without this talent, her options would have been limited to the very small range of occupations available to women at this time. One of these would have been the seamstress for whom she is mistaken by ‘John Bull’, but the most likely alternative for someone with a good education would have been working as a governess. It was, perhaps, an awareness of her narrow escape from this role that inspired those of her works in which the governess is a central character – for example, *Bread upon the Waters: a governess’s life* (1852) – and which, whilst sympathetic to those in the occupation, seek to dissuade women from choosing it.

Craik was thus part of a new category of middle-class women who had achieved financial security and status by exploiting the periodical market to establish a career in literature. The importance of the press in the development of women’s writing has been underlined in several recent studies. Barbara Onslow, for example, has given a

¹ See Karen Bourrier, ‘Narrating Insanity in the Letters of Thomas Mulock and Dinah Mulock Craik’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39 (2011), 203-222.

² See Sally Mitchell, *Dinah Craik* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), pp. 1-10, and Bourrier, pp.211-213.

valuable overview of female contributors to the nineteenth-century press,¹ Julia Swindells includes journalism in her discussion of the barriers women faced in entering the literary profession, focusing particularly on Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot,² Barbara Caine chooses Harriet Martineau and Frances Cobbe to exemplify how the periodical press was ‘used [...] to make women’s voices a significant part of public culture’,³ and Judith Johnston and Hilary Fraser emphasise the importance of journalism as part of the ‘diversity of [...] literary output [which] was a crucial factor in women’s struggle to be recognised as professional writers’.⁴ As Alexis Easley also observes, with reference to female journalists of the mid-Victorian period, in particular Eliot, Gaskell, Christian Johnson and Christina Rossetti,

their involvement in periodical journalism had important implications for the development of their book-length works of poetry, fiction and non-fiction. Moving between journalistic and literary media, they were able to develop wide-ranging intellectual interests as critics, poets, novelists and social theorists.⁵

Rosemary T. van Arsdel includes Craik in two articles about women’s contribution to *Macmillan’s Magazine*, noting that she was their first female writer,⁶ but in other works, including those above, she is mentioned only briefly, if at all. Craik’s work exemplifies some of the findings of such research, but is also untypical enough to

¹ Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

² Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: the Other Side of Silence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985).

³ Barbara Caine, ‘Feminism, journalism and public debate’, in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800 - 1900*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 99-115 (p.115).

⁴ Judith Johnston and Hilary Fraser, ‘The Professionalisation of Women’s Writing’ in *Women and Literature*, pp. 231-250 (p.246).

⁵ Alexis Easley, *First Person Anonymous: Victorian Print Media 1830-70* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.1.

⁶ Rosemary T. van Arsdel, ‘Macmillan’s Magazine and the Fair Sex’, Part 1, *Victorian Periodical Review*, 33.4 (Fall, 2000), 374-396 (376-378); Part 2, *Victorian Periodical Review*, 34.1 (Spring, 2001), 2-15 (p.9).

make her writing an abundant and rewarding source of material for further investigation into Victorian women's writing across genres.

Craik's enjoyment of her career is evident in 'War-sparkles', but there were many who disapproved of the way that journalism was becoming a means for those outside the upper circles of society to achieve professional status and who were particularly anxious that a good number of such writers were women. George Henry Lewes, writing in the *Leader* in 1850, conveys with comic irony, and perhaps more than a hint of genuine anxiety, the 'melancholy fact' that 'female authors [...], every year becoming more multitudinous and more successful', are, though 'delightful creatures', 'ruining our profession'.¹ In 1847, Lewes had written less flatteringly of women writers, in *Fraser's Magazine*, complaining that the previously well-trained 'army' of writers was 'swelled and encumbered by women, children and ill-trained troops'.² Thackeray's exhortation, in 1850, that 'ye knights of the pen' should operate in 'manly union' and show 'esprit de corps', is similarly couched in deliberately masculine terms.³ The military analogy was, as Fraser, Green and Johnston suggest, 'one of the most common metaphors used of the periodical press and journalism in the nineteenth century':

The recurrence of this metaphor suggests it is used as a trope to express ideas (and anxieties) about authority, particularly editorial authority, and to a lesser extent, hierarchy, and to assert some kind of control in the most aggressive metaphorical language.⁴

¹George Henry Lewes, 'A Gentle Hint to Writing Women', *The Leader*, 1 (May 18th, 1850), p.189.

² Lewes, 'The Condition of Authors in England, Germany and France', *Fraser's Magazine*, 35 (1847), pp. 285-95.

³W. M. Thackeray, quoted in Lewis Melville, *Some Aspects of Thackeray* (Boston: Little Brown, 1911), p. 18; p.13.

⁴ Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 77-99 (p.83).

In its criticism of the organisation and efficiency of the British army at a time when its weaknesses were only too evident, Craik's article can be read as a shattering of the myth of well-ordered masculine hierarchies, including that of authorship, in which women were viewed merely as an encumbrance.

The widely held belief that women were not suited to a profession which demanded exposure to, and intellectual engagement with, the realities of life, is epitomized by an article in the *London Review* of 1864:

Literature is not a profession to which English gentlemen are pleased to see their sisters and their daughters turn [...]. The women who attain to it must attain to it by undergoing a defeminising process; after which they gain much strength and breadth of view at the sacrifice of that nameless beauty of innocence which is by nature the glory of the woman, and which it is the object of English feminine training to preserve intact.¹

'War-sparkles' conveys an impression of its author as a woman professional who appears to embody the anxieties expressed in this article. Independent and strikingly self-assured, relishing the liberation of her solitary 'luggageless journey, entailing no bustle, no trouble, and no good-byes' (84), she 'pace[s] the Waterloo terminus' (84) with what would have been considered a masculine stride, unperturbed at being 'jostled' at the ticket office by one of the 'half-tipsy' recruits (85). Rather than being the object of the male gaze, it is she who is scrutinizing her male co-passengers, dismissing 'John Bull' as being 'not particularly interesting; I have travelled with the like of you by dozens' (89), satirising the pretensions of the upper classes, and implicitly but boldly challenging the view that no respectable woman should enjoy travelling alone, initiate conversation with a man to whom she has not been introduced, or calmly challenge his opinions. Her sense of autonomy is enhanced by

¹ 'Literary Women', *The London Review*, 8 (1864), 328-9, quoted in Fraser, Green and Johnston, p.33.

her social status, assessed at the ticket office – to her amusement – as being ‘second class, ma’am, I ‘spose’ (97). This position gives her more freedom than would have been possible for a young woman from the upper classes, who would rarely travel unaccompanied, and whose life, as Florence Nightingale complained, would be filled with trivialities: ‘a little worsted work, [...] copying something, putting the room to rights, [...] nothing requiring original thought’.¹

Craik’s exposure to the bustle of public places provides ‘most favourable circumstances for making those studies from the life, of which a railway terminus is a first-rate academy’ (84) and, as she reveals in a later article, ‘Travelling Companions’, also published in *Chambers’s*, in July 1857, she finds the second-class railway-carriage an equally abundant source of inspiration:

I certainly do meet with odd people on my travels. [...] I have met with characters enough to set up a modern Sentimental Journey: and heard little bits of histories, full of nature, feeling, or humour, that would furnish studies for many a novel-writer. Most of these I have lighted upon in railway-carriages - places fruitful in episodes to one who generally travels second-class and alone. [...]

Nature certainly meant me for a second-class passenger. I cannot help taking a vivid interest in everything and everybody around me. Convinced that

The proper study of mankind is man,

Or woman, as it happens, I suffer no little impediments to daunt me, and succumb to none of those slight annoyances, which are grave evils to persons of sensitive organisation.²

Through her reference to Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey*, published in 1768, Craik identifies herself with writers of the previous century who used their travels as

¹ *Cassandra and other Selections from Suggestions for Thought*, by Florence Nightingale, ed. Mary Poovey (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1991), p. 72.

² Craik, ‘Travelling Companions’, in *Studies from Life*, pp. 148-160, (p.148-9).

inspiration, and who commonly moved between travel writing, journalism and fiction, often blending the different genres as she did. Sterne and his contemporaries, Defoe, Fielding and Richardson, were, also like Craik, concerned with literature being relevant to ordinary people. Many of Craik's periodical articles describe people and places encountered on her travels in Britain and Europe, and she wrote three full-length travelogues describing visits to Cornwall, Ireland and France.¹

Craik's explanation that such encounters provided inspiration for her 'observations' (83), suggests a defence of her unconventional conduct corroborating Linda Peterson's view that women writers felt the need to justify their work as an extension of domestic life within the social community, 'with service to the reader and the nation underpinning professional labour'.² With its assertive authorial persona, combined with a distinctly feminine, empathetic tone, 'War-sparkles' amply demonstrates how the woman writer could extend her influence far outside the domestic realm.

The essay also exemplifies the centrality of the periodical to debates focusing on the role of women. Journals not only published articles directly on 'the woman question', but also helped construct notions of female identity indirectly, through the tone in which they were written.³ In 'War-sparkles', Craik gives her forthright opinion about women's work, and also conveys the image of herself as a single, working woman

¹ See, for example, 'Old Stones', *Chambers's* (August 1857), collected in *Studies from Life*; 'An Island of the Blest', *Plain Speaking* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1882); *Fair France: Impressions of a Traveller* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1871); *An Unsentimental Journey through Cornwall* (London: Macmillan, 1884); *An Unknown Country* (London: Macmillan, 1887).

² Linda H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.45.

³ See, for example, Swindells, Easley, Caine, and Fraser, Green and Johnston.

actively engaged in life outside the home, a powerful role model for women readers. Interestingly, this persona is more forceful than in her fuller discussion of women's employment in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*, where she writes of the suitability of literature as a career because it can be carried out privately at home, with the writer able to 'sit [...] quiet by [the] chimney-corner' (AWT, 58). The narrator of 'War-sparkles' does not seem to correspond with this description, but the emphasis on domesticity in *A Woman's Thoughts* supports Peterson's observation that women authors felt it necessary to demonstrate that their career did not conflict with their domestic duties.¹

The practice of anonymity made it easier for women to establish a career without inviting such criticism, and to protect themselves from intrusive public interest in their personal lives, which, as Gaskell had discovered, could be oppressive.² It also encouraged them to write on a wider range of topics. Craik seems to be making reference to the advantages of her anonymous status when choosing not to reveal anything about herself to the farmer in response to his 'glance at my black gown, as if there to read the secret of my interest in Scutari' (103). Her earlier reference to reading the lists of killed and wounded 'with quiet, terrorless curiosity' negates this interpretation of her dress, although her brother Ben did, in fact, work as an engineer for the Army Works Corps in the Crimea later in 1855.³ In 1858, Bessie Rayner Parkes, writing about women journalists, observed that 'in the reading-room of the British Museum [...] the roving eye may any day detect the [...] black silk dresses of

¹ Peterson, pp. 13-60.

² Easley, pp. 100-113.

³ See Karen Bourrier, 'Dinah Mulock Craik and Benjamin Mulock: re-reading the role of the male relative in the woman writer's career', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 33:3 (2011), 174-187, (p.180).

ladies who come there for references on every subject under heaven'.¹ This suggests that the black gown may have been worn as a kind of uniform for women writers, reinforcing their sense of professional status.

Using *A Woman's Thoughts* as an example, Tracy Seeley has written about the difficulties women essay writers faced in constructing an 'ethos for argument' in a genre which was traditionally masculine in style, using either the 'familiar', slightly self-deprecating and humorous approach or the more didactic, persuasive stance of the 'sage':

For writers and critics in privileged positions, gender has been an invisible constituent of *ethos*. It becomes immediately apparent, however, on reading Mulock's and other women's essays. Like the sages, these women sought reform, but could not assume the cultural status of prophet. And like the male familiar essayist, they wrote from personal experience, but could not assume his cultural status either. Entitled to the *ethos* of neither tradition, women writers had first to transcend the cultural limits of the personal in order to claim the authority to speak; and then, - paradoxically, they had to claim the personal - their experience as women- as their grounds for argument.²

In *A Woman's Thoughts*, Craik subtly affirms her 'cultural status' by quoting frequently from Milton, Spenser and the Bible, yet at the same time including anecdotes from her own personal experience which, she explains, gives her the right to comment. She balances this assertiveness with humour and with what Seeley terms 'gestures of rhetorical humility':³

¹ Bessie Rayner Parkes, 'The Profession of the Teacher', *English Woman's Journal* 1 (1858), 1-13 (p.8), quoted in Easley, *First Person Anonymous*, p.101.

² Tracy Seeley, 'Victorian Women's Essays and Dinah Mulock's Thoughts: Creating an Ethos for Argument', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 19.1 (April, 1996), 93-109 (p.97).

³ Seeley, p. 99.

These Thoughts – however desultory and unsatisfactory [...] are those of a “working” woman, who has been such all her life, having opportunities of comparing the experience of other working women with her own: she, therefore, at least escapes the folly of talking of what she knows nothing about. (AWT, 42)

Many women deliberately adopted a masculine writing style, partly to further disguise their identity, and partly to conform to the uniform ‘house style’ of many periodicals, particularly those aimed at the established middle classes, which tended to be that of the authoritative and worldly-wise gentleman.¹ Whilst feminist critics of the 1960s to 1980s considered such tactics a symptom of self-repression², and, more recently, van Arsdel writes that ‘women often preferred anonymity, not wishing to seem forward or pushy’,³ other recent studies are more persuasive in suggesting that anonymity and pseudonymity, together with signed authorship, were exploited by women writers as ‘a strategy designed to complicate the authorial position, rather than a defensive means of obscuring an essential “self” or “voice”’.⁴ However, whereas Easley feels there are ‘contradictory impulses that made women desire simultaneous careers as famous novelists and anonymous journalists’, and that ‘women’s manipulation of authorial gender was [...] an expression of their anxiety of authorship’,⁵ Craik’s work reveals no such unease or conflict. Although the beginning of ‘War-sparkles’ has a slight masculine tone – perhaps a deliberate ploy to engage male readers – and *John Halifax*, part of *A Life for a Life*, and a small number of short stories and children’s tales are written as if by a male narrator⁶ – her writing generally conveys an unambiguously female voice, purposefully utilising different genres to communicate her ideals to the

¹ See Fraser, Green and Johnston, pp. 77-99.

² Easley, p.6.

³ Rosemary van Arsdel, ‘Macmillan’s Magazine and the Fair Sex’, Part 1, p. 376.

⁴ Easley, p.7.

⁵ Easley, pp.184-5.

⁶ See, for example, *Avillion ; or The Happy Isles* (1853) in *Avillion and other tales* (1853); *A Hero: Philip’s book* (1853); ‘My Sister’s Grapes’, in *About Money and other things* (London: Macmillan, 1886; references to New York: Harper, 1887), pp. 109-129.

widest possible readership. Most of her unsigned periodical articles were subsequently collected and accredited to ‘the author of *John Halifax, Gentleman*’ – ‘War-sparkles’, for example, was published with her other *Chambers’s* articles in *Studies from Life* in 1861.

In ‘War-sparkles’, Craik claims the entitlement to write on a topic which may have been considered more suitable for a male writer, because she is expressing ‘the other side of the subject, which touches nearest the women and mothers at home’ (100). Although she can justify her comments on women’s work, she does not profess to be writing from personal experience as regards the war, either directly or as a bereaved relative. She uses some of the narrative techniques of *A Woman’s Thoughts* to both validate and temper her authoritative voice, but instead of referring to her own circumstances, and, in fact, expressing ‘a certain discomfort’ that having ‘no-one to part from, no-one to leave behind’ (85), might suggest a dispassionate approach, she constructs an identity more ‘Everywoman’ than ‘A Woman’, who, through the power of imagination, is able to empathise with the anguish of women in wartime. Her visualisation of the sergeant’s ‘old mother’, her ‘hand laid on brown curls’ (94) during his visit home, and of ‘some fond fool that cares for [the young officer], simpleton as he is’, waiting anxiously for news (103), represents an emphatically female viewpoint which contrasts with the three different male perspectives – the stolid acceptance of the experienced soldier for whom war is part of his occupation; the naive eagerness of the young officer who believes it will bring glamour and excitement; and the complacency of ‘John Bull’. Craik’s assured challenge to the latter’s indifference is softened by a tone of humorous self-deprecation – ‘he listened [...] while I gave him, woman-like, a piece of my mind’ – which also creates a sense of solidarity with her women readers

(100). Craik's case against war is not based on womanly fellow-feeling alone however. Claiming Biblical authority by quoting from the well-known passage from Isaiah – she emphasises that peace is not merely a sentimental, feminine ideal, but one exhorted by the prophets of the Old Testament, and at the heart of Christian belief. She thus appeals to her readers to 'abate any suffering we know of', not just through financial donations, (as *The Times*, for example, was also encouraging), but by upholding, in every-day life, the principles of pacifism:

above all, to help on, each by his small power – making in the aggregate the power which rules the universe, Love – that time when the "nations shall not make war any more". (104)¹

In contrast with Craik's broadly anti-war stance, the majority of periodical articles published at this time denounced any disapproval of the campaign as unpatriotic. 'Peace and Patriotism', published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in January 1855, epitomises their tone, condemning those who supported the views of the Peace Society, and equating 'love of country' with military 'heroism':²

The Peace Society are left almost "alone in their glory" or their shame, as examples of the unpatriotic spirit which a little while ago was general [...]. The evils of war are patent and notorious; the good of war is less on the surface, but yet not less truly existing. [...] But the greatest good of war is the social harmony and nationality of feeling it produces amongst ourselves.³

Craik's opinion was thus a controversial one, not only in its advocacy of peace, but in its argument that it was poverty not patriotism that encouraged men to enlist, and that, far from promoting 'social harmony', the war was exposing the stark divisions between rich and poor.

¹ This is a paraphrase of Isaiah: 2.4: 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'.

² The Peace society was founded in 1816. It is not known if Craik was a member. See Stefanie Markowits, *The Crimean War in the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 93-96.

³ 'Peace and Patriotism', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 77 (January 1855), 97-103 (p.103).

Another *Blackwood's* article, 'Peace and War' (November, 1854), provides an interesting comparison with 'War-sparkles' as it also takes the form of a conversation about the war, and is set in a railway carriage. With its sophisticated, wryly detached, timbre, and numerous classical references, it is clearly aimed at a more educated, gentlemanly reader. Although written as a dialogue between two men representing the pacifist and pro-war positions, the latter is given far more weight:

War is doubtless one of the most awful facts of our condition, but we know that the soldier may admire, even love, the public enemy, [...] for his enemy draws out his own virtues and puts them before his eyes; he shows him his own manhood. Thus war becomes to the combatants a sublime dispensation of the Almighty, to over-live which is life-long glory. [...] The true knight always loved a brave foe. ¹

It is this kind of 'heroic [...] picturesque' writing (83), acknowledging yet euphemistically glorifying and depersonalizing death, to which Craik refers in the opening of her article, and which contrasts with her unheroic vision of soldiers 'shipped off like cattle' to 'die in herds' in the carnage of the battlefields (103). Stefanie Markovits notes how the Crimean war provoked a 'reconsideration of ideas of heroism'. The language of chivalry was used at first to promote the belief that war would 'unify a [...] nation, divided in the aftermath of the "hungry" Forties, behind a new cadre of aristocratic and manly heroes'. As the war progressed, however, the private soldier replaced the officer as the heroic figure, but the 'great [...] individual hero of the war' was in fact a heroine, Florence Nightingale.² War-sparkles reflects this shift in attitude, but, though acknowledging the courage of Nightingale's nurses, and of soldiers like the sergeant, who would consider acts of bravery 'simple "duty",

¹ 'Peace and War', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 76 (November 1854), 589-598 (p. 590).

² Markovits, p.3.

nothing more' (103), Craik deliberately underplays the notion of heroism, instead setting out to convey the reality of individual suffering and loss.

The *Chambers's* readership may have been more sympathetic with Craik's viewpoint, since, although she refers to them as 'we middle classes, whom [the war] has not yet touched so nearly as the upper and lower ranks' (83), it is likely that some of her readers would have had relatives fighting in the Crimea, and whose 'present station' was, like the sergeant's, 'a step or two above' the one in which they were born (91). *Chambers's* has been described as 'politically designed for self-improvement among the working and artisan classes focussing on useful knowledge, temperance and moderation',¹ and as appealing to 'the more earnest, lower middle class'.² It was the lower and upper classes, rather than the 'politically Tory and conservative' middle classes more likely to read *Blackwood's*, who were providing most of the men slaughtered in battle.³ By 1849, *Chambers's* was selling over 64,000 copies annually compared with *Blackwood's* 5,750 and the *Quarterly Review's* 9,083.⁴ Even when taking into account that *Chambers's* was a weekly rather than monthly or quarterly publication, its popularity is evident. In her approach to the subject and in her writing style, Craik demonstrates an astute understanding of her audience. She succeeds in making a complex and controversial topic fresh and accessible, using language pitched at exactly the right level, neither patronising nor too intellectually obscure. The reader is drawn gently into the piece through descriptions of commonplace scenes with which

¹ Markowits, p. 214.

² Helene E. Roberts, 'Exhibition and review: the periodical press and the Victorian art exhibition system', in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, ed. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 79-107 (p.80).

³ Fraser, Green and Johnston, p. 213.

⁴ Scott Bennett, 'Revolutions in thought: serial publication and the mass market for reading', in *The Victorian Periodical Press*, pp. 225-257 (p. 236).

many would have been familiar. This, together with her gentle mockery of the upper-class figure, reinforces the sense that author and reader inhabit the same social milieu. The composed, lightly humorous tone at the start of the essay, although conveying genuine concern, does not prepare the reader for the shocking images of dead and wounded soldiers later in the piece, made more disturbing at this stage as they have become interesting as individuals. Through her use of the plural personal pronoun, Craik avoids any suggestion that she is criticising her readers' apathy: 'the first horror, the first triumph, having worn off, we return to daily life, which jogs on just the same' (83). She identifies herself with those who cannot imagine the war as anything other than 'vague and unreal' (83) yet, paradoxically, she pictures its horrors for them:

Can we follow those wretched boy-recruits, who [...] will be shipped off like cattle, to be hunted down by Cossack lancers, or die in herds by the road-side, and in the trenches, and among the Crimean snows? Can we picture the future of that young lad we laughed at? [...] Can we tell what may be the end of that fine handsome fellow who lounges opposite under the lamplight [...] who, with quiet brave indifference [...] is evidently ready at all risks, and under all circumstances, to do his duty [...]. Now, can you and I [...] imagine him lying in the cold, with his stalwart limbs shot off, and his bold brown face stark and white; or huddled under a flapping tent, with the snow beating in on his helplessness; or languishing weeks and months on an hospital-bed, and rising only – if he ever does rise – an invalid for life?

No, my good friend, we cannot realise these things. (103)

Craik's creation of this double persona – perceptive, empathetic and knowledgeable author, and uninformed, unimaginative reader – is a clever narrative tactic which not only allows her to enlighten and influence without preaching, but blurs the issue of a woman writing about a subject which would have been considered inappropriate both in terms of its blunt acknowledgement of death and disfigurement and of its being outside the writer's personal experience. Her description of the soldiers' suffering reveals an informed and articulate assessment of the realities of battle which belies her

seemingly self-deprecating question, ‘What can I know? – I, a comfortable Englishwoman, travelling thus in peace and pleasure?’ (102). Although she concedes the impossibility of fully imagining so alien an experience, she also implicitly suggests that it is the writer, and the woman writer at that, who has the greatest power to help others who ‘cannot take it in’ (102) to feel and understand.

Craik’s use of the plural personal pronoun is very different from that of male essayists and of those women writers who adopted a masculine tone. Eliza Cooke’s columns, for example, ‘always employ the plural ‘we’, an editorial style associated with a male voice’, even though she signed her pieces in the periodical, *Eliza Cook’s Journal*, of which she was editor:

Moreover, the writing itself suggests a male rather than a female persona [...]. Cook’s use of a house style endemic to that section of the periodical press most dominant and most popular in the century, her use of a corporate ‘we’, enables her to address particular class and political issues in the style most familiar to an 1850s readership.¹

In contrast, Craik’s use of ‘we’ emphasises the article’s feminine voice, connecting with her readers to convey sympathy and compassion, and proving that to confront the repugnant realities of life does not compromise femininity but rather enhances it.

Craik’s assertion that ‘the great misery of this war’ is that ‘we at home [...] know nothing at all about it’ (102) is interesting given the vast and unprecedented amount of material being published daily. It implies that news reports can only go so far in giving understanding of events and that facts must be given a personal, human

¹ Fraser, Green and Johnston, pp. 95-99 (pp. 98-99).

element in order to convey real meaning: ‘What can either you or I know of even those things that have reached us within the last two hours?’ (117) She encourages such empathy through her ‘vivid picture[s]’ (100), and through her imaginative contemplations and speculations on the lives of those she encounters. Craik the novelist is easily detectable in these passages, where a brief remark or subtle gesture is used to suggest the possibility of fuller narrative based on each briefly-sketched figure, to convey temperament and inner thought, and to inspire her to reflect upon ‘the influence of character on circumstances – circumstances on character – and where was the just division of results attributable to both’ (106). The passage below, where the sergeant looks out of the carriage window as the train leaves London, exemplifies Craik’s skill in succinctly conveying multiple layers of meaning:

Is he conning over that great sad mystery – “no more”? Is he bound for the Crimea, I wonder? Has he any friends left behind in town, that he presses [...] so close to the window, and rubs the pane clear from mist, and gazes back, with a gaze very sad and serious for a handsome young red-coat, upon that huge, fog-overhung London, whose intersected lines of lights are becoming fainter, dwindling into lamps here and there, with black hazy patches between, brick-fields, and commons, and hedged-meadows, as we sweep on into the regular country (90).

The juxtaposition of the soldier’s pensive gaze with the vanishing view of London arouses interest in his life-story and suggests the transience of individual existence, while the brick-fields’ encroachment into the countryside indicates the fast pace and increasing urbanisation of modern life, for which the rapidly expanding rail network was largely responsible.

Such vibrant and evocative descriptions of the sights and sounds of the author’s journey give the article a compelling sense of authenticity. Adding further to its vitality, and indicating the author’s interest in these earlier forms of fiction, are the

touches of myth and fable woven into the piece. A strong sense of fate, which ‘stands invisibly behind [us]’ (89), recurs throughout the essay, with the train described as a chimera-like ‘sinuous, black serpent’ (104) taking, it is implied, its soldier-passengers, powerless, to their doom. The more destructive potential of the railway is also suggested in its mythical representation. There is a fairy-tale air of mystery surrounding the persona of the narrator herself, heightened in the final passage where she alights from the train to continue her solitary journey. These lyrical last lines, with their emphasis on the beauty and peace of the landscape, form an implicit contrast to the scenes of death in the Crimean snows:

The war – the war! And I am driving down peaceful country lanes, between feathery, white-foliaged trees, and deep silent snow-drifts, shone on by moonlight and stars! (105)

As well as translating twenty-six fairy tales, published as *The Fairy Book* in 1863, Craik was also one of the first English writers to develop her own stories incorporating details from traditional folklore with original narrative, as Hans Christian Andersen was doing in Denmark.¹ Some, including *Alice Learmount* (1852) and *The Little Lame Prince and his Travelling Cloak* (1875), lend themselves to interpretation on a deeper, more sophisticated level than at first appears.² Many of Craik’s novels most notably *Olive* (1850) and *The Woman’s Kingdom* (1868), combine elements of fable with convincing descriptions of contemporary life and, as in ‘War-sparkles’, there is no sense of incongruity.

¹ Mitchell, pp. 82-83.

² See Elaine Showalter, ‘Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment: A Case Study in Victorian Female Authorship’, *Feminist Studies*, 2 (1975), 5-23; and Lily Philipose, ‘The Politics of the Hearth in Victorian Children’s Fantasy: Dinah Mulock Craik’s *The Little Lame Prince*’, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, 21, no. 3 (1996), 133-139.

The piece's intensely pictorial quality, with its series of scenes easily imaginable as genre or narrative paintings, is augmented through the author's skilful use of colour and chiaroscuro. These painterly techniques reflect an interest in art and in the interconnectivity between the literary and the visual arts evident in many of Craik's novels, particularly in *Olive* and *The Woman's Kingdom*, both of which feature a painter as a central character, and in 'The Story of Elisabetta Sirani', published in *Chambers's* in July 1847.¹ In 'War-sparkles', the graphic scenes of death on the frozen battlefield can be compared with William Simpson's more sanitised interpretations of the Crimea, in his series of paintings *The Seat of War in the East*, (1854-1856).² The broader setting of 'War-sparkles' reflects the popularity of the railway platform and carriage in art of the period, ideal for multiple-figure compositions and for highly charged emotional scenes involving meetings and partings. William Powell Frith's *The Railway Station* (1862) and James Tissot's *The Departure Platform, Victoria Station*, (1881-2), for example, show the commotion of the platform, whilst Abraham Solomon's *Second Class – the parting: 'thus part we rich in sorrow parting poor'*, depicts a carriage exactly contemporary with that in which 'War-sparkles' is set, in a train on the same London-Southampton line. The painting's companion piece, *First Class – the meeting: 'and at first meeting loved'* – which clearly shows the greater level of comfort offered to wealthier passengers – provoked a public outcry when both were displayed at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1854, because of its portrayal of a young man leaning admiringly towards a young woman, while her chaperone,

¹ Collected in *Avillion and other Tales*, Vol.3 (London: Smith Elder, 1853), pp. 317-335.

² See, for example, *Winter in the Trenches*, and *The Battle of Tractir Bridge*, 'Paintings by William Simpson, 1823-1889', in Victorian web, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/simpson/paintings/index.htm>> [accessed 2 February 2009].

presumably her father, sleeps.¹ In response, Solomon painted a second version of *First Class – the meeting*, depicting the two men in conversation, while the young woman, now safely at a distance, looks up demurely from her needlework. This image, implying that women need protection from the potential dangers of male society, and should be content to listen while men talk, makes a potent contrast to Craik's persona in 'War-sparkles'.

Craik uses railway travel as a multi-faceted symbol to signify the ephemerality of life, the significance of fate and chance meetings, class divisions, and the rapid changes in society brought about by technological advances. The frequent references to the press throughout 'War-Sparkles' underline the close relationship between the railway and print media, reflecting how the rapid expansion of the rail network was a major factor in the explosion in the number of newspapers, journals, and inexpensive works of fiction published at this period, in facilitating their fast transportation throughout the country.² The railway not only enabled Craik's career to flourish, it also played a significant part in her personal life. George Lillie Craik, the nephew of an acquaintance, was taken to her house to recuperate after a serious train accident near her home, and he later became her husband.³

¹ Ian Lowe 'Two Paintings by Abraham Solomon', *National Gallery of Canada Bulletin*, 9-10, V:1-2 (1967) <<http://national.gallery.ca/bulletin/num9-10/lowe1.html>> [accessed 1 February 2009]. Solomon's revised painting of *First Class* is sometimes referred to as *The Return*.

² Louis James, *The Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p.12; *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Realisms*, ed. Delia da Sousa Correa (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.33-35.

³ Mitchell, p.14. George Lillie Craik was the nephew of the historian and writer of the same name, whom Craik had known for some years.

The importance of the press in Victorian culture is indicated throughout ‘War-sparkles’, with Craik observing how it has become, like the railway, a unifying force yet also a representation of class boundaries. Its power to foster commonality is conveyed at the beginning of the essay:

Shall any of us now living ever forget that September day when we first read the *Times*’ account of the battle of the Alma? – that September moonlight night, when in London streets, provincial towns, and in the deep silence of country villages, people gathered together and asked one another “the last news”.
(84)

The public’s thirst for frequently updated information is suggested in the description of the ‘news-boy running from carriage to carriage’ with his cry of ‘Today’s Herald - second ‘dition! Last news of the war!’ (105), and in the young officer’s request for a newspaper in order to ‘have the latest intelligence’ (96). His insistence that he ‘always prefers the *Times*’ (96), and his pretentious scorning of the other papers available, indicate how choice of newspaper had become a signifier of social status. Craik’s reference to a specific cartoon in *Punch*, the farmer’s similarly-revealing choice of reading matter, points to the popularity of political cartoons at this time. John Leech’s image of ‘the Crimean navy digging Lord Raglan out of the mud, with the motto “Spades are trumps!” (91), was typical of those published at the time. Described as ‘admirable’ (91) by Craik, the cartoon’s ridicule of the incompetence of those in charge and its praise of the capabilities of ordinary men, appear to encourage the questioning of class hierarchies.¹ The war thus underlined what a formidable social and political influence the press had become, its capacity to both shape and express public

¹ *Punch*, January 13th, 1855. The cartoon also depicts the Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen, and a third figure of authority, probably the naval commander in chief, Admiral The Hon. Richard Dundas.

opinion suggested in Craik's comment that 'John Bull feels chiefly through his daily newspapers' (102).

Despite her acknowledgement of the journalist's power to manipulate emotion, it was the novel, Craik believed, that had the greater potential as a didactic force, a view that is reflected in the essay's strong fictional element. As she wrote in a review of George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* in 1861,

The modern novel is one of the most important moral agents of the community. The essayist may write for his hundreds; the preacher preach to his thousands; but the novelist counts his audience by the millions. His power is threefold – over heart, reason, and fancy.¹

That Craik continued to write for periodicals after she had become a successful novelist indicates, however, that this kind of writing had a distinct purpose for her and was not merely an 'apprenticeship' or useful source of income before she achieved fame.

Craik's review expressed concern that Eliot, in writing a tragic end for Maggie Tulliver, 'her passions unregulated, her faults unatoned and unforgiven', was misusing the novelist's power by failing to provide a more positive exemplar for women readers, instead 'fall[ing] back upon the same dreary creed of overpowering circumstances' (204). She was however unreserved in her praise of the novel's artistic merit, considering it to be 'one of the finest imaginative works in our language'.² Eliot's opinion of Craik was less complimentary. Evidently displeased at being mentioned

¹ Craik, 'To Novelists – and a Novelist', *Macmillan's Magazine* (April, 1861), collected in *The Unkind Word and other Stories* (London, 1869; references to New York: Harper, 1870), pp. 195-207 (p. 196).

² *Ibid.*, 206; 204; 199.

alongside Craik in a French critic's review of the latter's work,¹ she describes her fellow-novelist as 'a writer who is read only by novel-readers, pure and simple, never by people of high culture. A very excellent woman she is, I believe, but we belong to an entirely different order of writers'.² Eliot and Craik are indeed very different in their approach to literature and in their writing styles, but what Eliot evidently considered a weakness – an ability to connect with the popular audience – was arguably one of Craik's greatest strengths, a deliberate strategy allowing her to disseminate her opinions to a broad readership well beyond the intellectual elite. Her prolific contribution to the periodical press, and her emphasis on serious topics in her fiction, ensured, however, that her work was not solely of interest to readers of lightweight novels, as Eliot implies. Her many articles on diverse socio-political and cultural topics, written with the distinctive blend of personal anecdote, imaginative reflection, and astute analysis evident in 'War-sparkles', were published not only in *Chambers's*, but in periodicals aimed at the more educated reader, *Macmillan's*, *Fraser's* and *Cornhill* for example, to which Eliot herself contributed. Her novels were reviewed alongside those by Eliot, Gaskell and Brontë, with G. H. Lewes describing her in 1852 as a 'novelist of considerable power'.³ It is true to say, however, that her reputation amongst 'people of high culture' did diminish during her career, perhaps because of her appeal to the ordinary reader. As Sally Mitchell suggests, referring to the immense popularity of *John Halifax*, 'snobbery about mass-audience taste influenced the judgments of the critical establishment'.⁴ Her greater focus on issues concerning

¹ E. de le Forgue, 'Le Women de femme en Angleterre', *Revue des deux mondes*, 25 (March, 1860), 797-831.

² George Eliot, Letter to Francois Albert Durade, *The George Eliot Letters*, 3.302 (1859-1861) ed. Gordon S Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-78).

³ George Henry Lewes, 'The Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review*, LV111 (July, 1852), p.131.

⁴ Mitchell, pp. 118-119.

women was also a significant factor in the undervaluing of her work, a situation reinforced, rather than controverted, by feminist critics, and which, as the following chapters will reveal, continues to the present day.

In its questioning of masculine institutions and class hierarchies, its advocacy of social mobility and of wider opportunities for women, its broadly religious, yet progressive tone, and its strong sense of moral purpose, 'War-sparkles' encapsulates many of the themes and values which define Craik's work. The following chapters explore Craik's explication of these beliefs in both essay and novel, focusing in particular on how they are intrinsic to her vision of how male and female roles should be rebalanced and redefined.

Chapter Two

Concerning Men

A Selfish Animal

One of Craik's last works was an essay entitled 'Concerning Men', first published in *Cornhill Magazine* in October, 1887. She was, she explains, 'urged' to 'write a paper giving a woman's opinions upon men', on the premise that 'a woman who has for the purposes of literary art analysed the minds of men and women, must have reached valuable conclusions as to the mutual limitations of each sex and its supplementation by the other'. She 'hesitated' in fulfilling the request, since, despite having the 'inevitable experience' gained from 'the study and observation of human character' over forty years of authorship, she is

conscious of having lived, in a sense, out of the world, - a quiet, happy, domestic existence, which never brought me into contact with really bad men. Consequently, pessimistic or Zolaesque studies of them had no charm for me; and I have shared with many other female writers the accusation that all my men are 'women's men', i.e. men, painted, not as they are, but after the ideal - a woman's ideal - of what they ought to be.¹

Craik's comments are somewhat disingenuous. Unmarried until her fortieth year, she had lived a life far less 'out of the world' than the majority of women. Her early years had been marred by her unstable father, who was abusive, probably even physically violent, towards his wife. One episode resulted in him being forcibly removed by the police from the family home and committed to a mental asylum for six years. A few months before his wife's death, he had chosen to live apart from his family. Craik had given a 'solemn promise' to her mother that she would never live with him, but she

¹ Craik, 'Concerning Men', in *Concerning Men and Other Papers* (London: Macmillan, 1888), pp. 1-28 (pp.1-2).

supported him financially for the rest of his life, spent in and out of the asylum.¹ Writing to her brother Ben in 1860, she revealed that she lived in “perpetual fear” of his appearing at her home when he was released – “If I couldn’t send him money – he w^d turn and blacken the Author of John in every possible way”.² Ben suffered from poor physical health after working abroad, and endured bouts of ‘melancholia’. Craik cared for him during these periods, but he died aged thirty-three, after being run over when escaping from the asylum where he had eventually been committed as suicidal.³ Craik’s own experience of domestic life was thus a complete reversal of the Victorian model, since it was the women who were the stronger members of the household, working to provide for the less capable men.

The perception of Craik as portraying men as ‘a woman’s ideal’ was largely founded on the misconception that her characterisation of John Halifax reflected her own ‘rose-tinted’ view of men. This misreading has clouded interpretations of her work from the novel’s publication until the present day. Showalter, for example, suggests that Craik, despite her father’s failings, was unwilling to criticise men, particularly after her marriage:

It never occurred to her to wonder at male weakness. Now that she had a man’s help, she was not about to see it mocked or threatened by a new generation of women less reverent of male authority or conjugal bliss.⁴

Craik’s work, in fact, constantly exposes male weakness and immorality, and challenges robustly those social, legal and political institutions that allowed their vices to flourish without censure. Each of her novels includes what could be called

¹ See Karen Bourrier, ‘Narrating Insanity’, pp.208-213 (p.211).

² Craik, Letter to Ben Mulock, 14th October, 1860; see Bourrier, pp. 214-215 (p.214).

³ Bourrier, p.215.

⁴ Showalter, ‘Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment’, p. 20.

‘pessimistic [...] studies’ of male characters, at least one of which, notably Edward Scanlan in *A Brave Lady* (1870), would appear to have been modelled on her father. A progressively more condemnatory stance is also evident in her non-fiction. In *A Woman’s Thoughts*, she writes rather coyly that ‘these chapters do not presume to lecture the lords of creation’ (153) and, although she implicitly criticises men for their part in creating the inequalities discussed, she focuses on how women can help themselves. Four years later, in ‘The House of Commons: from the Ladies’ Gallery’ (1863), she again adopts a humorous, ironically deferential tone, but undermines this by mocking the male institution of which she pretends to be in awe. The essay starts with an apparent compliance with the commonly held notion that political debate is beyond the grasp of most women’s intellect:

And seldom can any woman really understand politics. The cool, clear, large brain, the steady judgment, the firm, unimpassioned, yet not untender heart, is a combination of qualities which very few men, fewer still women, can boast. ¹

The piece then goes on to deflate the expectation that it will describe the ‘truly great politician’. Instead, Craik writes scornfully of the poor oratorical skills and ‘school-boy’ behaviour of the MPs:

In truth, it somewhat surprised us ignorant women, who expected to behold a body of men concentrating every energy of their powerful minds on the government of their country, to see the [...] “free and easy”, demeanour, the want of dignity and gravity, and the total absence of anything like Araepagite solemnity in the British House of Commons. (*The House*, 147; .143)

Her apparent intimation that women’s intellect is inferior to men’s is also contradicted by her suggestion that an exceptional woman might indeed be more suited to political life than the majority of men. Her authorial persona, demonstrating an intelligent and perceptive understanding of the subject of the debate, Italian unification, as well as a

¹ Craik, ‘The House of Commons: from the ladies’ gallery’, *Cornhill Magazine* (October 1863), collected in *The Unkind Word and other stories*, pp.138-149 (p. 138).

‘masculine’ knowledge of the classics, also deliberately belies the ostensibly unassuming timbre of the piece.

Craik’s later essays become steadily more serious in tone. In ‘What is Self-Sacrifice?’ (1875), she considers the problem of male egotism, a quality encouraged by women’s ‘sinful self-sacrifice’. The language of the essay, in which she observes that ‘it is apparently a law of the universe that the male animal should be [...] a selfish animal’, clearly indicates that Craik is referring to Darwin’s theory of natural selection.¹ *On the Origin of Species* had been published in 1859, and *The Descent of Man* in 1871. In the latter, Darwin had written:

Man is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition, which passes too easily into selfishness. These latter qualities seem to be his natural and unfortunate birthright.²

Although Craik appears to acknowledge that ‘a large ego is oftentimes necessary for a man to hold his own in the hard battle of life; and the creed of “self-preservation is the first law of nature” [...] may contribute a good deal to the advantage of the species’, she argues that evolutionary theory should not be used to excuse male egotism as ‘natural’ or unavoidable (‘What is Self-Sacrifice’, 9). Male self-centredness, she reiterates in ‘Concerning Men’, is the result of nurture as much as nature, fostered by women’s culturally conditioned tendency to favour boys ‘from [the] cradle’ onwards:

There is [...] for the ordinary man [...] no time in his life when he is not bolstered up in his only too natural egotism by the foolish subservience or the adoring love-servitude of the women about him. (Concerning Men, 9)

¹ ‘What is Self-sacrifice’, in *Sermons out of Church* (London, 1875; references to 4th edn. London: Daldy, Isbister, 1876), pp. 3-42 (p.9).

² Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, ed. James Moore and Adrian Desmond (London: Penguin, 2004), p.629.

Craik's understanding of human psychology is more in tune with modern perceptions regarding environmental influences on the development of personality than that of Darwin, who believed that 'education and environment produce only a small effect on the mind of any one, and that most of our qualities are innate'.¹

The concept of natural selection, which became known by Herbert Spencer's term as 'the survival of the fittest',² seemed to exalt 'male' qualities of competitiveness and physical strength over those of empathy and compassion, generally perceived as feminine. The language of Craik's later essays reflects the late-century emphasis on these 'manly' attributes considered valuable for imperial domination. She writes, for example, of 'the hard battle of life', above, and, in 'Concerning Men', of a man's need for 'muscle and brains' to 'fight', to 'protect', and to 'govern the world'(7). More characteristic of her work however, is the explication of her belief that 'feminine' qualities, endorsed by Christian teaching, are fundamental to human development. Martin Danahay has written of the anxieties the emphasis on physical work provoked for men whose living was earned within the female, domestic environment, as artists or writers for example.³ Craik's fiction contains some interesting representations of this ambiguity. She also goes further, in suggesting that men who would have been considered emasculated by illness or disability could contribute just as usefully to society as the physically strong. Craik's positive portrayals of disabled men and women can be read as a deliberate challenge to those who followed Sir Francis

¹ Charles Darwin, in *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, ed. Nora Barlow (London: Collins, 1958), p.43.

² Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864) p.444.

³ Martin Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

Galton's interpretation of evolutionary theory to support eugenics and thus a less compassionate view of disability.¹

For Craik, it was far more important to eradicate traits of immorality than physical infirmity, as she explains in 'For Better for Worse' (1887). There is none of the mock-deference of earlier pieces in this essay, in which Craik makes her most uncompromising attack on male vice. Darwin had proposed that women were below men in the evolutionary scale – 'Thus man has ultimately become superior to woman'² – and implied that their prime function was to pass on to the male line, those characteristics which had given the human male his supremacy in the animal kingdom. In a forthright subversion of Darwin's assumption, Craik suggests that it is the vices found commonly in the male sex, and which, it could be argued, are rooted in the egotism deemed desirable for evolutionary advancement, which should be eliminated through negative eugenics. Women, she advises in strongly-worded terms, should be more selective about their choice of husband in order to prevent such an 'hereditary curse' on successive generations:

For – let me dare to utter the plain truth – they [the children] ought never to have existed at all. To make a drunkard, a debauchee, a scoundrel of any sort, the father of her children, is, to a righteous woman, a sin almost equivalent to child-murder.³

Darwin believed that it was natural for a woman to make her 'free or almost free' choice of a husband based on his 'social position and wealth'.⁴ Craik, however,

¹ See Martin Brookes, *Extreme Measures: the Dark Visions and Bright Ideas of Francis Galton* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004); Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (1869); *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Development* (1883).

² Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p. 631.

³ Craik, 'For Better For Worse', *Contemporary Review* (April, 1887), collected in *Concerning Men* (London: Macmillan, 1888) pp. 29-50 (p.43).

⁴ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p.653.

realised that society's emphasis on a man's wealth rather than his morality, resulted in a woman's choice being less 'free' than Darwin suggested:

A man makes his own marriage. It is he who is supposed to take the initiative. [...] If the union turns out a mistake, he has, ordinarily, no one to blame but himself. But there are myriads of women who, by persuasion of friends, or of the lover himself, by the self-delusion and self-sacrifice which 'the weaker sex' is constantly prone to, marry in haste and repent at leisure. ('For Better', 30)

Craik's novels contain several examples of such materialistic marriages, contrasted with those in which the woman's selection of a husband may not have appeared advantageous in economic terms, but proves mutually fulfilling.

'The laws and customs of many generations have placed women far too much in the power of men, Craik observes in 'Concerning Men' (9), and in several works, she campaigns for the reform of the most damaging of such laws. *A Brave Lady* (1869) makes a powerful case for the Married Women's Property Act, passed the following year, which allowed women to keep income and property earned through their work. *Young Mrs. Jardine*, (1879) and 'For Better for Worse' are a response to the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878. This had given magistrates' courts the power to grant a woman legal separation and custody of children under ten years old, but, unless she applied for a separation order while still living with her husband, and could prove his extreme physical abuse as well as adultery, she was considered guilty of desertion.¹

As Jo Aitken writes,

In practice, the 1878 act had many shortcomings and in the 1890s several feminists wrote lengthy articles calling for a new act. [...] The 1895 Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act allowed wives to apply to magistrates for separation and maintenance orders on much wider grounds of persistent cruelty, wilful

¹ See Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) pp. 161-176.

neglect, or desertion. For the first time, wives were allowed to leave their abusive husbands before applying for separation orders.¹

Craik argues that women married to men whose behaviour is intolerable should be granted, 'easily and cheaply', legal separation and sole custody of their children ('For Better', 44). Her list of what she considered should be grounds for legal separation goes even further than that applied after the 1895 Act:

Besides infidelity, the one cause for which law, though I shame to say, not always social opinion or custom, justifies a woman in quitting her husband, there are other wrongs, equally cruel, and equally fatal in result, which Society allows her to endure to the bitter end. A man may be a confirmed drunkard, a spendthrift, a liar – a scoundrel so complete that no honest gentleman would admit him within his doors: and yet the wretched woman his wife is expected to 'do her duty' – to stick to him through thick and thin' – so goes the phrase. ('For Better', 37)

Craik has limited sympathy, however, for women who are 'either too ignorant or too cowardly to exact from men the same standard of virtue which men expect from them' ('Concerning Men', 9). Their failure to challenge male vice makes them complicit in the continuing application of the double standard.

'For Better for Worse' is also a direct response to the Infant Custody Act of 1886, in which, Craik felt, the welfare of children of immoral men 'had been overlooked by our legislators' ('For Better', 39). Although the Act supposedly placed the child at the centre of decisions regarding custody, the father remained the sole legal guardian. It was, Craik felt, a woman's moral duty to protect her children from the influence of a bad father:

Whatever compels a woman to teach her children that to serve God they must *not* imitate their father, warrants her in quitting him and taking them from him. ('For Better', 42)

¹ Jo Aitken, 'The Horrors of Matrimony among the Masses: Feminist Representations of Wife-Beating in England and Australia, 1870-1914', *Journal of Women's History*, 19.4 (Winter 2007), 107-131 (110).

It is clear, then, that Craik's view of men was far from naïve. She did, however, continue to support marriage as an ideal, and there are passages in her work that suggest a conservative stance. 'Equality of the sexes', she had decreed in *A Woman's Thoughts*, 'is not in the nature of things. Men and women were made for, and not like one another' (AWT, 6). Thirty years later, In 'Concerning Men', she alludes to the more organised and vocal women's movement which had gathered strength during the intervening years, yet her words appear to convey that her own attitude was unchanged:

Much as has been said about the equality of the sexes, and great as is the indignation of some of us at being considered 'the weaker sex', I am afraid that absolute equality between men and women is impossible. (Concerning Men, 5)

Her use of the word 'equality' is misleading. She did not intend to suggest that men were superior, or should receive preferential treatment, but believed that women who became wives and mothers fulfilled a distinct role which could conflict with other occupations. It should be remembered, however, that Craik herself successfully continued her career after she married and adopted a child. Her understanding of 'separate spheres' was quite different from the usual contemporary model presented, for example, by Sarah Stickney Ellis, John Ruskin and Coventry Patmore.¹ She stressed that the work of household management was as important and influential as a man's paid employment outside the home – 'each is as distinct, as honourable, as difficult' (AWT, 14). According to Dahanay, 'in the Victorian period it would have been 'especially difficult to recognise any [...] activities as work if they were carried

¹ See later references for works by Ellis and Ruskin; Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (London, 1854).

out by women, because work was defined as the prerogative of masculinity'.¹ Craik's refusal to privilege masculine over feminine vocation was fundamental to her belief that women should be able to share their husband's burdens as 'co-mates, equal and yet different, each sex supplying the other's deficiencies, and therefore fitted to work together, not apart, for the good of the world'. ('Concerning Men, 15)

Recent studies investigating the construction of masculinity in the nineteenth century, have suggested that the separate spheres ideology was more problematical for men than has generally been recognised. Craik's work explores such contradictions and tensions, indicating her awareness that the strict demarcation of roles could be damaging for both sexes, and that a wife destined from childhood exclusively for marriage and motherhood, could prove to be an emotional and financial encumbrance: 'most men prefer a woman who will and can take care of herself. It saves them a world of trouble'.² Danahay has suggested that 'work was the foundation of male identity in the Victorian period'.³ Craik realised that, for many men, the constant grind of work, the necessity to earn enough money to support a family and, perhaps, a socially ambitious wife, could be an alienating and dehumanising experience. In an essay of 1886, 'About Money', she writes:

Often when going out of London about 9 a.m., and meeting whole trainfuls [...] of busy anxious-looking men hurrying into London, I have said to myself, "I wonder how many of these poor, hard-worked fellows have wives or sisters or daughters who [...] take the weight of life a little off their shoulders, expend their substance wisely, keep from them domestic worries, and, above all, who take care of the money?"⁴

¹ Danahay, p.13.

² Craik, 'Decayed Gentlewomen', in *Plain Speaking*, pp. 117-153 (p.122).

³ Danahay, p.13.

⁴ 'About Money', *Contemporary Review* (September 1886), collected in *About Money and other Things*, pp. 1-26 (p. 8).

She pities the ‘silent endurance of many middle-aged “family men” to whom – often, alas! through the wife’s fault – domestic life has been made a burden rather than a blessing’ (‘About Money’, 10). For such men, she realised, the image of home as a place of peaceful retreat, promoted by Ruskin and Ellis, was a sham.

It is this sense of a destructive division and lack of communication between husband and wife, which John Tosh points to in his studies of Victorian masculinity:

The daily experiences of husband and wife were more likely to diverge sharply, as he laboured in an unfamiliar and unseen working environment for six days a week, while her life was given over to activities which often seemed to him to be either trivial or ‘feminine’ (or both) . [...] The polarization of breadwinner and home-maker, with divergent educational paths to match, loaded the odds against fulfilling marriages. ¹

Craik’s view that men and women should share the burden of life’s responsibilities is underlined by her unusually progressive understanding of gender characteristics. In *A Woman’s Thoughts*, she considers that ‘each sex is composed of individuals, differing in character almost as much from one another as from the opposite sex’:

For do we not continually find womanish men and masculine women? and some of the finest types of character we have known among both sexes, are they not often those who combine the qualities of both? Therefore, there must be somewhere a standard of abstract right, including manhood and womanhood, and yet superior to either. (*AWT*, 25)

Although, in ‘Concerning Men’, she writes that there are ‘distinct psychological and physiological’ differences between the sexes, (7), she nevertheless concludes that ‘we find continual exceptions – women as strong as many a man, and men tenderer than most women’(3), and similarly in ‘The House of Commons’, she suggests that men

¹ John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.26.

and women who do not conform to the usual gender stereotypes should ‘follo[w] out [...] the law of their individual natures’ (138). Such views were extremely unusual at this time, as Tosh points out:

Victorian middle-class culture was constructed around a heavily polarized understanding of gender. Both character and sexuality were seen in more sharply gendered terms than ever before or since.¹

There has probably never been a time when the differences between male and female were so rigidly interpreted as the early and mid-Victorian period.²

Craik’s perspective on male and female roles can thus be seen to be less conservative and more questioning than is generally recognised. Her willingness to empathise with the pressures society placed on men indicates a balanced view that adds more weight to her condemnation of their vices than a more strident feminist position might have done. It is quite clear, however, that she had no illusions about the male sex, and it was, paradoxically, this disillusionment that inspired her to create the character that would lead to her being labelled as naïve.

The Man of Men: John Halifax

Craik’s characterisation of an ideal man in *John Halifax, Gentleman*³ did not stem from over-sentimentality, but was a deliberate attempt to construct a model of manhood by which the aspiring man of substance could measure himself. As the creator of one of the most iconic representations of masculinity in the Victorian age, Craik played an important part in rewriting the definition of the gentleman as one who

¹ Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, p.46

² Tosh, p.64.

³ *John Halifax, Gentleman* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1856; ed. Lynn M. Alexander, Plymouth: Broadview, 2005).

should earn the title through behaviour, not claim it by birth. Her hero gains the wealth and status necessary to be accepted as a social equal by his peers, but it is his beneficial influence on his family, employees, community and wider society, and his determination to fight corruption and injustice at every level, that makes him a gentleman. Although it is set earlier in the century, the work is clearly intended to draw attention to the social problems and divisions of mid-Victorian Britain. Kiran Mascarenhas suggests that the novel's title, with its 'New Testament forename [and] Saxon surname', 'promises not to upset',¹ but the name 'Halifax', which would have been well-known to Craik's readers as exemplifying the appalling working and living conditions of the northern mill towns, appears to have been chosen deliberately to trouble the conscience. Modern critics thus continue to misunderstand Craik's purpose, frequently echoing Henry James's disdain of what he saw as her 'flattering account of human nature'. In a review of her novel, *A Noble Life* (1866), he refers to the earlier work:

"John Halifax" was an attempt to tell the story of a life perfect in every particular. [...] The hero was a sort of Charles Grandison of the democracy, faultless in manner and in morals, [...] a perfectly virtuous human being [...]. Miss Mulock [...] gives us the impression of having always looked at men and women through a curtain of rose-coloured gauze.²

Robin Gilmour also makes the connection between John Halifax and Samuel Richardson's hero, describing him as 'the Sir Charles Grandison of the cotton-mills', and writes condescendingly of the protagonist's 'steady upward graph of prosperity,

¹ Kiran Mascarenhas, 'John Halifax, Gentleman: a Counter Story', in *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: rereading Nineteenth Century women writers*, ed. Tamara S. Wagner (New York: Cambria, 2009) pp. 255-270 (p.255).

² Henry James, 'Dinah Maria Mulock Craik, a review of *A Noble Life*', *Nation* (March 1, 1866), collected in *Literary Criticism: American Writers, English Writers, Volume 1* (New York: Viking, 1984), pp. 845-848 (p.845).

celebrated with total lack of irony or criticism by the author'.¹ Similarly echoing James, John Tosh describes the character as 'hopelessly idealized'.² The most recent criticism focuses on the hero's prosperity, with Sylvana Colella exploring how Craik negotiates the tension between self-interest and public-spiritedness,³ and Brigid Lowe ignoring John's energetic philanthropy to suggest that he is motivated solely by personal gain, and is 'unmistakably [...] selfish'.⁴ Mascarenhas goes further, misinterpreting the text to construct a character who is 'colonising, vampiric', a 'debilitating influence', prospering at the expense of those around him.⁵

Craik's justification for her portrayal of a man intended to be neither impossibly virtuous nor destructively self-centred, can be found in an essay of 1858, 'The Man of Men: according to our Great-Grandmothers',⁶ in which Craik herself implicitly allies her novel with Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*. The essay is an oblique, but nevertheless obvious, defence of *John Halifax, Gentleman*, published two years earlier. Although Craik mocks, with affectionate humour, the lack of plot, wordiness, archaic language, and portrayal of old-fashioned manners and customs in Richardson's novel,

¹ Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp.101-2 (p.101).

² John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), p.140.

³ Sylvana Colella, 'Gifts and Interest: John Halifax Gentleman and the Purity of Business', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35 (2007), 397- 415.

⁴ Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: an alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Anthem, 2007), pp.157-202 (p.171).

⁵ Mascarenhas, p.266; p.262.

⁶ Craik, 'The Man of Men: according to our Great-Grandmothers', in *Chambers's* (September 15th, 1858), collected in *Studies from Life*, pp. 254-274.

she asserts that ‘the book itself may move our risibility, but the hero himself never’.

For Craik, Grandison is the ‘ideal of a true Christian gentleman’,

Thoroughly noble, just, and generous [...] asserting true honour against all the shams of it then current; polite without insincerity; pious without either intolerance or cant; severe in virtue, yet pitiful to the most vicious; faithful to his friends, and forgiving to his enemies [...] he is the noblest of all fictional heroes, ancient or modern. (‘The Man of Men’, 267-268)

Craik’s listing of qualities that apply equally well to John Halifax, suggests that she may have been consciously aiming to create a ‘Sir Charles Grandison of the democracy’, as James mockingly put it. Quoting from Richardson’s defence of his hero, she establishes a sense of solidarity with the earlier author, using his words to challenge the adverse reviews she had received herself. Richardson acknowledged that some readers might have found his hero ‘too near to the faultless character which critics censure as being above nature’:

Yet it ought to be observed, too, that he performs no one action which it is not in the power of any man in his situation to perform; and that he checks and restrains himself in no one instance in which it is not the duty of a prudent and good man to restrain himself. (‘The Man of Men’, 268)

‘Excellently and truthfully argued’, is Craik’s comment on this, and she must have felt that Richardson’s words could be applied just as well to her own hero. Her use of the present tense in the following passage, suggests that it is her own novel she is defending, rather than one, which, as she acknowledges at the start of the essay, is little read in her time:

Heaven help us! are good men become so rare, that the mere presentment of such in a book is to be scoffed at by many, and regarded by almost all as unnatural and impossible? a merely good man, not one whit better (as the author himself suggests) than all good men ought to be? (‘The Man of Men’, 273)

Richardson's novel was written one hundred years before *John Halifax*, and the latter is set at the turn of the eighteenth century, with the story ending in 1834. How relevant, then, was Craik's representation of an ideal man to the later industrialised age in which she wrote? Henry James clearly thought it anachronistic, both in terms of the authenticity of the protagonist, and of the place of such a 'model' character in the modern novel of realism:

Sir Charles Grandison, with [...] his reverence, his piety, his decency in all the relations of life, was possible to the author, and is tolerable to the reader, only as the product of an age in which nature was represented by majestic generalisations. But, to create a model of a gentleman in an age when, to be satisfactory to the general public, art has to specify every individual act of nature argues either great courage, or great temerity on the part of the writer.¹

The enormous popularity of *John Halifax* amongst the rising classes, very few of whom would have chosen to read Richardson's novel, suggests that James was wrong and that Craik had judged correctly its appeal to a contemporary readership. Although Grandison is a hero of his time in that he is aristocratic, impeccably courteous, and a 'man of feeling', Craik was not alone in believing that the attributes he embodied were as relevant to the modern age as to the previous century. Her 'definition of a gentleman' is very similar to that described by John Henry Newman in *The Idea of a University* (1854), as 'one who never inflicts pain [...] is patient, forbearing and resigned [...]. Nowhere shall we find greater candour, consideration, indulgence'.² In his popular conduct book for the aspiring middle-classes, *Self-Help* (1859), Samuel Smiles also includes 'discretion, forbearance, and kindness' as necessary qualities, emphasising that, among the 'many tests by which a gentleman may be known [...]

¹ Henry James, 'Dinah Maria Mulock Craik', p.845.

² John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University: 'Discourse Eight, Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Religion'* (1854), in appendix to *John Halifax, Gentleman*, ed. Lynn M. Alexander, pp.503-4.

there is one that never fails – How does he *exercise power* over those subordinate to him?’¹

Craik also believed that a gentleman must be a humane employer. In an essay of 1875, ‘Benevolence – or Beneficence?’, she reiterates the core values personified in John Halifax, and argues that they are not merely a sign of personal benevolence but vital to social cohesion. The essay gives a further insight into the motivation behind her novel:

The common justice between man and man, which makes the labourer worthy of his hire, the rent-payer deserving of a decent house to live in – as good a house of its kind for a mechanic as for a gentleman [...]. Until “gentlefolk” believe this, and cease to regard their servants, clerks etc. as inferior beings, from whom nothing is to be expected but a hand-to-hand struggle between rich and poor, employer and employed, as to who shall have the best of it; until they give up the system of treating their dependants as mere machines, out of whom is to be got as much work as possible [...], until this state of things ends, there must always be the secret enmity between class and class, that half-concealed, half-acknowledged difference in morals, feelings and principles, which constitutes the main difficulty of those who would fain have but one law of right for all, and look upon every man who fulfilled it as “a man, and a brother”.²

Craik’s ironic use of the word “gentlefolk” acknowledges that, in Victorian society, to be thought of as a gentleman did not necessarily require virtuous behaviour, but was frequently still a matter of social pedigree or wealth. *John Halifax* challenges this assumption by creating a paradigm of masculinity relevant to those who had achieved their status through hard work and self-improvement rather than through inheritance, and by emphasising the importance of Christian values of compassion and altruism. For the successful businessman, tradesman, engineer or factory owner, the novel was

¹ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help, with Illustrations of Character and Conduct*, Chapter 13: ‘Character – the True Gentleman’ (London: S.W. Partridge, 1859), pp. 333-4.

² Craik, ‘Benevolence – or Beneficence?’ (1875), in *Sermons out of Church*, pp.139-170 (p. 158).

an endorsement of his place in the social hierarchy, reassuring him that his moral credentials need not be compromised by the material benefits gained through work, as long as he could demonstrate, as John Halifax does, that his family, employees and the community also benefited. It is this relationship between the protagonist and the broader society which is central to the novel, making it more than just the tale of one good man, or a validation of the success of the middle classes, but a plea to men who had risen in the world not to emulate the worst traits of the aristocracy in their treatment of the lower classes, but to use their influence to bring about a fairer society. It is to emphasise this message that Craik sets the tale against the backdrop of the French revolution. Writing in the year of *John Halifax*'s publication, the French historian A. de Tocqueville suggested that it was the lack of such an intermediary class in France which was a major factor leading to the Terror and to its failure to herald a democracy:

If we follow the mutations in time and place of the English word 'gentleman' [...] we find its connotation being steadily widened in England as the classes draw nearer to each other and intermingle. [...] Thus its history is the history of democracy itself [...]. In France, however, there has been no question of enlarging the application of the word *gentilhomme* [...]. This is because it has always been employed to designate the members of [...] a caste that has never ceased to exist in France and is still as exclusive as it was when the term was coined many centuries ago.¹

It was, as Gilmour acknowledges, the 'flexibility and elasticity' of the notion of the gentleman, 'making it adaptable to the needs of rising social groups', that helped England avoid a bloody revolution:

As Marx and others recognised, the Victorian bourgeoisie was a revolutionary class [...]. That the revolution took a gradual rather than a violent form, was due in large part to the fact that it was able to find a *modus vivendi* with the aristocratic ruling class. What has come to be called the Victorian

¹ A. de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. S. Gilbert (London: Fontana, 1966) p.109, quoted in Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*, p.4.

Compromise had for one of its central features the gradual supersession of one kind of social structure by another.¹

Craik's novel pays tribute to those middle class virtues that saved England from revolution by offering a path of moderation between the corruption and extravagance of the aristocracy and the corresponding violence of the poor. More importantly, it serves as a reminder that such virtues must be upheld in contemporary society, where poverty and injustice still had the potential to lead to civil unrest, as the Chartist demonstrations of the 1830s and 1840s had indicated.

Whilst it is true that the novel can be read as an historical or political allegory about the rise of the middle classes, as Mitchell has suggested: – 'the achievements and experiences of John Halifax correspond allegorically to the events that transferred power from the aristocracy to the middle class',² – it would be wrong to consider it, as Gilmour does, a tale which merely celebrates middle class material success by charting the fulfilment 'of the hero's social ambitions'.³ Whilst Gilmour suggests that the symbols of John Halifax's prosperity – 'the carriage, the estate, the acceptance by county society, even the aristocratic son-in-law' are 'presented [...] as the *rewards* for practising self-help: success is measured in terms of breaking into the traditional hierarchy',⁴ Craik clearly intends her novel as a rejection of aristocratic values, as is underlined by John's refusal of Lord Ravenel as a potential son-in-law until he has renounced his title, lost his fortune, and earned his living. The aristocracy is thus subsumed into the middle class rather than vice versa.

¹ Gilmour, p.8.

² Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p.41.

³ Gilmour, p.101.

⁴ Gilmour, p.102.

Craik distinguishes between the higher levels of aristocracy, characterised by the Luxmores with their pre-Reform political corruption, adulterous marriage of convenience, and lack of compassion for the poor, and the older landed gentry represented by Sir Ralph Oldtower with 'his fine old Norman face, like one of his knightly ancestors on the tomb of Kingswell church'. John Halifax has no wish to see the entire ruling class overthrown, as is demonstrated by his respect for Oldtower:

"There's something pleasant about his stiff courtesy and his staunch Toryism, for he fully believes in it, and acts up to his belief. A true English gentleman, and I respect him."¹ (292)

Whilst John can admire a man whose political views, as a Tory opposed to parliamentary reform, conflict with his own, and has no objection to his son marrying Oldtower's daughter, he can find nothing laudable in the dissolute and malevolent Brithwood – 'a fox hunting, drinking, dicing fool!' (197) – or in Lord Luxmore, who, despite having a 'winning charm', exemplifies profligacy and corruption. The success of the middle class, as personified by Craik's protagonist, comes about through its rejection of the worst of aristocratic values, whilst assimilating the paternalistic sense of duty and responsibility of the gentry.

The figure of Lady Caroline, daughter of Luxmore and Brithwood's wife, serves throughout the novel as a reminder of the French revolution. Described by Abel as a 'Jezebel [...] brought up in the impious atrocities of France, and the debaucheries of Naples' (197), Caroline embodies the sexual immorality of the aristocracy, encouraged but not, in John's eyes, excused, by her unhappy marriage of expediency. Her insincere regard for John as '*l'homme du peuple*' (205), her feigned sympathy for the

¹ The Broadview edition incorrectly replaces 'Norman' with 'Roman'.

cause of the bourgeoisie, and her lack of understanding of the squalid conditions of the Parisian poor, evoke the figure of Marie-Antionette rather than that of a genuine democrat, an association reinforced when she ‘turn[s] “shepherdess”’, taking off her jewellery and feeding the poultry, on a visit to the Halifax family (282). In response to John’s affirmation that his name alone should suffice as his pedigree, she declares,

You are right; rank is nothing [...]. Give me the rich flesh-and-blood life of the people. *Liberté – fraternité – égalité*. I would rather be a gamin in Paris streets than my brother William at Luxmore Hall. (205)

Her claim to “adore *le peuple* [...] especially *le peuple Français*”, is met with John’s rejection of the notion of a shared objective with his French working-class counterparts, who are, he tells her, “a very different class of beings” (204), different, he implies, in that the English seek social and political change through non-violent means and are thus more likely to be successful. As the daughter of an English aristocrat, Lady Caroline is a representative of their collective failure to recognise that conditions in England were, as Craik reminds the reader, dangerously similar to those before the revolution in France:

It was the year 1800, long known in English households as “the dear year”. The present generation can have no concept of what a terrible time that was – War, Famine, and Tumult stalking hand in hand, and no one to stay them. For between the upper and lower classes there was a great gulf fixed; the rich ground the faces of the poor, the poor hated, yet meanly succumbed to, the rich. Neither had Christianity enough boldly to cross the line of demarcation, and prove, the humbler, that they were men – the higher and wiser, that they were gentlemen. (100)

The novel goes further than this passage suggests, since it shows that one of the ‘humbler’ class can not only prove to be a man, but also a gentleman. Although Craik

places this ‘terrible time’ in the past, the reader would have been well aware of the continued existence of the ‘great gulf’ between classes.

The interpretation of the novel as a socio-political allegory is reinforced by references to the early seventeenth century poet Phineas Fletcher, after whom Craik’s narrator is named. Fletcher’s best known work *The Purple Island, or the Isle of Man* (1633), is an epic metaphysical poem in which the island represents the human body, whose functioning signifies the social and political health of the nation. The ‘purple veins’ symbolise rivers, used, as was common in poetry of the Stuart period, to suggest the flow of human activity. As Mark Bayer explains, ‘properly circulating rivers [...] signify a properly functioning polity’:

Fletcher is using the design of the human body to analyze and interrogate the body politic, the mystical fiction upon which the power of absolutist monarchs throughout Europe was derived [...]. Rivers in early modern literary productions often function as a marker of a brand of nationalism which reflexively comments on the health of the English state.¹

Rivers and streams play an important part in *John Halifax*, suggesting that Craik’s references to *The Purple Island* are significant. John’s life is described as flowing like the ‘broad and grand’ River Severn in its ‘natural channel’ (262), and his happy marriage as ‘the fullness of a stream that knew no fall’ (377). He is one of those men ‘with an instinct to rise’ who, ‘as surely as water regains its own level so do they, from however low a source, ascend to theirs’ (323). The river can be deceptively tranquil, however. John rescues Brithwood and Ursula’s father from the dangerous ‘eger’ or spring tide, which transforms the Severn from ‘a calm, gracious, generous river [...]

¹ Mark Bayer, ‘The Distribution of Political Agency in Phineas Fletcher’s *Purple Island*’, *Criticism*, 44.3 (Summer 2002), 249-270 (p. 249).

rolling on through the land slowly and surely, like a good man's life' (69) to 'a whirl of conflicting currents, in which no boat could live – least of all, that light pleasure boat, with its toppling sail' (70). The two men, unaware of the tide that threatens to overwhelm their 'pleasure boat' and drown them, represent the aristocracy's oblivion to the perilous tide of political change surrounding them, from which they can be saved only by the intervention of the moderate artisan. The same tide jeopardises, both literally and metaphorically, Abel Fletcher's tanyard, but, thanks to John's foresight, much of his property is saved and he avoids ruin (74). However, the tanyard, John realises, is 'a slowly leaking ship' (244), threatened by newer industrial processes. John's ability to negotiate natural forces, (or symbolically to navigate advantageously the turning of the political and industrial tide), becomes central to his success when he turns the potential disaster of Lord Luxmore's vengeful diversion of the stream used to power his mill, into a triumph, since it brings forward his nascent plans to harness the new technology of the steam engine. Luxmore's use of the stream to make fountains for his pleasure grounds epitomises the selfish decadence of the aristocracy and their power based on land ownership, and contrasts with John's forward-looking enterprise, which frees him from this power and allows him – and symbolically the new middle classes generally – to prosper. Phineas's reading of verses from *The Purple Island* conveys the poem's pastoral tradition in the portrayal of the shepherd's life as being 'full of [...] rich content' in contrast to the 'unhappy pawns', the wealthy courtiers.¹ Like Craik's novel, the poem emphasises the benefits of being of 'middle fortune',² underlining the moral superiority of the simple working man and his importance to the political and social health of the country.

¹ Fletcher, *The Purple Island, or the Isle of Man* (1633) Canto X11.5 (London: Burton and Briggs, 1816), quoted in *John Halifax*, pp.126-127.

² Fletcher, Canto X11.3

Also inviting allegorical interpretation is the description of John and Ursula in their first garden, which both suggests and counters the idea of the garden as a symbol of the Creation myth:

there was nothing Eden-like about it, being somewhat of a waste still, divided between ancient cabbage beds, empty flowerbeds, and great old orchard trees, very thinly laden with fruit. (239)

It is clear, however, that John and Ursula, in the ‘ desolate garden [...] shut in by four brick walls’ (238), are intended as a post-industrial Adam and Eve, heralding the possibility of a new kind of Eden where work is not a punishment for sin, but a means for men of all classes to flourish and live harmoniously together. A later description of the garden, made both beautiful and productive through skill and hard work, is a representation of such a society:

fruits, flowers, and vegetables living in comfortable equality and fraternity, none being too choice to be harmed by their neighbours, none esteemed too mean to be restricted in their natural profusion. (247)

Coming at the crisis point of an illness which is both physical and spiritual, John’s dream is typical of another form of metaphorical literature – that of spiritual biography – in that it gives guidance through an angelic vision, at a time of despair. There are many echoes of Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) throughout the work, with John in the role of Christian. John’s anguished belief that Ursula can never be his wife correlates with Christian’s capture by Giant Despair. The allusion to Bunyan’s work also helps to explain why John is so reluctant to seek legal redress from Luxmore –

Christian is shown to take the wrong path by seeking deliverance from his burden through the help of Mr. Legality rather than through Christ.¹

Although John Halifax can thus be considered as a metaphorical Everyman charting the rise of the new middle class, an Adam creating a new Eden, a Christian on a spiritual life-journey, or as a model of manhood in the style of Charles Grandison, it is unlikely he would have caught the public imagination so compellingly if he had not also conveyed the sense of authenticity as an individual, which, as Henry James suggested, the Victorian reader demanded.² Despite the comparison which Craik herself invited, John Halifax has, in fact, little in common with Grandison apart from his exemplary virtues. Wealthy, educated, polished, and secure within his pre-ordained sphere, Richardson's hero faces few moral challenges, his only dilemma being which of two attractive heiresses he should marry, while Craik's has to overcome a series of major difficulties and trials before he can be accepted as a gentleman. It is the way in which he negotiates these trials, rather than the wealth and position his success brings him, which earns him the right to be known as such. Whilst he embodies each of the essential qualities of the true gentleman, John Halifax is not, Craik stresses, naively good-natured or absurdly optimistic; his goodness does not always come naturally to him, and he frequently has to control feelings of frustration, anger, resentment and despair as he struggles to establish a position between the upper and lower ranks. Craik's portrait is not of a man so saintly that he can ignore the injustice of his situation and the taunts of his 'superiors', but of someone barely able to contain his hatred and bitterness. His job at the 'accursed tanyard' (194), lower down

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, (1678), ed. W. R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 20-28.

² Henry James, 'Dinah Maria Mulock Craik', p.845.

the scale than the poet Fletcher's contented shepherd, is repulsive to him, the stench of the hides he carries on his wagon a potent symbol of his lowly status. He longs for freedom from toil, but his one attempt at self-indulgence – a visit to a play with Phineas – ends badly, with his being barred from associating with his only friend, and the withdrawal of Abel Fletcher's intention to take him on as an apprentice. This punishment is prompted partly by Abel's hostility, as a Quaker, to the theatre, but more by John's failure to look after the frail Phineas, who is too weak for the long return journey. Although he has demonstrated his consideration for his friend by carrying him home, John accepts the punishment as just, but in other situations he must conquer the urge to retaliate when treated with unwarranted contempt. He pre-emptively averts a scolding from Jael, who disapproves of his association with Phineas ('Thee bean't company for him' (66), with a 'half-malicious, half-ceremonious bow' (54). Later in the novel, John's 'malice' has terrible consequences, when he cannot resist letting Luxmore know that his attempt to ruin the mill has failed:

It would not have been human nature, if a spice of harmless malice – even triumph – had not sparkled in John's eye [...]. "Your cutting off of the watercourse has been to me one of the greatest advantages I ever had in my life, for which, whether meant or not, allow me to thank you." (342)

His sense of triumph is short-lived however, and there is a suggestion that he is being punished both for his provocation and for his failure to predict its consequences, as Luxmore responds by 'spurr[ing] his horse violently' and knocking down Muriel in his path (342).

It is in dealing with Brithwood's taunts that John finds it hardest to exercise restraint. He refuses, 'with flushed, proud face', to pick up the guinea which Brithwood throws

insultingly at his feet as a reward for saving him from drowning (71), and he comes near to physical reprisal when Brithwood attempts to humiliate him at the party to which both have been invited. Brithwood turns away in disgust when Lady Caroline introduces John, albeit patronisingly, as a ‘gentleman’, and makes it clear that he cannot possibly invite him to his home, as his wife has requested:

“You may be a very respectable young man, for aught I know, still rank is rank. Of course, Dr. Jessop asks whom he likes to his house [...] but really, in spite of my lady’s likings, I can’t well invite you to my table!”

John’s reply – “Nor could I humiliate myself by accepting any such invitation,” – is said ‘distinctly so that the whole circle might have heard’, and is thus deliberately provocative, as Brithwood’s response indicates:

“Humiliate yourself! What do you mean, sir? Wouldn’t you be only too thankful to crawl into the house of your betters [...]. It’s always the same with you common folk, you rioters, you revolutionists. By the Lord, I wish you were all hanged.”

The young blood rose fiercely in John’s cheek, but he restrained himself. “Sir, I am neither a rioter nor revolutionist.”

“But you are a tradesman.” (208)

Brithwood’s anger betrays the ruling class’s fear of the working man, a fear which turns ‘common folk’ into potential revolutionaries threatening their way of life. For Brithwood, ‘rioter’, ‘revolutionist’ and ‘tradesman’ are virtually synonymous, and, despite John’s honest denial, Brithwood is right in foreseeing that tradesmen will soon be living in the ‘houses of their betters’ – in John’s case, Longfield bought from the Oldtowers, then the grand Beechwood Hall. John does not ‘personally engineer the

demolition' of the Luxmores, as Mascarenhas suggests.¹ The aristocracy destroy themselves through their profligacy, symbolised by Luxmore's 'massacre' of the ancient woodland surrounding the Hall (443). Ravenel is, however, influenced by the example of John's virtue, to sell the family estate in order to pay off creditors after his father's death. Later in the novel, John makes clear that it is possible to uphold democratic principles without advocating the annihilation of the aristocracy. Phineas questions whether John's respect for Sir Ralph Oldtower is compatible with his beliefs as 'a democrat'. John explains:

"So I am, for I belong to the people. But I nevertheless uphold a true aristocracy – the *best* men of the country – do you remember our Greeks of old? These ought to govern, and will govern, one day, whether their patent of nobility be birth and titles, or only honesty and brains." (292)

There is no possibility of compromise with men like Brithwood, whose sneering declaration that a 'prentice lad' can never be treated as a gentleman, tests John's self-control to the limit, conveyed in a sense of barely-controlled physical power:

John was silent; he had locked his hands together convulsively; but it was easy to see that his blood was at boiling heat, and that, did he once slip the leash of his passion, it would go hard with Richard Brithwood.(209)

Although John's restraint falters when Brithwood offends Ursula – 'his right hand burst free. He clutched the savage by the shoulder' – it is Brithwood who strikes the blow. John's non-retaliation to 'that last fatal insult, which, offered from man to man in those days, could only be wiped out with blood' (209), is not a mark of cowardice but of strength of character, enabling him to 'prove himself what Richard Brithwood, with all his broad acres, could never be – a gentleman' (208). Craik's reminder that, 'in those days', a man's honour would be compromised if he refused to return blow for

¹ Mascarenhas, p.258.

blow, evokes a similar scene in *Sir Charles Grandison* where the hero, grazed by the villain's sword, 'seized him by the collar [...] wrenched his sword from him, and snapped it'.¹

Like Richardson, Craik stresses her hero's physical strength and courage, emphasising how he could easily have 'felled' his adversary 'to the ground' (209) if he had chosen to do so. She thus deflects any interpretation of unmanliness, making it clear that it is more difficult to control anger than to indulge it. The importance of non-violence to Christian doctrine is also accentuated in John's response to those onlookers who mutter that his restraint must come from his being a Quaker. John declares that that is not the reason: "'But I am a Christian. I shall not return blow for blow; I am a Christian'" (210). His repetition of the phrase makes the point that it is not only Quakers, but *all* Christians who should follow the principle, and that those who do not are hypocrites: 'It was a new doctrine; foreign to the practice, if familiar to the ear, of Christian Norton Bury' (210). His ability to exercise self-restraint under provocation is an important confirmation to Ursula of John's worth, since 'a Christian only can be a true gentleman' (211). This episode, in which the accepted standards by which a man is measured in society are turned on their head, with Brithwood the wealthy aristocrat termed a 'savage', and John Halifax, the tanner's apprentice hailed as a 'true gentleman', is central to Craik's model of gentlemanly behaviour and places Christianity at its heart.

¹ Samuel Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, (1753), ed. William Lyon Phelps (New York: Croscup and Sterling, 1901), p.254.

Despite Ursula's endorsement, the confrontation with Brithwood deepens John's fear that the social gulf between himself and Ursula is too great to be crossed. His greatest test of character, and one where he shows most human weakness, comes from this belief that his love can never be requited. Not only does it threaten his self-control, causing self-pity, bitterness and despair, it also tests his faith, as he is in danger of putting his love for Ursula before his trust in God.

"Nothing can do me good. [...] My God! What have I not borne. Five whole months to be dying of thirst and not a drop of water to cool my tongue!" He bared his head and throat to the cutting wind. His chest heaved, his eyes seemed in flame. [...] "God forgive me – but I sometimes think that I would give myself body and soul to the devil for one glimpse of her face, one touch of her little hand". (193)

The passage conveys a strong sense of the physical passion that some critics have found lacking in Craik's characters. Showalter, for example, suggests that 'John Halifax [...] represented the epitome of Christian gentlemanliness, a manliness stripped of all virility'.¹ Such an outburst of emotion is rare, however. Craik more often conveys a sense of John's struggle to keep his feelings under control through descriptions of physiological reactions which cannot be hidden – the 'deadly paleness' in which 'every feature trembled' (185), the 'sudden and violent colour' (161), the 'clenched hand' (230). The eventual breakdown of his health which can be explained by a 'feverish ague' but is rooted 'in that mental pang that no doctors could cure' (214), is a symbol of 'soul-sickness' (215) – not only an indication of the strength of his feeling for Ursula, but a loss of religious trust. It is his physical weakness, however, rather than his strength, which proves to be the catalyst in their relationship, allowing social formalities and boundaries of propriety to be stripped away, and enabling them to reveal their feelings for each other. It is important to Craik's

¹ Showalter, 'Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment', pp. 17-18.

delineation of John's Christian virtue, however, that it is his dream of Ursula, in which she tells him he must 'rise up and do [his] work in the world; do it for Heaven's sake, not for hers' (219), which is the crucial turning point in his recovery, rather than her promise to marry him.

John's sensitivity and compassion can be recognised as characteristics of the eighteenth century 'man of feeling', but they are counterbalanced by evidence of his practical, restrained qualities. His response to the Fletchers' garden is indicative of this, early in the novel: 'He did not go into ecstasies as I had half expected, but gazed about him observantly while a quiet intense satisfaction grew [...] over his whole countenance' (44). Her hero is not a man of affected displays of sensibility but of genuine, largely private, sentiment, often expressed through acts of 'tenderness'. This quality, Craik explains through Phineas, is not only a desirable quality in a man, but is essentially a masculine characteristic:

He [...] put his arm around mine, and helped me in, as if he had been a big elder brother, and I a little ailing child [...]. [I]t was the first time in my life I ever knew the meaning of that rare thing – tenderness. A quality different from kindness, affectionateness, or benevolence; a quality which can exist only in strong, deep, undemonstrative natures, and therefore in its perfection is seldomer found in women than in men. John Halifax had it more than anyone, woman or man, that I ever knew. (53)

The frequent references to John's physical strength, contrasting with his friend's frailty, overturn any suggestion that her hero is feminised by his compassion, a point underlined by other displays of male tenderness in the novel. Phineas becomes manlier, more 'impetuous' and dynamic (218) when reciprocating care during John's illness, and Lord Ravenel nurses Guy through fever during their adventures in

America. Holly Furneaux has written of the erotic significance of male nursing in Dickens's novels:

Nursing operates as a central, reiterated behaviour through which both male and female characters legitimate their physical contact and express their excitement at such intimate touching.¹

A contemporary critic found it 'difficult to suppress a fear that Phineas Fletcher will fall hopelessly in love with John Halifax, so hard is it to remember that Phineas is of the male sex'.² Whilst there is certainly a homoerotic quality in Phineas's intense love for John, and his response to John's care for him – 'If I had been a woman and the woman that he loved, he could not have been more tender over my weakness' (92) – it is doubtful that Craik would have intended the relationship to be considered in any light other than that of brotherly love, underlined by its comparison with the relationship between David and Jonathan. Any suggestion of homoerotic reciprocity is quashed, perhaps deliberately, in the scene in which Phineas, believing his friend to be dying, takes John's hand:

I took up his poor hand that lay on the counterpane; – once at Enderley, he had regretted its somewhat coarse strength; now Ursula's own was not thinner or whiter. He drew it back.

"Oh Phineas, lad, don't touch me – only let me rest." (215)

John's temporarily feminising illness appears to equalise the relationship between the two men, but rather than bringing him closer to his friend, it reinforces Phineas's feeling of displacement – 'Alas! I was not enough to make him happy now' (181) –

¹ Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.177-211 (p.177).

² R.H Hutton, 'Novels by the Authoress of John Halifax', *North British Review*, 29 (1858), 466-81 (pp.474-5).

and, through his selfless intervention, is the catalyst that brings about John's marriage to Ursula.

Craik's inclusion of two characters with disabilities, and her hero's compassion towards them, is significant in the context of contemporary attitudes regarding those with physical impairment, as will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. As Martha Stoddard Holmes has suggested, congenital disability, particularly blindness, carried the stigma of shame, since there was the possibility that the cause was syphilis passed from parent to child.¹ Craik's casting of Muriel as an angelic figure, born to highly moral parents, loved by all, intelligent and gifted musically, is a clear message against such prejudice. Mascarenhas includes Phineas and Muriel amongst those characters who 'have the life sucked out of them as they orbit John Halifax' (263), and Brigid Lowe suggests that Phineas is 'left without a future', 'an empty shell' after John's death (172). Such readings are negated by the full lives of both characters as beloved and valued members of the family, and in Phineas's praise of John's care: "He gave me strength, mentally and physically. He was life and health to me" (124). Muriel's death is not, as Mascarenhas claims, symbolic of 'a refusal to accept adult womanhood', nor does she suffer from 'chronic fatigue [...] symptomatic of depression and frustration'. She is weakened by smallpox, and injured by Luxmore's horse.² Phineas's disability is not only a means for the hero to display both his physical strength and his sensitivity, it also provides an effective narrative framework, in which Phineas is able to give a viewpoint on the hero in the masculine world of work and public life, as well as in the domestic sphere. J. Russell Perkin reads Phineas as an

¹ Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 34-73.

² Mascarenhas, p.265.

attempt by Craik to emulate George Eliot in constructing a masculine narrative persona, and thus 'break out of the feminine ghetto'. The strategy failed, he suggests, because the 'feminised [...] chronic invalid' is 'not a very convincing male voice', in contrast with the 'strength and assertive masculinity' of John Halifax.¹ This narrow concept of muscular masculinity is, however, consistently undermined in Craik's novels, as will be discussed further in this chapter.

John's marriage to Ursula, the daughter of a gentleman and related to aristocracy, is by no means the final verification of his status. Craik's hero has to continue to prove himself in three major areas – in his family; in the world of work as he rises from employee to employer; and, after he has gained influence, within the community and beyond. Important to each of these is his attitude towards the material gains his success brings him. The roles of John and Ursula within marriage conform to Victorian expectations, in that John's labour is performed outside the domestic sphere, and Ursula's largely within, but each, Craik stresses, is as difficult and valuable as the other. Home is a haven, in which both husband and wife seek to shelter the other from their cares, but, even in a marriage described as 'a full and perfect whole [...] as true marriage should be' (239), these, largely financial, worries during 'ten struggling years' threaten to disrupt the harmony, which only Muriel can restore:

If at night, her father came home jaded and worn, sickened to the soul by the hard battle he had to fight daily, hourly with the outside world, Muriel would come softly and creep into his bosom, and he was comforted. If busying herself about, doing faithfully her portion too, that the husband when he came home of evenings might find all cheerful and never know how heavy the household cares had been

¹ Russell J. Perkin, 'Narrative voice and the 'feminine' novelist: Dinah Mulock and George Eliot', *Victorian Review*, 18.1 (1992), 24-42 (p. 33).

during the day – if, at times, Ursula’s voice took too sharp a tone – at sight of Muriel it softened at once. (258)

The passage conveys a sense of strain imposed by the desire to keep ‘all cheerful’ by separating the cares of the day from the ideal of home, but elsewhere in the novel there is no suggestion of the unbridgeable distance between husband and wife which Craik refers to in her journalism, caused by the selfishness of men, or by women who are ‘far from being helpmeets to the men they marry’ (‘About Money’, 7).

As a husband and father, John exhibits the combination of firmness and gentleness essential to Craik’s conception of the ideal man. His emotional response to the birth of his first child, (when first placed in his arms, ‘he had wept like a child’ (250), his tender care for all his children, in particular, for his blind daughter, and his full involvement in their upbringing, would have been considered unusual at the time of the novel’s publication and still more so as the century progressed, with, as Tosh suggests, middle class men becoming increasingly distanced from the minutiae of family life, and boys being taught that to show emotion was a sign of weakness.¹ In an earlier work, however, Tosh uses Craik’s comment about ‘selfism’ in ‘Concerning Men’ to support his view that her journalism on the role of fathers is ‘unduly pessimistic’, because ‘there is abundant evidence of fatherly concern and involvement with the day-to-day raising of children’, yet he also criticises her portrayal of John Halifax as a father as overly sentimental

Craik gave an idealized and tear-jerking portrayal of a public-spirited entrepreneur who melted at the sight of his newborn daughter and watched over her when she was ill. But her comments about real family life were much more hard-nosed. Of the father she wrote: ‘His very selfishness, or, call it selfism,

¹ Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, pp. 103-128.

his hardness and masterfulness, are, in one sense, a necessity, else he would never be able to fight his way and protect those whom he is bound to protect.’ According to this view, the very distortions which the father’s personality endured in the public sphere disqualified him from full human relations with his children.¹

Craik’s views are not, as Tosh suggests, conflicting. In her journalism, she set out to examine how men’s seemingly inexorable selfishness affected their wives and children, whilst her purpose in *John Halifax* was to present an exemplary husband and father. Although she acknowledges that John is ’jaded’ by the ‘the hard battle he has to fight daily’, and her use of military metaphor echoes her journalistic writing on the subject, Craik shows how it is possible for fathers to negotiate the transition between work and home, by being fully involved in family life and making democratic decisions through what she refers to as ‘domestic consultations ’ involving the whole family, as the following passage, concerning their proposed move to Longfield, indicates:

Of these domestic consultations there was never any dread, for they were always held in public. There were no secrets in our house. Father and mother, though sometimes holding different opinions, had but one thought, one aim – the family good. (260)

As the passage indicates, Ursula is not diminished or ‘silenced’ by her husband, as Mascarenhas has suggested.² At the centre of family and community life, she displays a ‘quiet tenacity’ and is ‘not a woman to be led blindfold, even by her husband’ (327). John is ‘not only parent and head, but companion, guide and familiar friend’ (364), and thus very different from the usual stereotype of the remote, stern Victorian paterfamilias, as described by Tosh:

¹ Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, p.86; quotation from Craik, ‘Concerning Men’, p.7.

² Mascarenhas, p. 267.

Maternal nurture implied softness, warmth, empathy and affection [...]. Fatherhood, on the other hand, suggested single-mindedness (particularly as regards breadwinning) discipline, rigidity and anxiety; many fathers subordinated their more human instincts to the overriding need to prepare their sons for a harsh and challenging market place.¹

Fatherhood has a religious significance for Craik, as a representation of ‘that Father in Heaven, who is at once justice, wisdom and perfect love’ (280). The notion of God as a just but loving father gained importance to many in the mid-Victorian, post-Darwinian world:

this conception of a mechanistic, exclusively material world, and its corollary, the spectre of universal orphanhood, lent urgency and appeal to the notion of a ‘vast system of paternal administration in pursuance of one purpose of eternal good’.²

Such a view had connotations for the father’s moral and spiritual responsibilities within the home. Craik’s description of John as ‘the good father’ (280), carries the weight of this religious significance, giving authority to her model of fatherhood, and thus intended to influence the reader’s views, some of which may well have differed from those sanctioned in the novel. In John’s opinion on education, for example, Craik undermines the belief, becoming increasingly common amongst the rising classes, that boarding school was the right place to equip their sons with the necessary gentlemanly attributes. John has an ‘invincible objection’ to sending his boys away to school, fearing it will ruin their character (359):

Guy sat down beside his mother, and slipped his arm round her waist. They still fondled her with a child-like simplicity – these her almost grown-up sons; who had never been sent to school for a day, and

¹ Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, p.184.

² Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers (eds.), *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 16- 19; quotation from T. Griffith, *The Fatherhood of God* (London: Hatchard, 1862), p. 214.

had never learned of other sons of far different mothers, that a young man's chief manliness ought to consist in despising the tender charities of home. (360)

Here Craik shows awareness of the way in which the notion of manliness was being shaped by the public school ethos, which rejected the domestic ideal as being antipathetic to the demands of empire. As Tosh explains, 'whereas young men earlier in the century were often able to express intense feelings in public – tears, hugs and so forth – this became increasingly rare in their sons and grandsons'.¹ By emphasising her belief that young men should be brought up to consider that showing affection is a not a sign of weakness but a strength, Craik makes clear that John's tenderness towards his children is not an idiosyncrasy, but an essential part of manliness.

John and Ursula do, however, acquire one of the accoutrements signifying gentility, in the form of a governess for Maud. Ursula's misgivings about this, combined with the rift between Guy and Edwin that Louise Silver's presence causes, may suggest that Craik intended the decision to be considered unwise, despite the eventual marriage between Edwin and Louise. It is in dealing with his children that John's usually sound judgement is occasionally seen to falter, and where he experiences his greatest sorrows, Craik perhaps suggesting that material success does not guarantee contentment, and that family life can be less easy to negotiate than the world of work. John's rejection of Lord Ravenel as a suitor for Maud can be interpreted as the action of a controlling and somewhat hypocritical father, an interesting parallel with John's thwarted love for Ursula, since Ravenel is rejected partly because he is of the wrong class for his daughter. John's action, however, proves to be justified because it brings

¹ Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p. 49.

about Ravenel's moral restitution. Lynne M. Alexander has suggested that John disapproves of Ravenel's Catholicism and censures 'a marriage across faiths'.¹

However, John's support of sectarian tolerance is made clear throughout the novel:

John [...] express[ed] his conviction, then unhappily a rare one, that everyone's conscience is free; and that all men of blameless life ought to be protected by, and allowed to serve the state, whatever be their religious opinions. (264)

It is the lack of *any* faith, evident in Ravenel's comment that 'a wise man esteems all faiths alike worthless' (264), which, along with his idle life, explains John's belief that he is not worthy of Maud.

Ravenel, essentially an honourable man, made cynical by indolence and lack of purpose, is proof that wealth has the potential to spoil character. John's sons have all the social and educational advantages that he lacked, but there is a suggestion that this has made life too easy for them and they have not developed their father's strong moral sense. Guy, with his 'pleasure-loving temperament', is attracted to the leisure pursuits of the gentry, 'the fox hounds, dinner parties, balls', anathema to his father's principles 'which [...] forbade outward show' (370). As the eldest son, it is expected that Guy will take over the running of the mill, but although John appears to understand that his son's personality is different from his own, he fails to appreciate the consequences of this. Guy has to 'get over his fancy of going to Cambridge' because 'college life would not have done' for him (359), then is thwarted in his wish to become 'a capital soldier' (361). His plea that he would have 'liked it [...] better than anything', is countered by his father:

¹ Lynne M. Alexander, introduction to *John Halifax, Gentleman*, p.19.

“Better than being my right hand at the mills, and your mother’s at home? – Better than growing up to be our eldest son, our comfort and our hope? – I think not, Guy.”

“You are right, father,” was the answer, with an uneasy look. For this description seemed less what Guy was, than what we desired him to be. (361)

There is a suggestion of self-interest in the repeated use of the possessive pronoun in John’s response, as if seeing Guy’s future in terms of his own and Ursula’s wishes. Guy has to develop his own character, even though it means going through a period where he violates his parents’ code of behaviour by becoming involved in Lord Luxmore’s set in Paris, ‘gets drunk – in a gaming house’, and, having struck Vermilye and believing him to be dead, flees to America (438). The guilt of the act is softened by the explanation that Vermilye had insulted his father, but serves as a contrast to the scene where John refuses to return Brithwood’s blow. Becoming part of a higher social class thus has disastrous consequences for the family. Although Guy can call himself a gentleman’s son and heir, he is, by his parents’ standards, no longer a gentleman himself. He must redeem his character, and, just as his father did, earn the title through hard work. Ravenel, who joins him in America, must also go through this period of toil before he achieves the required standard of masculinity. In the classic cycle of the spiritual biography, and thus echoing Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), ‘poverty, labour, sickness, shipwreck’ (480) are necessary stages in the moral salvation of both men. Guy’s rehabilitation into the family is important as a marker of John’s own gentlemanly status, since, as Tosh points out, the passing on of worthy qualities to sons ‘affected not only [a father’s] private satisfaction as a parent, but his social standing as a man’.¹ Guy as a version of the Prodigal Son also conveys Craik’s belief

¹ Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, p.4.

in the possibility of repentance and forgiveness, a theme explored more fully in *A Life for a Life*.

The willingness to work hard is essential to Craik's model of gentlemanly behaviour, and reflects some of the views being expressed by other influential writers of the period, including Carlyle, Mill, Ruskin and Smiles. As Danahay puts it:

Guided by John Calvin's teachings, the 'work ethic' assumed that all people, especially men, were constrained to labour by the will of God, and that thrift and sobriety were necessary for salvation. These ideals find their expression in the Victorian period in an emphasis upon self-discipline, self-denial and hard work. During the Victorian period [...] the refusal or inability to work was castigated and seen as 'a moral and social sin'. The compulsion to labour was thus made an integral part of normative masculinity. (147)

There is a Carlylean tone of work as a means of self-denial and sexual sublimation in John's declaration, when telling Phineas of the "torment, conflict, despair" of his love for Ursula, that "nothing but work kept me in my senses" (193). Craik does not romanticise labour for its own sake, as Carlyle did, ('All work, even cotton spinning is noble'),¹ and neither does she dismiss the possibility that its material benefits can be enjoyed. For Craik, work is a means of testing character, and it is largely through his conduct as both employee and employer that her hero has to prove his worth. As labourer, then clerk and apprentice, he exhibits not only the stoicism and tenacity required for physical labour, but a sense of duty towards his employer. His quick thinking and sound judgement, combined with his natural intelligence and desire for self-improvement, are the attributes that set him apart from other workers. Craik was criticised for her hero's possession of a Greek testament inscribed by his father, 'Guy Halifax, Gentleman', since, if John's virtues can be explained by his noble blood, the

¹ Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), p.158.

democratic message of the novel is undermined.¹ In a tribute to Craik written after her death, her friend Frances Martin explained that the testament was intended as a symbol, and that the title of ‘Gentleman [...]’ was held to be the inalienable possession of every human being. The old Greek testament is an allegory. Somewhere there is the inscription “Gentleman” for everyone’.² Perhaps an awareness of potential criticism caused Craik to describe the inscription as having been written in a ‘feeble, illiterate, female hand’ (41), implying that John’s mother was of a lower class. Craik does not claim that all working men have the capacity to be a John Halifax – as an employer, John is aware that many of his men are superstitious and ignorant – but she suggests that those who do have the capacity should be encouraged to develop it.

His experience of being a poor, working man is crucial to John’s success as an employer, since it enables him to understand his employees, and is also the impetus behind his desire to bring about social reform:

“When I was a young man [...] I had strongly impressed on my mind the wish to gain influence in the world – riches if I could – but at all events influence. I thought I could use it well, better than most men; those can best help the poor who understand the poor.” (365)

This empathy is in evidence early in his career and is key to his successful handling of the rioters in the ‘hungry year’ of 1800 (100), so different from Abel’s disastrous lack of understanding. John’s intervention is heeded because he is recognised as not only ‘a real gentleman’, a man of integrity, who has helped them when in trouble, but also as one who “‘‘comed here as poor as us’’” and has known hunger as they have (118).

¹ See Louisa Parr, ‘Dinah Mulock (Mrs. Craik)’ in *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria’s Reign* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1897), pp. 219 -248 (p. 233).

² Frances Martin, ‘Mrs. Craik’, *The Athenaeum* (22 October, 1887), 539.

Although John's immediate solution – to feed the men – may seem simplistic and short-term, the action is intended by Craik as symbolic, making the point that the bread riots were caused by sheer desperation rather than any political or personal motive, and that men driven half-mad by starvation cannot be reasoned with. Craik is here conveying a message as relevant to contemporary mill owners as to those at the time of the bread riots – that to keep men and their families in a permanent state of poverty in order to subdue them, is not only unchristian but counter-productive. Although his action would 'cost [Fletcher] a considerable loss' (123), John is wise enough to see that this is nothing compared with the cost of a full-scale rebellion, Craik thus emphasising how fair treatment of workers is not only morally right but has considerable economic benefits. Abel's mishandling of the riot stems from his inability to understand the suffering of his men, putting his own interests first in hoarding grain. Phineas explains this attitude as being endemic:

There was a belief afloat, so widely that it tainted even my worthy father, that plenty was not good for the working classes: they required to be kept low. (49)

In condemning Abel's attitude, the novel is critical not only of the upper classes but of the self-made man who fails to treat with humanity the class from which he himself has risen. In contrast, John, as a fair employer, earns the respect and trust of the men, and it is this that enables him to avoid the machine-breaking widespread at the time. He explains to his workers that steam is the only way to keep the mill open, pays them while the 'iron-armed monster' is installed and, as it starts up for the first time, demonstrates how it operates (340). This consultative and paternalistic style of management carries the same religious connotation as his role as father. For both John and Ursula, power comes with responsibility and benevolence:

[They] had agreed together to live for some years to come at little Longfield, strictly within their settled income, that all the remainder of his capital might go to the improvement of Enderley Mills and mill people.

“I shall be master of nearly a hundred men and women. Think what good we can do!” (290)

John’s desire to use his profits to improve conditions for his workers is underlined again later in the novel, when, as the wealthy owner of Beechwood Hall, he continues this investment, taking a ‘patriarchal pleasure’ in investing capital wisely, ‘chiefly for the benefit of his mills and those concerned therein’ (374).

Craik’s representation of a model of management which was moral, philanthropic, and, significantly, embodied in the figure of a mill-owner, would undoubtedly have aroused conflicting emotions in her readers, for whom the steam-powered cloth mill would have been a potent and complex symbol – an emblem of pride in British industrial supremacy and the prosperity it generated for many, celebrated at the Great Exhibition five years before the novel’s publication, yet also a source of shame at the dreadful conditions endured by workers in the mill towns. As suggested earlier, Craik’s use of ‘Halifax’ as John’s surname would seem to be a deliberate way of keeping the contemporary association with one of the largest of such towns, in the reader’s mind.

Mid-Victorian Halifax has been described as follows:

The appalling living and working conditions within these expanding mill towns initially went unheeded, and the new textile factories stood side by side with barrack-like back-to-back slums along the congested valley floors, whilst double-decker terraces clung precariously to the steep hillsides. In Halifax, cellar dwellings and open sewers presented an ever-increasing challenge to the newly created borough authority. The booming Pennine town paid little attention initially to basic public amenities,

and in 1843 was described as a 'mass of little, miserable, ill-looking streets, jumbled together in chaotic confusion'.¹

John's humane treatment of his workers is thus not intended to be merely of historical interest, but as an exemplar for contemporary employers. Her paternalistic model was not an unrealistic one, as some, albeit few, philanthropic industrialists were aiming to provide good working conditions, housing and recreation. Robert Owen, for example, had run his New Lanark mills on such lines at the period in which John Halifax is set, while Titus Salt founded the village of Saltaire near Bradford for his cloth mill workers in 1853.² These were exceptions however, with the goal of most mill owners being to work their employees as ruthlessly and as inexpensively as possible.

John's prudent investments and aversion to speculation are important elements in the plot later in the novel, when, due to this caution, he is the only businessman not to suffer from the collapse of the county banks. Financial bubbles were a recurring feature of the nineteenth century, with the 1825 financial collapse to which Craik is referring, considered the most devastating, but others, around the time of *John Halifax's* publication (1856), also leading to bankruptcy for thousands.³ John prevents a run on the local bank, by publicly depositing five thousand pounds, thus reassuring the townspeople and preventing its collapse. Craik here seems to be recommending a course of action which was to become a central tenet expounded by Bagehot in his

¹ 'From Weaver to Web', *Online Visual Archive of Calderdale History, Calderdale Central Library* <<http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/wtw/timeline/1810-1850/1810-1850-1.html>>.

² See Robert Owen, *A New View of Society and other writings* (1813), ed. Gregory Claeys, (London: Penguin, 2007), and Robert Balgarnie, *Sir Titus Salt, Baronet, his life and its lessons* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877).

³ There were major financial collapses in 1847, 1857, 1866 and 1890. See Charles P. Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics and Crashes: a history of financial crises*, 5th edition (New Jersey: Wiley, 2005).

work *Lombard Street* (1873)¹ written in reaction to the crash of 1866: ‘Bagehot’s principal message is that the first task of a central bank during a financial panic is to end the panic’.² John’s financial security, however, provokes envy and malice, ‘the curse of prosperity’ (385), as he calls it, a further manifestation of the corrupting power of money. Craik’s emphasis on the possibility of an ethical use of capital, and her hero’s aversion to greedy speculation, is unusual in the light of the more typical attitude, frequently portrayed in novels of the same period as *John Halifax*, that to discuss profit was essentially vulgar, and that the successful businessman’s fortune was frequently tainted by corruption.³

There is certainly a sense in *John Halifax*, of the author having to justify the morality of her hero’s prosperity and consequent rise in society. Not only does her protagonist use his wealth to improve the conditions of his own workers, including the provision of good housing, he also strives to gain social and political influence in a wider sphere. The motive behind John’s desire to develop the Enderley mill is ‘not merely the making a fortune [...] but the position of useful power, the wide range of influence, the infinite opportunities of doing good’ (261). Craik is not afraid to acknowledge that a ‘fortune’ can be enjoyed by those who have earned it, as long as it is also used to benefit others. When John contemplates the move to Beechwood Hall, he again validates his wish to live on a grander scale, arguing that ‘the higher a man rises, the

¹ Walter Bagehot, *Lombard Street: A Description of the Money Market* (1873), ed. Peter L. Bernstein (New York: John Wiley, 1999).

² Richard G. Anderson, ‘Bagehot on the Financial Crises of 1825 – and 2008’, *Economic Synopses*, 7 (2009), p.1.

³ For example, Dickens’s *Hard Times*, 1854.

wider and nobler grows his sphere of usefulness', and so too does that of his sons, who will 'help on the ever advancing tide of human improvement, among their own people first, and thence extending outward in the world, whithersoever their talents or circumstances might call them' (366). John's emphasis on the importance of his family to the wider world undermines Lowe's suggestion that 'the [Halifax] family exists in opposition to society; its exclusiveness depends on the strict maintenance of its boundaries, which always tend to exclude all but sexual partners'.¹ As well as 'extending outward', the family's boundaries are elastic enough to encompass Phineas, Lady Caroline in the last three years of her life, and Mary Baines and her sick child.

The move to the Hall is given religious significance, a symbol of what John sees as his Christian duty to be a more visible presence and influence. Guy's snobbish excitement at the thought of 'founding a family' at Beechwood, is tempered by John's declaration:

"My boy, there is only one Name to whose honour we should all live. [...] In thus far do I wish to 'found a family' as you call it, that our light may shine before men – that we may be a city set on a hill – that we may say plainly unto all that ask us, 'for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'. [...] I believe [...] that one may 'serve the Lord' as well in wealth as in poverty, in a great house as in a cottage like this. I am not doubtful, even though my possessions are increased. I am not afraid of being a rich man."

The passage contains several biblical allusions, which would have been familiar to most readers and which are used to validate John's decision. In the 'Sermon on the Mount', believers are told, 'You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.' (Matthew 5:14) and 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds' (Matthew 5:16). The quotation from the book of Joshua,

¹ Lowe, p.166.

‘for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’ (Joshua 24:15), is relevant in that Joshua’s judicious leadership of his family, or ‘house’, is a sign of his suitability as a leader, chosen by God. A man’s behaviour within his family, Craik thus suggests, should be seen as a way of judging his capabilities as a leader in public life. She is perhaps referring, as she did in her journalism, to those influential men whose respectable public face was so different from that shown at home.¹ John’s assertion that he is ‘not afraid of being a rich man’ refers to the parable warning that ‘it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’ (Matthew 19: 24). Although Craik appears to be questioning the meaning of the parable, since John *is* a rich man, its full interpretation makes clear that it is those who value material possessions more than their faith who will not ‘enter the kingdom’. The religious connotation of the move is strengthened by its being presented as a decision forced by duty rather than for self-gratification, and which will increase the weight of responsibility upon him and on Ursula. It will ‘double her responsibilities and treble her cares; give her an infinitude of new duties and no pleasures half so sweet as those we left behind’ (367). The early deaths of John and Ursula, with the frail Phineas outliving them, are also perhaps intended to suggest the heavy burden such an obligation imposes.

Silvana Collella has written of the ways in which Craik balances the self-interest of capitalism with the altruism of charity in *John Halifax*, suggesting that

altruism often appears as the public face of individualism in Craik’s novel. The narrative treads a fine line between the “good-faith economy” (Bourdieu 1980:114) and the rationality of self-interest in an

¹ See, for example, Craik’s essay ‘Genius; its aberrations and its responsibilities’, which criticises the behaviour of Thomas Carlyle; *Good Words* (April, 1855), collected in *About Money*, pp. 89-108.

attempt to redefine the social and symbolic capital of the industrious middle classes. *John Halifax* promotes a vision of disinterested generosity as much as it affirms the benefits of self-interest.¹

However, while Colella suggests that ‘the plot never fails to reward the pursuit of self-interest with symbolic and material gains’,² and provides ‘a compromise [...] whereby the so-called middle class virtues fluctuate between the allegedly opposite poles of disinterestedness and instrumental rationality’,³ a reading of the novel which takes account of the many biblical references used in the context of John’s prosperity, suggests that Craik herself did not consider the philanthropic use of earned wealth as a compromise but rather as a Christian duty. Lowe ignores the many references to John’s active improvement of the lives of the poor, and his provision of good working and housing conditions for his employees, in her reading that he ‘will do nothing to alleviate the distance between himself and his workers’, and misunderstands the narrator’s comment that ‘there was not a gentleman in the country whose name so seldom headed a charity subscription as that of John Halifax’ (428).⁴ Craik is not suggesting that her hero is miserly or motivated by self-interest, but that, instead of performing ‘showy deeds’ (428) or giving money publicly for self-aggrandisement, he does his good works quietly. Readers would have been aware of the implied reference to Matthew 6:2, which advises, ‘Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do [...] that they may be praised by others’. In her essay ‘Benevolence – or Beneficence’ (1875), she explains her view more fully, writing of the importance of helping others to help themselves rather than merely donating

¹ Silvana Colella, ‘Gifts and Interest’, p. 397.

² Colella, p.398.

³ Colella, p.410.

⁴ Lowe, p.164.

money, and giving the example of an acquaintance who had set up schemes for improving the lives of ‘the very poor’ in the London slums:

She has slowly lifted [them] from the [...] savagery of London courts and alleys, into intelligent human beings – during all these years, she said, she had never given in charity one single shilling. Fair payment for fair work was the principle she invariably went upon. (‘Benevolence’, 129)

As John’s wealth increases, so too does his capacity to effect change more widely. Bourrier has described John Halifax as a ‘paragon of strength and silence’,¹ but this ignores his increasingly powerful and influential voice. He serves as a magistrate, dispensing justice fairly, is sympathetic towards poachers, whose activities he considers ‘illegal’ rather than ‘dishonest’ (262), speaks at public meetings, arguing against the hanging of Luddites, and influences political process at the highest level, giving ‘evidence’ to Pitt about the bread riots (196). Although unwilling to stand as a candidate for a rotten borough in an unreformed parliament, he is able to influence the electorate to choose Ralph Oldtower as a candidate rather than Luxmore’s pawn, Vermilye. Craik reminds her readers of the corruption before reform, when Phineas speaks ironically of the “‘free and independent burgesses’” who are being bribed to send Vermilye to Parliament, a situation John finds

repugnant alike to his feelings and his principles, but which he had still to endure, not having risen high enough to oppose, single-handed, the great mass of social corruption which at this crisis of English history kept gathering and gathering, until out of the very horror and loathsomeness of it, an outcry for purification arose. (291)

Although, looking back in middle age, John feels he has not achieved as much as he had once hoped, Ursula reminds him of the success of many of his causes:

¹ Bourrier, ‘Narrating Insanity’, p.205.

“your improvements at Enderley, and your Catholic Emancipation – your Abolition of Slavery and your Parliamentary Reform – why, there is hardly any scheme for good, public or private, to which you do not lend a helping hand”. (359).

It is the author’s stress on the importance of active engagement in social reform that explains why it is the erring son, Guy, ‘generous but uncertain’ (361), rather than the dutiful Edwin, ‘the good son who had never given him a single care’ (430), who proves to be John’s moral successor, and, as an MP, will carry on John’s legacy of reform. During his seven years in America, Guy has become

eager and earnest upon other and higher cares than mere business; entered warmly into his father’s sympathy about many political measures now occupying men’s minds. A great number of comparative facts concerning the factory children in England and America; a mass of evidence used by Mr. Fowell Buxton in his arguments for the abolition of slavery, and many other things originated in the impulsive activity, now settled into mature manly energy, of Mr. Guy Halifax, of Boston, U.S. (470)

That Craik’s novel is not merely a celebration of commercial success is evident in this passage. ‘Mere business’ is much less important than the ‘higher’ causes for which its profits and influence can be utilised. Edwin, although the most similar to John in his interest in machinery, business sense, diligence and steady character, is flawed, Craik suggests, in that he appears to put material above moral worth. When told of the plans to move to Beechwood, his thoughts immediately focus on whether it would be ‘a safe investment to buy it’ rather than on any sentiment for Longfield (365). On learning that more banks have failed, rather than appearing concerned for those who are ruined, he asks if it will affect the family, prompting Guy to criticise him for ““always thinking of ‘us’ and ‘our business’” (369). It is interesting that while John’s business acumen is presented as an unalloyed virtue, there is a suggestion that Edwin’s makes him somewhat pedestrian and self-centred: ‘the grave Edwin [...] was already a thorough

man of business, and plodded between Enderley mills and a smaller one [...] at Norton Bury, with indomitable perseverance' (361). While Edwin's diligence is praised, there is a sense that success is not as creditable if it has not involved hardship and struggle, as John's and Guy's has.

It is significant that Craik chooses to end the novel with the deaths of John and Ursula taking place on the day of the abolition of slavery:

Friday, the first of August, 1834; many may remember that day [...]; everywhere bells were ringing [...] in town and country, there was spread abroad a general sense of benevolent rejoicing – because honest old England had lifted her generous voice, nay had paid down generously her twenty millions, and in all her colonies the negro were free. (491)

The passage celebrates the profound impact wrought by the perseverance of men like John Halifax, but is also a reminder of the continuing social deprivation tolerated in 'honest old England'. Conditions of workers in mills, factories and mines were frequently described as being as degrading as those endured by slaves.¹ Craik herself makes the connection in 'Benevolence – or Beneficence?', when, describing the oppression of the working classes, she uses the phrase inscribed on the medallion of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery, in arguing that there should be 'one law of right for all, and [to] look upon every man who fulfilled it as "a man, and a brother"' ('Benevolence', 158). It is his contribution to the alleviation of human suffering rather than the fruits of his personal success which is John Halifax's most important legacy, set to continue through the reforming zeal of his son, Guy Halifax, MP. Craik's ideal

¹ See Robert Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

of masculinity clearly involves more than dutiful assiduousness or the ability to maintain the *status quo*, worthy as that might be, but must incorporate a ‘manly energy’ (470) to strive continually for improvement, not only for oneself but also for the wider society.

Shams and Sceptics: Men of the Church

Although John Halifax’s rise to prosperity takes place at the beginning of the nineteenth century, he is, as a mill-owning industrialist, the archetypal Victorian self-made man, embodying the social, political and technological shifts that allowed such men to flourish. In several other novels, Craik uses a figure more usually associated with the conservative values of the pre-industrial age – that of the clergyman – to examine how contemporary masculinity was being shaped by such forces of change. Rather than representing stability, as might be expected, the clergyman instead becomes a focus for many of the tensions and uncertainties complicating the construction of masculinity during this period, as well as allowing Craik to comment on what she saw as the church’s failure to disseminate the Christian principles upon which her own ideal of manliness was founded. The clergyman is a key character in several of Craik’s novels, and, with the exception of the faultless Reverend Cardross in *A Noble Life*, is generally portrayed in a light more often scathing than flattering. The novels discussed below are of particular interest for the way Craik makes the clergyman central to her examination of some of the most significant and controversial debates of the period, all of which are directly related to the issue of masculine identity.

One of her more sympathetic portraits is that of Harold Gwynne in her novel of 1850, *Olive*¹, who is used to explore the question of how religious belief might be reconciled with scientific knowledge. Written nine years before Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, the novel shows an awareness of how the work of geologists and natural scientists such as J.D. Lamarck,² Charles Lyell,³ and Robert Chambers,⁴ was already casting doubt upon the literal truth of the Bible. Harold personifies the deep anxieties aroused by such theories, his role as priest adding dramatic intensity to the narrative's exposition of his dilemma. The novel also draws attention to the limited range of professions open to men at this period.⁵ Having been given the opportunity to study at Cambridge, despite his humble background, Harold is forced through financial hardship and a sense of obligation to his widowed mother, to accept the offer of a curacy, rather than follow his strong inclination towards scientific investigation. The church remained one of the few respectable occupations open to those men who had received a university education but who lacked the wealth, connections, or inclination to establish themselves in the law or the army, or in the newer professions of medicine or literature. Even within the church, however, access to the more desirable livings was largely restricted to those with influential acquaintances.⁶ The profession of scientist did not, in fact, exist at this time, with scientific research being carried out by well-off

¹ *Olive*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850; references to Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

² J.D. Lamarck, *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809), trans. by Hugh Elliot, as *Zoological Philosophy: an exposition with regard to the Natural History of Animals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

³ Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, 3 Vols. (London: John Murray, 1830-33).

⁴ Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation and Other Writings* (London, 1844; ed. James A. Secord, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁵ Cora Kaplan suggests that the novel is set early in the nineteenth century, basing this on the assumption that the Coronation referred to (p.37), taking place when Olive is between the ages of seven and twelve, is that of George IV (in 1821). However, it could also refer to that of William IV in 1831. Olive is twenty-eight at the end of the novel, thus dating the second part as mid-century. The beginning of Chapter XIX, (p.109) describes an area of contemporary London 'between two great omnibus outlets'; omnibuses did not become commonplace until the late 1830s. See Judith Flanders, *Victorian City: Everyday Life in Dickens's London* (London: Atlantic, 2012), pp.70-75.

⁶ See Gerald Parsons, *Religion in Victorian Britain: 1, Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

amateurs, frequently clergymen who combined their clerical duties with recording their observations on the natural world – observations which had, in less questioning times, seemed to prove, rather than contest, the existence of a creator.¹ Harold's passion for scientific enquiry cannot be properly fulfilled until he is of independent means after inheriting from his aunt. Craik's accurate assessment of the frustration experienced by those with such interests is borne out by the writings of T. H. Huxley (1825-1895), whose views provide an interesting parallel with those expressed by Harold:

The difficulties of obtaining a decent position in England in anything like a reasonable time seem to me greater than ever they were. To attempt to live by any scientific pursuit is a farce. Nothing but what is absolutely practical will go down in England. A man of science may earn great distinction, but not bread.²

As has been well documented, universities in both Germany and Scotland were more advanced than those in England in their emphasis on scientific teaching and research, and this was largely due to the stultifying effect of the Church of England on higher education.³ Harold's plan to study in Heidelberg and his eventual establishment of his career in Edinburgh, reveal the author's appreciation of this lack of education, a situation that Huxley deplored:

As for works of profound research on any subject [...], why, a third-rate, poverty-stricken German University turns out in one year more product of that kind than our vast and wealthy foundations elaborate in ten.⁴

¹ See Bernard V Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: designing nature for new audiences* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

² T. H. Huxley, quoted in *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, by Thomas William Heyck (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 100.

³ J. B. Morell, 'The Patronage of Mid-Victorian Science in the University of Edinburgh', *Science Studies*, Vol 3.4 (October, 1973), 353-388.

⁴ Huxley, 'A Liberal Education and Where to Find it', *Macmillan's Magazine* (March, 1868), 367-378 (p.377), quoted in *The Transformation of Intellectual Life*, p. 106.

Kaplan believes that ‘Harold’s particular scientific expertise and interests are kept deliberately vague’,¹ and Margaret Maison, in her study of Victorian religious novels, also suggests that Craik ‘does not trouble to tell us’ what has ‘shattered her hero’s creed’.² However, Craik clearly implies it is the study of astronomy that has led Harold to atheism:

“With straining eyes I gazed into the Infinite – and I was dazzled, blinded, whirled from darkness to light, from light to darkness – no rest, no rest! [...] Those pleasant dreams of yours – God, Heaven, Immortality – are to me meaningless words. [...] [T]hey seem to shine down like pitiless stars upon the black boiling sea in which I am drowning.” (196)

“What is even a world? A mere grain of dust in endless space? It cannot be. A God who could take interest in man, in such an atom as I, would be not God at all.” (221)

Harold’s interest in astronomy seems to indicate the author’s awareness that this was the only science to be taught at Cambridge at this period.³ At the time when Craik’s hero would have been immersed in his study of the subject, astronomers such as John Pringle Nichol and George Biddell Airy were actively publishing,⁴ and, in 1844, Robert Chambers’s widely read *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* had suggested that cosmic evolution ruled out the possibility of the Biblical account of the Creation. Although Harold claims to continue to “believe in a God, [...] the one ruling Spirit of the universe – unknown, unapproachable. None but a madman would deny the existence of a God” (196), elsewhere in the novel he describes himself as an ‘atheist’ (319) declaring, “I believe in none of these things – I am an infidel!” (195).

¹ Cora Kaplan, Introduction to *Olive*, p.xii.

² Margaret Maison, *Search Your Soul Eustace: Victorian Religious Novels* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), pp. 218-220 (p.219).

³ Allan Chapman, *The Victorian Amateur Astronomer: Independent Astronomical Research in Britain, 1820-1920* (Chichester: Willey, 1998), p.17.

⁴ Chapman, pp. 13-32; 165-180.

For Craik to portray a clergyman in this light must have seemed shocking to some of her readers, but in doing so, she confronts the problem of doubt with a compelling directness, examining the implications of non-belief for an honourable man who not only has to face the consequences of atheism for his sense of self, but whose livelihood is dependent on the public profession of faith. Elizabeth Gaskell's Reverend Hale (in *North and South*), is much less controversial, as he does not lose his faith in God, only his willingness to abide by the church's thirty-nine articles.¹ Harold's spiritual crisis represents more than one man's struggle with scepticism. Through it, Craik emphasises the centrality of Christian values to her concept of masculinity.

The juxtaposition of religious, philosophical and scientific texts in Harold's study – 'more that of a man of science and learning than that of a clergyman' – suggests a genuine desire for truth, obscured rather than enlightened by the 'vast mass of polemical literature [of] all faiths, all variations of sect' (89). The use of religious tracts as a stand for his telescope indicates where Harold's interests really lie, as does the 'well-thumbed' copy of Isaac Newton's theories in contrast to the dust-covered sermons and the Bible placed on 'the farthest shelf'. The novel suggests that to question religious belief is natural, and condemns the church for not supporting those who do so. As a young man, Harold sought advice from men respected as 'pious', who proved 'too idle or too weak to fathom their creed', while those like himself, who 'dared – not yet to doubt, but meekly to ask a *reason* for their faith' were 'condemned

¹ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1855), ed. Angus Easson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); see Angus Easson, 'Mr. Hale's Doubts in *North and South*', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 31. 121 (Feb.1980), 30-40.

as impious' (196). Further compounding his disillusionment with his fellow-clergymen is their 'falsehood [and] hypocritical show':

Perchance in the desert, I might have learned to serve God. [...] But when between me and the one great Truth came a thousand petty veils of cunning thoughts and blindly-taught precedents; when among my brethren I saw vile men preaching virtue – men with weak, uncomprehending brains set to expound the mighty mysteries of God, then I said to myself, "The whole system is a lie!". (197)

The passage provocatively suggests that it is the church itself, not science, which presents the greatest threat to faith. This view is reiterated in one of her most powerful essays, 'Sermons' (1864), in which she is scornful of the generally poor quality of religious oration in all sects of the church, reflecting, she suggests, the inadequacy of the exponents. Clergymen should not be viewed as being beyond criticism as men 'sent from God', she argues, but should be open to rigorous scrutiny because of their influential position within society.¹ For the majority of Craik's readers, the weekly sermon would have been an important part of their religious and cultural lives.² Her essay is thus more than a commentary on sermons, but, like *Olive*, an uncompromising attack on one of the major bastions of masculine authority at this period. The essay reveals how closely the church was bound up with the issue of class. The typical English rector, Craik comments, has no true vocation but is commonly 'the squire's younger brother, son or nephew [...] located by hereditary influence' (130). Despite a degree, he is 'not considered clever enough for any other profession', but, Craik notes sardonically,

in the Church of England, talent is not indispensable. Education is, and corresponding refinement. You will rarely find the poorest curate, or the richest and dullest rector, who is not, in degree, a gentleman;

¹ Craik, 'Sermons', *Cornhill Magazine* (January 1864); collected in *The Unkind Word and Other Stories*, pp. 127-137 (p.127).

² See Robert H. Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit: Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Associated University Press, 1998), pp. 43-56.

but a gentleman is not necessarily a clever man, and certainly not a clever preacher; nay sometimes quite the contrary. ('Sermons', 130)

'Sermons', written with the 'intellectual dignity of style' (137) Craik deems essential for such an address, implicitly illustrates that the woman author communicates the Christian message more effectively than the clergyman. Several of her essays are essentially moral discourses made relevant and accessible to the contemporary reader, their titles suggesting that the author intended them to fulfil a need the church was failing to meet.¹

The novel places the struggle between faith and doubt within the discourse of gender, by suggesting that the male institution of the church is failing to represent the principles of Christianity, or to confront the implications of scientific knowledge, while Olive's 'womanly' faith and insight make her 'a far better apostle than the clergyman' (189). Harold's contempt for the clergy's lack of intellectual curiosity makes clear, however, that Craik's intention is not to set 'masculine' reason against 'feminine' trust as Maison implies, describing *Olive* as a 'feeble rescue story':

Olive is one of the earliest tales of these anguished doubters, lost, strayed and brought back to the fold by an angelic member of the opposite sex. [...] She soon succeeds, of course, and Harold, restored to health and orthodoxy, marries his fair rescuer at the end of the story.²

The novel is, in fact, a far more sophisticated representation of the crisis of faith than Maison's appraisal would suggest. Olive succeeds in restoring Harold's belief because she is the antithesis of his fellow-clergymen: she exemplifies Christian principles in

¹ Craik, *Sermons out of Church* (1875); 'Life and its Worth: a Lay Sermon', in *Sunday Magazine*, (1884), collected in *About Money and Other Things*, pp. 57-75.

² Maison, *Search Your Soul, Eustace*, pp. 218-219 (p.218).

her own life; her faith comes directly from her own intuitive response to the Bible, rather than the ‘worn-out forms’ of the church (197); and she has the intelligence to realise that Harold’s scepticism ‘must be wrestled with, not with the religion of precedent – not even with the religion of feeling – but by means of that clear demonstration of reason which forces conviction’ (199). Although he regains a broad belief in God, Harold is not restored to orthodoxy, but leaves the church to establish his career as a scientist.

Craik’s portrayal emphasises that without faith, her hero is deeply flawed. His torment is evidence of his admirable integrity, but he lacks empathy and compassion, even towards his own daughter, forbidding Olive with ‘calm, cold’ words from comforting her at her mother’s graveside because he ‘deem[s] it very inexpedient that the feeble mind of a child should be led to dwell on subjects which are beyond the grasp of the profoundest philosopher’ (165). At this first meeting, Harold’s initially hostile, condescending manner, and his daughter’s reaction, ‘almost amounting to fear’ (164), casts him in the mould of earlier brooding heroes, particularly Edward Rochester, in *Jane Eyre*, and creates a romantic tension between hero and heroine. As Kaplan suggests, Harold also shares characteristics with Jane Eyre’s clergyman suitor St. John Rivers.¹ However, although Craik’s description of her hero as having a classically handsome appearance marred by ‘a certain rigidness and harshness in his mien, and a slightly repellent atmosphere around him’ (84) could apply equally to Rivers, Harold’s enlightened learning is the antithesis of Rivers’ Calvinistic repression. Olive’s first impression confirms the sense of Harold’s masterful bearing:

¹ Cora Kaplan, Introduction to *Olive*, p.xii.

He was a gentleman – a true *gentleman*; at the first glance anyone would have given him that honourable and rarely earned name. [...] Handsome he was [...] but there was something in him that controlled her much more than mere beauty would have done. It was a grave dignity of presence, which indicated that mental sway which some men are born to hold, first over themselves, and then over their kind. Wherever he came, he seemed to say – I rule, I am master here! (164)

Although the novel's authorial voice generally seems to represent Olive's viewpoint, there are several passages in which, like that above, the reader is being encouraged to have a different perception of character and events from that of the heroine. The italicisation of the second '*gentleman*' suggests that Olive's initial impression fails to take account of Craik's own interpretation of the word. At this stage, the reader knows more about Harold's character than does Olive, and is aware that he does not, in fact, have the self-control which his bearing suggests. At his first appearance in the novel, he has allowed his passion for Sara to overcome his good sense, a struggle revealed in his agitated, almost petulant, behaviour:

He restlessly paced the room, angry with his mother, himself – with the whole world. A moralist looking on the knotted brow, which indicated the most majestic intellect, would have smiled to see [...] a great and wise man making of himself a slave, nay, a very fool, for the enchantments of a beautiful woman. (92)

His marriage, motivated by his desire to escape his troubled thoughts, suggests an unattractive self-centredness: “I have had enough of study; I must have interest, amusement, excitement. I think I have drunk all the world's pleasures dry, except this one. [...] I know no rest except I am beside her” (93). Harold is disappointed in his belief that Sara can provide the 'rest' he requires. Described as coming from 'the class from whence are taken the lauded “mothers, wives and daughters of England”' (58), Sara is used by Craik to expose the fault lines in Sarah Stickney Ellis's model of

femininity delineated in her much-read advice manuals.¹ Harold's thwarted expectation that a wife should soothe, flatter, and provide unconditional love and 'domestic peace' (196) is an echo of the disenchantment with married life felt by Olive's parents:

Like many another pair who wed in the heat of passion, or the wilful caprice of youth, their natures, never very similar, had grown less so day by day, until in mature age, their two lives, instead of flowing onward in one loving current, had severed wider and wider, [...] a gulf of coldness, indifference and distrust [...]. Angus Rothesay was a disappointed man. At five-and-twenty he had taken a beautiful, playful, half-educated child [...] forgetting that at thirty-five he should need a sensible woman to be his trustworthy, sympathising wife, the careful and thoughtful mistress of his household. [...] He brooded over his disappointed hope in silence and reserve. [...] After a few years of struggling, less with her than with himself, he decided that he would take his own separate course, and let her take hers. [...] Their current of existence flowed on coldly and evenly, in two parallel lines which would never, never meet! (46)

Both unhappy marriages reveal Craik's view of the dangers of 'separate spheres', where women are brought up to be decorative and vacuous, men are expected to exhibit a proud restraint that prevents them from compromise or understanding, with the result that an unbridgeable distance grows between husband and wife. Just as Angus blames his wife for driving him to 'stray' by failing 'to make his home sweet and pleasant to him' (272), so too does Harold blame Sara for his misery, although he is more culpable for failing to recognise the incompatibility between the vain, 'not over-clever', yet 'sincere, good-tempered, affectionate' girl and himself (58). Her tears over the letters returned by her former suitor indicate that she is equally unhappy, and capable of a deeper feeling that Harold has failed to nurture. Harold's jealous reaction to the letters, his 'freezing [...] stern' words accusing her of lying throughout her marriage, and his avowal that he 'will never trust [her] or any woman more',

¹ Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England* (1839); *The Daughters of England* (1842); *The Wives of England* (1843); *The Mothers of England* (1843).

indicate vanity rather than love. Sara's last days – 'Harold was never unkind to her [...] but somehow, she pined away' (179), – suggest a chilling lack of sympathy contributing to her death. The bitter anguish Harold feels at the realisation that he may not be the beloved creation of a benign God, but, instead, a 'mere [...] atom' (221) in an impersonal Universe, appears to stem from the same egotism that doomed his marriage. Despite the imperious demeanour suggestive of the 'controlling influence' of 'a man born to rule over the wills of his brethren', Harold's self-absorption and resulting lack of fellow-feeling make him weak. His display of helplessness in front of the bereaved John Dent, where Olive takes over his role as priest in bringing solace to a man driven near madness by the loss of his son, proves that Olive's seemingly gentle influence is stronger – Harold's 'sceptre seemed torn from his hand – he was king no more' (194). The metaphor implies that it is not just the power of the church that is being challenged, but masculine authority generally.

Olive's feminine self-deprecation, however, allows her to give guidance and support to Harold without threatening his pride, but there is once again an ironic dissociation between the heroine's perception of Harold's superiority and the author's subtle undermining of it. At first, Harold dismisses Olive's belief that 'Faith and Knowledge' are not incompatible (38), as female gullibility, telling her sarcastically that he "often find[s] that the great beauty of a woman's religion. She pauses not to argue – she is always ready to believe" (165). Olive's 'woman's religion', however, is, though intuitive, ultimately more rational than that promulgated by a church controlled by men. While the narrative appears to convey the heroine's view that 'he was a great and learned man, and she a lowly woman: in her knowledge not worthy to touch his garment's hem – in her faith able to watch him as from Heaven' (194), her

enjoyment of the Book of Revelations, the most complex of Biblical texts, is evidence of intelligence as well as faith. So too is her skilful argument against atheism which takes place in the form of letters. Their content, revealed indirectly in Harold's responses, proves her to be equally 'learned', despite his patronising agreement with her deferential comment that she is not:

You answer, my kind friend, like a woman [...]. You say that, like most women, you have no power of keen philosophical argument. Perhaps not; but, there is in you a spiritual sense that may even transcend knowledge. (221)

Realising that his understanding of astronomy – 'the black abyss' (194) and the 'pitiless stars' (196) – is, in part, responsible for Harold's atheism, Olive reinterprets the 'fathomless mysteries' of the universe as a validation of faith, rather than a sign of man's insignificance. Just as it is impossible to fully comprehend the 'planets and systems' of the universe, 'so in the immaterial world there must be a boundary where all reasoning fails, and we can trust to nothing but that inward, inexplicable sense we call faith.' This, Harold feels, is 'the great argument' which 'incline[s]' him to believe (221).

In his re-writing of Olive's text in his replies, Harold can deny that he is being advised by a woman, a situation against which his pride revolts: "Sometimes I could almost curse the weakness which had given you – a woman – to hold my secret in your hands" (220). Although he later acknowledges that "my mind echoes your words" (222), he prefers to interpret her influence as that of the conventional 'good angel' (312) who gives "womanly" advice (222) and "preached to me with [her] life", rather than as an intellectual equal who has skilfully directed his thinking (220).

As Harold finds himself persuaded by Olive's argument, he feels that "all human affections are growing closer and dearer unto me" (222). Yet soon afterwards he tells her that, for men, "human affections are [...] secondary things. We scarce need them, or, when our will demands, we can crush them from our hearts" (228). These conflicting statements suggest a struggle to relinquish his self-perception of independence, threatened by a growing attachment to Olive, unacknowledged even by himself. Though his pride prevents him from declaring his feelings, they are subtly revealed to the reader in his jealous reaction to Olive's friendship with Lyle. His illness, resulting from his rescue of Olive from a fire – perhaps symbolic of the fire of the Holy Spirit – is the final process in his rehabilitation. The episode is evidence of his manly courage, but, as in *John Halifax*, the physical weakness that ensues is feminising – 'his whole face seemed softened and spiritualised' (311) – allowing the inhibitions of formality between hero and heroine to be discarded.

Despite his transformation and the satisfaction of the heroine's desires through marriage, the author does not appear to be quite as convinced by Harold's suitability as a husband as her heroine is. After a few weeks of marriage, though feeling a 'full contentment', Olive looks back on a honeymoon in which 'no wild raptures had she known – no thrilling honeymoon bliss' (324). Harold's daily reading of his 'great, ugly scientific book' (325) at the breakfast table, though a mark of his wish to inform Olive of his field of scholarship, could also indicate a desire to exert authority. Olive learns early in her marriage that she must manage his moods with subtlety, and prevent him from becoming 'tired and dull' from constant study – 'she never let him see how skilfully she did this, lest his man's dignity should revolt at being so lovingly beguiled' (330). She must keep 'secret' (324) the knowledge that he owes his wealth to her

renunciation of her aunt's legacy, as 'he was still as ever the very quintessence of pride'. These indications of Olive's tactful, but assertive, control undermine any sense that Harold is the dominant partner (330). At the end of the novel, as he proudly proclaims himself 'strong and bold [...], stern to resist, daring to achieve, as a man should feel' (331), the reader is aware that Harold's financial, moral and spiritual well-being are all attributable to his wife.

Harold's redeeming characteristics, his integrity and search for truth, are, it is implied, qualities not usually to be found in the clergy. In other novels, the author seems in sympathy with Harold's condemnation of those 'vile men preaching virtue' (197), whose hypocrisy is manifested in the church's apparent acceptance of the double standard, and in its wider unforgiving attitude towards wrongdoing. Through the character of Reverend Johnston in *A Life for a Life* (1859)¹, Craik considers the church's position regarding forgiveness, with reference to two much-debated issues of the time - the 'fallen' woman and the criminal justice system. Craik's own stance is made clear in the novel's epigraph: 'I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance' (Luke 5.22). Johnston's idea of justice, however, is based on the 'retributive vengeance' of Old Testament texts rather than on the precept of mercy advocated in the gospels (*A Life*, 283). Described as a clever man, he is nevertheless completely unsuited to his role, lacking the ability, or desire, to speak to his congregation in a language they can understand. His address is

what might have been expected from his face – classical, accurate, intelligent, gentlemanly. And the congregation listened with respect as to a clever exposition of things quite beyond their comprehension.

¹ *A Life for a Life* (London, 1859; references to New York: Carleton, 1866; University of Michigan Historical reprint series).

Except the gabble-gabble of the Sunday-school, and the clerk's loud "A-a-men!" the minister had the service entirely to himself. (48)

When it is revealed that the army doctor to whom his daughter Dora has become engaged, is the man who killed his only son years earlier, Johnston is unable to offer forgiveness despite the knowledge that the nineteen-year-old Max was deliberately made drunk and provoked into a rage by the older man, who is 'depraved to the core' (262). In the first edition of the novel, Max does not intend to kill. ("I murdered him [...]. Not with intent, God knows" (257). However, as she explains in the Preface to the second edition, Craik's original aim was to make the murder a deliberate act, though still 'without premeditation', committed under extreme provocation and instantly regretted. Believing that 'the public [...] would never endure that a man-slayer should be represented as a hero', she softened the deed to 'accidental manslaughter', but in response to a review in the *Athenaeum*, which found his 'agony of remorse' and his punishment too severe for the crime, Craik returned to her original idea, and the second edition was changed accordingly.¹ Johnston's reaction is the same in both editions. He curses Max 'in his own words and those of the Holy Book' (280), wishes to have him 'tried, condemned, executed', claiming that this is 'not out of personal revenge – which were unbecoming in a clergyman – but because God and man exact retribution for blood' (281). Legally there was only one degree of murder at this time, and Johnston's inflexible view would not have been unusual. However, many juries and judges did take extenuating circumstances into account.² Johnston's wish for vengeance, supported through Old Testament texts, is refuted by Max and

¹ Craik, Preface to second, revised edition of *A Life for a Life* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1860); 'A Life for A Life', (review), *Athenaeum* (6th August, 1859), 173-74.

² Public hanging ended in 1868, but capital punishment remained until 1965. See Martin J Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England 1830-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 266-279.

Dora, whose counter-citations give authority to the view that ‘the gospel of repentance and remission of sins’ (283) should prevail over the teachings of earlier prophets seemingly endorsed in the thirty-nine articles.

Johnston’s moral credentials are undermined by the revelation that his son’s dissolute character was due largely to his being indulged as a child:

His father never said him nay in any thing – never, from the time he sat at table in his own ornamental chair, and drank champagne out of his own particular glass [...]. He never knew what contradiction was (269).

The reader is reminded of an earlier scene in which Johnston, questioning the suitability of his daughter Lisabel’s prospective husband, after learning that he occasionally drinks alcohol, declares:

If I had a son, and he liked wine, as a child does, perhaps – a pretty little boy, sitting at table and drinking healths at birthdays; or a schoolboy, proud to do what he sees his father doing – I would take his glass from him, and fill it with poison – deadly poison – that he might kill himself at once, rather than grow up to his friend’s curse and his own damnation – a *drunkard*. (82)

The later disclosures about Harry confirm Max’s, and the reader’s, suspicions that Johnston is speaking about his own son. The contradictions within his outburst demonstrate Craik’s skill in unobtrusively allowing her characters to reveal their hidden flaws and unconscious emotions. Johnston’s words suggest a man piously condemning wickedness from a position of moral superiority, but the details of the supposedly hypothetical scene betray his guilt. He considers murder an unpardonable sin, yet his imagined poisoning of his own child is presented as a righteous act. In a potent travesty of the Communion service, he sees himself as saving his son’s soul by taking the glass of wine and substituting it with poison, seeming to forget that he

himself encouraged his son to drink the alcohol which proves toxic, not only spiritually, but in the manner of his death, through the drunken fury he provoked in Max. Johnston's avoidance of responsibility for his parental failure is revealed in his suggestion that to 'lik[e] wine, as a child does' is a natural inclination, and in his description of his son's imagined death as being self-inflicted. Penelope's revelations about her brother's character add further to the sense of hypocrisy in Johnston's vehement denunciation of Max:

Harry was so degraded that [...] we were thankful to forget he had ever existed; [...] he died as he had lived, a boaster, a coward, sponging upon any one from whom he could get money, using his talents only to his shame, devoid of one spark of honesty, honour and generosity. (283)

That Johnston does feel long-suppressed remorse for his failings as a father is revealed in his reaction to Penelope's words – a 'groan which burst from the very depths of the father's soul', betraying 'the whole history of his life' – and in his reference, again from the Old Testament, to 'Eli, the priest of the Lord – his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not' (284). Despite this acknowledgement, his decision not to have Max prosecuted does not come from any sense of fairness, but from the fear of the scandal that would arise from a public trial.

There is also a suggestion that Harry 'went all wrong' (269) because his father, opposing him for the first time, prevented his elopement with a village girl with whom he had fallen in love, and who had subsequently 'died of a broken heart' along with their child (321). This revelation makes Johnston's pitiless attitude towards Lydia, their former servant, seduced by Penelope's fiancé Francis, more repellent. His dismissal of Dora's plea to help Lydia and her child as they face starvation, suggests the possibility that Harry's lover was similarly abandoned. Dora is chastised for 'even

alluding to such things' (319), a reflection of how the fallen woman was considered as a contaminating influence. As the 'daughter of a clergyman' her father tells her, she "cannot possibly be allowed to interfere with these profligates":

"I shall forbid them the church and the sacrament, omit them from my charities, and take every lawful means to get them out of the neighbourhood. This, for my family's sake and the parish's, that they may carry their corruption elsewhere".

Johnston's use of biblical texts to validate his rejection of Dora's plea that Lydia's child is 'innocent' is again contradicted by Dora's reference to the gospels:

"Silence, Dora. It is written 'The seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned'. The sinless must suffer with the guilty; there is no hope for either."

"Oh, papa," I cried, in an agony, "Christ did not say so. He said, 'Go and sin no more.'" (319)

Dora's quotation from the account of the 'woman taken in adultery' (John 8: 1-11), where Jesus, refusing to condemn the woman, challenges her male accusers – 'Let him who is without sin among you let him first cast a stone at her.' – not only elucidates Christian teaching on forgiveness, contrasting it with the Judaic punishment of stoning to death, which was to be the woman's (but not the man's) fate, but is also used to denounce the contemporary application of the double standard. Sixteen years after Craik's novel was published, Josephine Butler used the same text in her campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act (1864), one of the most blatant manifestations of the continuing view that a lower standard of sexual morality was acceptable in men than in women. In *Some Thoughts on the Present Aspect of the Crusade against the State Regulation of Vice* (1875), Butler wrote:

The way in which even good men, professing to be believers in Jesus of Nazareth, judge this matter, the ways in which they cling to their unequal judgments of unchaste men and unchaste women [...] is so un-Christlike, so unholy, that it calls for the most stern and constantly-repeated rebuke. [...] Remembering how the Holiest could say to one such erring woman, "neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more", I

would, if I were a man, [...] feel ashamed and penitent on behalf of other men, for whom and by whom these helpless ones have been cast forth and branded.¹

Johnston's harsh condemnation of two naive young girls is shockingly hypocritical in the light of his finding the sins of their sophisticated seducers easily pardonable. He does not castigate Francis for his betrayal of his own daughter, and appears to find Penelope's refusal to marry Francis an over-reaction, dismissing his liaison with Lydia as insignificant: "one half the world would hardly consider it any disgrace at all" (304). Max's observation, that "there are very few [...] who either profess or practise the Christian doctrine that [...] a man's life should be as pure as a woman's" (310), is corroborated in contemporary texts as well as in studies of Victorian attitudes towards prostitution.²

Johnston's position as clergyman, moral arbiter of his community, with the influence to dispense or prevent charitable aid and to expel wrongdoers from the parish, is a powerful one, and, Craik suggests, if such power is fuelled by a desire for punishment rather than rehabilitation, it is being misused. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had recommended the setting up of workhouses for the destitute to replace the existing system of parish relief, although many parishes continued to provide 'outdoor' charity. The local clergyman would often have been on the Board of Guardians responsible for the management of the local workhouse, or, if not, his views would have been taken

¹ Josephine Butler, *Some Thoughts on the Present Aspect of the Crusade Against the State Regulation of Vice* (Liverpool: T. Brakell, 1874) p.16.

² See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Paula Bartley, *Prostitution, Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000); William Acton, *Prostitution considered in its moral, social and sanitary aspects in London and other large cities* (London: Churchill, 1857); William R. Greg, 'Prostitution', *Westminster Review*, 53, (1850).

into consideration.¹ If admitted to the workhouse, an unmarried mother would have been considered responsible for her plight and thus treated particularly harshly, suffering, with her child, what Frances Power Cobbe, writing in 1865, described as ‘degradation’.² Many resorted to infanticide, prostitution or suicide to avoid this desperate situation.³ Johnston’s views are therefore not only extremely cruel, but, rather than bringing about moral improvement, would be more likely to lead to far worse crimes.

The emphasis of the novel is as much on the redemption of Johnston as it is on that of Max and Lydia. His gradual change of attitude comes about through his being reminded of Christ’s teaching on forgiveness, his acknowledgement that Max is a good man who is the antithesis of his own son, and through his encounter with Lydia and her child. The latter not only forces him to confront the effects of his ruthlessness, but causes him to think of Harry’s child, the grandchild whose life, it is implied, he had not thought worth saving. The symbolic enactment of the communion service, a sacrament emblematic of Christ’s promise of the remission of sins, with Johnston giving bread and wine to the starving family, is not only a sign of Lydia’s absolution, but of Johnston’s own salvation, and contrasts with the earlier imagined scene where he administers poisoned wine to his son:

He returned with both [bread and wine] – one in each pocket – then, sitting down on the chair, cut the bread and poured the wine, and fed these three himself, with his own hands. (323)

¹ M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929: the history of an English social institution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.113-134 (p.130).

² Frances Power Cobbe, ‘The Philosophy of the Poor Laws’, *Fraser’s*, 70 (September 1864), 373-394, quoted in Chris Barton and Gillian Douglas, *Law and Parenthood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.197.

³ See Ann R. Higginbotham, ‘“Sin of the Age”: Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London’, in *Victorian Scandals: Representations of Gender and Class*, ed. Kristine Ottesen Garrigan (Athens: Ohio UP, 1992), pp. 257-288.

His fetching of the loaf of bread from the village baker's shop conveys Craik's belief that Christianity should be part of everyday life as in the gospels, not something 'quite beyond [...] comprehension' as suggested in Johnston's preaching.

Although Johnson goes on to give a public endorsement, in a court of law, of Max's good character, proclaiming "May God pardon you, even as I do this day" (381), his refusal to give his blessing to the marriage between Dora and Max, for fear of 'what the world [will] say', and because, although he has forgiven he 'cannot forget' (329), makes the point that absolution is meaningless if it does not enable the repentant sinner to make a fresh start. His unexpected arrival at the church in time to give Dora his blessing is the final stage in his spiritual progress, but there is an implicit suggestion that his acceptance of their marriage is made easier because of their imminent emigration to Canada. This has been facilitated by the novel's other, more favourable, representation of the clergy, Reverend Thorley, the prison chaplain. Although Thorley believes that 'the stigma even of an absolute crime is not hopeless or eternal' (373), his encouragement to Max to start a new life abroad indicates his realisation that English society cannot offer true clemency. Craik's use of Reverend Johnston to represent the hypocritical and bigoted enables her to confront the way that Christian texts were ignored when making moral judgements about those who had transgressed. As is typical of Craik, the heroine provides the major contrasting voice of Christian reasoning.

In *A Brave Lady* (1870)¹, Craik again challenges the church's authority in relation to an important contemporary issue. First published in serial form in *Macmillan's* between May 1869 and April 1870, the novel was written specifically to draw attention to the inequitable legal position of women within marriage, and aimed to influence opinion before the Married Women's Property Bill was due to be debated in Parliament in 1870. The Bill was subsequently made law, though in an 'emasculated' form, giving women possession of money earned after marriage, but no further rights over property. Fifteen years earlier, twenty-six thousand signatures had been gathered in support of bringing such a bill to parliament, but it was fiercely opposed as being 'contrary both to the common law of England and to the law of God' with bishops in the Lords being particularly vociferous.² As in *A Life for a Life*, the novel offers two contrasting portraits of clergy. Although the first part is set early in the nineteenth century, Craik's comments about Reverend Henry Oldham's lack of vocation echo those in 'Sermons' (1864), the latter essay indicating that the problem continued well into the century. Oldham is 'a man of education and taste' who, as the younger son of wealthy parents, 'was presented to the living through family influence':

[He] had fulfilled its duties decently, if rather grudgingly, his natural bias being in a contrary direction [...]. He was charitable enough to the poor of his parish; and he read prayers now and then, and preached a sermon, fifteen minutes long, regularly once a month; which comprised for him the whole duty of a clergyman. (35)

In 'strong contrast' (36) to Oldham's well-meaning but introverted nature, his curate, Edward Scanlan, is a superficially charismatic Irish evangelist, whose easy-going manner makes him popular with his parishioners, and who relishes the opportunities

¹ *A Brave Lady* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1870; references to Hurst and Blackett, 1871).

² L.C.B Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of British and Imperial History 1837-1901* (London: Methuen, 1973), pp. 180-182 (p.181). See also Deborah Wynne, *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 21-25; Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

his work gives him to mix in higher social circles. His father, a wealthy brewer, ‘had brought his son up to the Church’ (41), evidently hoping to advance the family’s social status, but, when the business collapses, Scanlan is left without the comfortable living he had expected and is appointed as a curate on a modest stipend. The novel gives an insight into the influence of evangelical preachers, their carefully rehearsed dramatic performances offering a contrast to the dull, predictable addresses of the traditional clergymen ‘of the old school’ like Oldham (35). Believing that his ‘great talents for preaching were entirely wasted in the provinces’ (89), Scanlan attempts to establish himself amongst the ‘aristocratic evangelical set’ in London (98). Popular preachers could attract audiences of many thousands, as the career of evangelist Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) demonstrates.¹ Although Craik admires the ‘sincerity’ of many such preachers, and explains that she does not consider ‘every Evangelical clergyman to be like Edward Scanlan’, whose religion is no more than ‘a mere farrago of set phrases’, she believes that ‘this narrow form of faith, which openly avers that its principal aim is its own salvation, becomes, even when sincere, so repulsive that its tendency is to end in no faith at all’ (186). Craik’s criticism of evangelism indicates that she was not afraid to take a stance that many of her readers would not have shared, as does the novel’s ridicule of the way that different styles of religious service went in and out of fashion. In London, Scanlan soon finds that he is ‘no longer “the rage” as he had once been’ in Dublin (125), and, after his return to the provinces, his congregation desert him for a follower of ‘Puseyism’ who offers ‘various innovations – choir-singing, altar decoration [...]. They ran after the High-Church vicar, just as once their predecessors had run after the young Evangelical curate’ (164). As in *Olive*, the novel implies, through the character of its heroine Josephine, that women are better

¹ ‘The Life and Times of Charles H. Spurgeon’, in *Christian History and Biography, Christianity Today Online*, <<http://www.ctlibrary.com/ch/1991/issue29/2908.html>> [accessed 19th March, 2010].

suiting to performing the role of priest than many men. Craik makes the point subtly, by expressing the view through the comic figure of the family's maid, Bridget, who 'has an outspoken disapprobation of men as a race, and especially as clergymen'. She would like to 'put [her] missis in the pulpit', believing she would preach "'better than most men; and she'd act up to it too, which isn't always the way with your parsons'" (84).

As a member of the household, Bridget is fully aware of the superficiality of Scanlan's outward charm, which belies the misery he inflicts upon his wife through his dishonesty, 'vanity and egotism' (183). His character is carefully and convincingly drawn to make the point that husbands who were neither adulterers nor physically violent towards their wives and children – both adultery and either desertion or cruelty had to be proved to give a woman grounds for divorce after the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 – could still make the lives of their families unendurable. While Josephine struggles to feed and clothe the family, her husband indulges himself with luxuries in order to 'keep up appearances' among his wealthier parishioners.¹ His inability to live within his means, his lack of conscience regarding his debts, and his risking of his family's reputation and security through his embezzlement of church funds, lead Josephine to the realisation that her husband is 'a moral coward' (92), a man 'who cannot be improved' (80). The moral influence of even the most principled of women is not without limits, Craik emphasises, perhaps alluding to the idealised vision of marriage described in Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*: 'Of Queens' Gardens', published

¹ Craik's disapproval of such pretensions is evident throughout her work, and particularly in her essay 'On Living in Perspective', *Fraser's Magazine* (October 1866), collected in *The Unkind Word and other Stories*, pp. 115-126. See also, 'Women of the World', in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1857), and 'About Money', in *About Money and Other Things* (1886).

five years earlier. The husband's role, Ruskin writes, is to 'guar[d] the woman' from 'all peril and trial':

Within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the true nature of home - it is the place of Peace ¹

The novel charts with such intense authenticity, Josephine's gradual disillusionment and growing contempt for the husband she had once loved, that it is not unrealistic to believe that Craik is describing the suffering endured by her own mother. Scanlan is undoubtedly based upon her father, also an Irish evangelical preacher with grandiose delusions, attracted by the possibility of fame in London, blaming others for his lack of success, and always in debt. While Craik's mother was able to protect her children from their father's influence by having him committed to an asylum for several years, Josephine believes that her only recourse is to leave the family home, taking her children with her. Josephine's concerns about the moral damage being inflicted upon her children are central to her desire to leave her husband. On discovering his embezzlement, she is horrified not only by the prospect of shame that her children will suffer, but 'is aghast [...] at the sort of man [...] whom she had so ignorantly made her husband and the father of her children':

In marrying, how little do women consider this – and yet it is not wrong, but right to be considered. The father of their children – the man from whom their unborn darlings may inherit hereditary vices, and endure hereditary punishments – viewed in this light, I fear many a winning lover would be turned – and righteously – from a righteous woman's door. (173)

These views are reiterated forcefully in Craik's later essays 'Concerning Men' and 'For Better for Worse', and in her novel of 1879, *Young Mrs. Jardine*.

¹ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies: 'Of Queens' Gardens'* (London: Smith, Elder, 1865), p.147.

The legal position of women is made starkly clear by Josephine's reading of the statute exactly as it currently stands. She is shocked to discover that she has no rights to any property, including the money she earns as a lace-maker to supplement the family income, nor, since they are over the age of seven, any custodial rights over her children. Craik also makes a veiled attack on the way that a woman's body was regarded as the property of her husband. Josephine is worn down by bearing nine children in quick succession, yet her husband, bemoaning the financial burden this imposes, appears to distance himself from any responsibility. Reminding him that she is soon to have another child, Scanlan speaks 'in a tone of extreme annoyance':

"You should have thought of everything a little more [...]. It is very, very provoking, altogether most unfortunate; [...] indeed we shall have quite enough mouths to fill – rather too many."

"Too many!"

It was but a chance word, but it had stabbed her like a sword. (54)

While Josephine desperately tries to save her family from ruin, Scanlan believes his marriage conforms to the conventional pattern:

"As I have so often to remind you, the husband is the head of the wife. [...] Just leave me to earn the money, and you stay quietly at home and enjoy yourself, like other wives, and be very thankful that you have a husband to provide for you. Depend upon it, this is the ordinance of Scripture". (131)

Josephine's own perception of the travesty of 'this charming picture of domestic life with which he deluded himself' (132) underlines the novel's message that, behind a façade of respectability lay many a disastrous marriage in which it was most often the woman who suffered: 'in that awful leap in the dark which both make when they marry, the precipice is much deeper on the woman's side' (212).

Scanlan, inferior in every way to his wife, is able to remind her that his position as ‘head of the family’ is supported in law and in the Bible, as is his decree that she cannot leave him. His quotation from St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians – ‘Let not the wife depart from the husband’ (1 Corinthians, 7:10), is countered by Josephine’s terse observation that ‘St. Paul was not a woman, and he had no children’ (185). Craik thus suggests that the law, constructed by men in favour of men, should, even if it appears to have religious endorsement, be based instead on the reality of women’s lives. The novel’s juxtaposition of the strong, intelligent, virtuous woman and her weak, hypocritical, selfish husband makes a very powerful case for a change to a statute which decreed that a woman’s legal position was the same as that of a ‘lunatic’. This is underlined through Scanlan’s decline into dementia towards the end of the novel. Just as the author’s own father’s mental instability eventually became a means to make her family safe through his incarceration, so too does Scanlan’s harmless dependence enable Josephine to gain some autonomy, having been made financially secure through Reverend Oldham’s legacy to her.

Before his mental decline, Scanlan enjoys the benefits of their rise in fortune. His new status as ‘Sir Edward’ does not make him a gentleman, however, Craik once more giving her view that the right to this epithet is not gained by wealth or birth, but earned by good character:

It was not his low origin [...] which made him what he was. I have known gentleman whose fathers were ploughmen – nay, the truest gentleman I ever knew was the son of a working mechanic. And I have seen boors who had titles, and who, in spite of the noble lineage of centuries, were boors still. What made this man vulgar was the innate coarseness of his nature, lacquered over with superficial

refinement. He was, in fact, that which, in all ranks of life, is the very opposite of a gentleman – a sham. (244)

Scanlan's despicable nature is conveyed in the punishments he dispenses in his role as magistrate, a position conferred as a result of his new rank. He relishes the authority to mete out harsh punishments for poaching or 'petty larceny' motivated by extreme poverty, despite having carried out the more serious crime of embezzlement himself (246). As well as being an unflattering depiction of evangelical clergy, Scanlan is one of Craik's most authentic, and intensely unfavourable, representations of masculinity, the complete reverse in every respect to the ideal of manliness portrayed in the figure of John Halifax.

Healing Bodies and Souls: the New Professions

A major factor in the church's inadequacy, Craik realised, was the lack of vocation evident in many of its representatives, a situation resulting from the dearth of alternative professions, particularly for those without financial independence. The spiritual vacuum left by the clergy's failings, could, it is suggested in four novels, be filled by men of integrity from outside the church, particularly from the emerging professions of medicine and literature, which are presented as forces for both spiritual and social improvement. The novels are revealing of the difficulties faced by men trying to establish a career and maintain integrity whilst under financial constraint, and of the pressures of assimilating the demands of a vocation with the ideal of domestic harmony. They also give an insight into the often uneasy development of these occupations within the context of existing class hierarchies.

As *John Halifax, Gentleman*, makes clear, productive employment and social responsibility are essential components of Craik's model of gentlemanliness. It is not surprising then, that she regarded the profession of medicine highly, with the heroine of *The Woman's Kingdom* (1869) describing its 'endless opportunities of usefulness' as her 'ideal of the perfect existence',¹ and the hero of *A Life for a Life* (1859) claiming that, "'the doctor"', has, of all persons the greatest influence amongst the poor – if only he cares to use it' (*A Life*, 175). As Robyn Chandler observes, with reference to the latter novel, Craik 'redefines medicine as a moral occupation and denies the clerical ownership of theology'.² In *A Life*, the figure is also, as discussed previously, a focus for some of the most controversial of contemporary debates. In order to justify the novel's message, that atonement for even the worst of crimes is possible through genuine remorse and useful work, Craik must convince the reader that Max's contribution to society during the twenty years after he commits murder, benefits the world more than his death would have done. His vocation as a doctor, with the power to save lives, is, of course, the most fitting, but the issue is complicated by his being an army surgeon, who has served in the Crimea. This allows the author to suggest that judgements on the taking of life are not clear cut, since actions interpreted as heroic on the battlefield can be seen as 'a picturesque form of murder' (13). While 'War-sparkles' had been distinctly pacifist in tone, and *A Life for a Life* begins with the heroine's declaration of hatred for soldiers – men who voluntarily 'receive wages for taking away life' – and her opinion that war is 'utterly opposed to Christianity' (13), Dora's softening of attitude suggests that the author's views had similarly altered. In

¹ *The Woman's Kingdom* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1868; references to New York: Harper, 1872); first published in *Good Words*, Jan-Dec, 1868, p.16.

² Robyn Chandler, 'Dinah Mulock Craik: Sacrifice and the Fairy-Order', in *Silent Voices: Forgotten Novels by Victorian Women Writers*, ed. Brenda Ayres (London: Praeger (2003), pp. 173-201 (p.193).

response to Max's statement, 'I am not in your sense a soldier, a professed man-slayer; my vocation is rather the other way. Yet even for the former I could find arguments of defence' (55), Dora concedes that 'the necessity of war' is 'too momentous for human wisdom to decide upon', and that 'Christian warfare is never against sinners but against sin' (95). Her words reflect how imperial expansion was beginning to be presented as a channel for the dissemination of Christianity across the globe. As Kenneth E. Hendrickson explains,

a pattern emerged between 1858 and 1885 [...] for the national adulation of British status and power. Its basis was a martial Christian identity at first pinned upon a few heroic exemplars, then connected to the institutional army at large.¹

Craik would have read accounts of courageous and selfless men from all ranks serving in the Crimea, which had contributed to a general shift in attitude towards ordinary soldiers.² That the novel was written during the time of the Indian Mutiny (1857-1859) may further explain Craik's change of stance. In an insurrection explicitly presented as 'a conflict between Christian civilisation and heathen barbarism',³ British soldiers were glorified as 'earnest disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ'.⁴ In a later essay, however, Craik expresses cynicism towards imperial missionary work, suggesting that it was frequently undertaken for self-aggrandisement or 'excitement' rather than through genuine faith ('What is Self-sacrifice?', 15).

Craik explores the idea of justifiable killing further, and connects it to the issue of class, through Max's reflections on the practice of duelling to the death, which 'the

¹ Kenneth E. Hendrickson, *Making Saints: religion and the public image of the British Army, 1809-1885* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), pp. 74-81 (p.14).

² Hendrickson, p.91.

³ Hendrickson, p.91.

⁴ Rev. William Brock, *A Biographical Sketch of Sir Henry Havelock KCB* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1858), p.1. See also Olive Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', *English Historical Review*, 86, 338 (January, 1971), 46-72.

army still holds [...] to be the necessary defence of a gentleman's "honour" (168). Duelling was not banned in the army until 1844, but, as the novel suggests, went on well into the mid-nineteenth century¹. Jeff Kinard observes that, 'if charged at all, most duellers, as members of the gentry, were typically exonerated as a matter of course'.² Max rejects the concept of what society considers gentlemanly 'honour', yet acknowledges that its association with bravery and chivalry makes it a seductive concept:

"Ungentlemanly" – what a word it is with most men, especially in the military profession. Gentlemanly – the root and apex of all honour. Ungentlemanly – the lowest term of degradation. Such is our code of morals in the army; and, more or less, probably everywhere.

An officer I knew, who [...] was himself as true a gentleman as ever breathed; polished, kindly, manly, and brave, gave me once, in an argument on duelling, his definition of the word. "A *gentleman*" – one who never does anything he is ashamed of, or that would compromise his honour.

Worldly honour, this colonel must have meant, for he considered it would have been compromised by a man's refusal to accept a challenge. That "honour" surely was [...] a little less pure than the Christianity which all of us profess, and so few believe. Yet there was something at once touching and heroic about it. [...]The best of our British chivalry – as chivalry goes – is made up of materials such as these.

But is there not a higher morality – a diviner honour? And if so, who is he that can find it? (30)

The novel implicitly questions whether the murder Max commits, in the heat of alcohol-fuelled rage, is worse than one carefully premeditated but glossed over with the veneer of civilisation. By situating the murder against the backdrop of Stonehenge, Craik suggests the enduring impulse to ritualise retribution and to seek divine justification and appeasement. The 'civilised' public hanging is thus no different from

¹ See Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: violence, manliness and criminal justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

² Jeff Kinard, *Pistols: an illustrated history of their impact* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 29-33 (p.32).

the pagan human sacrifice.¹ Although capital punishment was never used to punish the duellist, it was, with regard to less ‘gentlemanly’ crimes, ‘a momentous question’, ‘the one question of our time’ (168) which ‘now fills the newspapers’ (166). A Royal Commission had been appointed in 1856, but it was more concerned with the reduction of the number of capital crimes and the issue of public executions than with abolition itself. Although the Association for the Abolition of Capital Punishment was actively campaigning,² a leading article in the *Times* of September 5th, 1860, voiced what appears to have been the prevailing view, in words which could have been used as a denunciation of Craik’s novel: ‘Are we to make a providence of ourselves by weighing a slender chance for his future repentance against the beneficial effect of his execution?’³

Craik did not write on the subject in her journalism, perhaps feeling that the novel was a more suitable medium in which to explore a topic where her views may have been as ambivalent as those of her heroine. Dora, although convinced that where the murder was not ‘wilful’, there should be leniency, and who has ‘turned sick’ at newspaper accounts of public hangings where ‘the execution seemed more of a murder than the original crime’, is undecided about its complete abolition – ““But still to say there should be no capital punishments! I could not tell”” (168). The novel is clearly insistent, however, that criminals should be given the opportunity for redemption and rehabilitation, Craik once more writing against mainstream opinion. When working as a prison doctor, Max finds that his enlightened views conflict with those in authority.

¹ At this period, Stonehenge was considered to have been a Druid temple, used for human sacrifice. See Rosemary Hill, *Stonehenge* (London: Profile, 2009).

² See, for example, *The Times*, January 22nd, 1856, p.5, for a speech given in Rochdale by John Bright to the Association for the Abolition of Capital Punishment.

³ See Brian P. Block and John Hostettler, *Hanging in the Balance: a history of the abolition of capital punishment in Britain* (Winchester: Waterside, 1997), p.62.

Although the gaol is considered a ‘model of its kind [...] excellent, no doubt, compared with that which preceded it’, he deplores the treatment of prisoners as a ‘herd of brute beasts’ (311), without ‘human individuality or responsibility’, the harsh floggings ‘viewed as mere punishment, with no ulterior aim at reformation’, liable to turn ‘a mere headstrong lad [...] into a hardened ruffian’ (362).¹ The ‘solitary, sanitary, moral improvement system’ (311), intended to prevent the spread of corruption, makes an interesting parallel with Reverend Johnston’s view of the contaminating influence of the fallen woman.

Max’s own atonement comes through work that is not only valuable to others but also develops his best qualities. Demonstrating the capacity for both courage and tenderness essential to Craik’s ideal of masculinity, he rescues wounded men on the battlefield whilst under attack, and is compassionate towards the injured and dying. A skilful and tirelessly dedicated surgeon, he also has an active interest in broader social issues. Through his causes and personal trials, the novel examines some of the most pressing and contentious of contemporary problems arising from poverty and inequality, focusing particularly on penal reform and public health, including the appalling living conditions endured by soldiers returned from the Crimea – ‘the mortality in a campaign, with all its fatal chances, is less than in barracks at home’ (97). This appears to be an accurate assessment of the situation – Hendrickson describes the ‘filthy’ and ‘unsanitary’ conditions in the Aldershot barracks during the 1850s, and notes that, despite the generally more sympathetic view of soldiers, ‘[a]fter

¹ The prison is intended to be one of the many built on the same lines as Pentonville, opened in 1842. The emphasis was on the prisoner’s supposed moral improvement through religious instruction and isolation from other prisoners. Some felt, however, (as Max does), that the practice of solitary confinement for most of the day was inhuman. See Philip Smith, *Punishment and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p.70.

Crimea, public attentions to the army were short-lived'.¹ Through Max's attempts to have the question of soldiers' welfare 'inquired into and remedied' by 'urging it at the Horse Guards, or failing that in the public press' (97), the novel seeks to rekindle interest, openly criticising the 'tardiness of the government' (174), and others with influence who 'will talk enough of the need for it, but they will not act; it is too much trouble' (109).

Max's interest in 'the study of health rather than of disease, of prevention rather than cure' (28) demonstrates a modern understanding of public health matters. Such a progressive attitude would have been rare among doctors at this period, as medical historian A. J. Youngson notes: 'most doctors before 1850, and many as late as 1870 [...] simply did not observe or think scientifically'.² The connection between unsanitary conditions in overcrowded slums and the many outbreaks of contagious diseases was still not fully understood. In what is considered to be the first epidemiological study, John Snow had traced the source of the 1854 cholera epidemic to a single water pump, but his theories were not widely accepted until the 1860s.³ Max's initiative to clean the village's water supply suggests that Craik was aware of Snow's work. The several references to his collection of 'clear data' (97) and 'statistics of mortality' (96) also reflect Snow's methodical approach to medicine. Max's use of this comparatively new science of statistics to understand both public health and social problems is carefully balanced against his personal care of individual patients, emphasising that the hero is not using data in the way that Dickens, believing

¹ Hendrickson, p.11.

² A. J. Youngson, quoted in Tabitha Sparks, *The Doctor in the Victorian Novel: Family Practices* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 16.

³ See Sandra Hempel, *The Medical Detective: John Snow, Cholera, and the Mystery of the Broad Street Pump* (London: Granta, 2006).

it to be dehumanising, satirised in *Hard Times* in 1854.¹ Max's condemnation of rural poverty, and his opinion that 'twenty new cottages built on the moor would do more moral good than the new county reformatory' (38), is at odds with the more usual idealised contemporary image of country life, and reveals an awareness of the link between social deprivation and crime at a time when many believed that the poor were naturally feckless. Similarly, with regard to urban slums, he believes

moral and physical evil to be so bound up together, that it [is] idle to attack one without trying to cure the other. He thought, better than all building of gaols and reformatories, or even of churches [...] would be the establishing of sanitary improvements to our great towns, and trying to teach the poor, not how to be taken care of in workhouses, prisons, and hospitals, but how to take care of themselves in their own homes. (174)²

Max's unstinting work and social conscience are in stark contrast to the more socially advantaged male characters in the novel. While he collects 'evidence' (96) from barracks across the country and initiates projects to improve housing and sanitation, in addition to his day-to-day work as a doctor, those from whom he seeks support lead leisured, worthless lives. A colonel's description of his son's 'place' in a government office as a 'capital berth, easy hours – eleven till four, and regular work; the whole *Times* to read through daily' (108), is, Max observes contemptuously, "an accurate description of what I had [...] seen in [...] public offices of all kinds, where the labour

¹ Sheila M. Smith, 'Blue Books and Victorian Novelists', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 21, No. 81 (Feb. 1970), 23-40.

² Although the first Public Health Act had been passed in 1848, after the publication of Edwin Chadwick's report, 'The Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population' in 1842, it was 'the responsibility of local people and their representatives' to 'petition for an inspection and call for action' if they felt there was a particular health problem. It was widely believed that there was a 'failure to tackle rural issues'. See Kenneth Calman, 'The Public Health Act of 1848, and its relevance to improving public health in England now', *British Medical Journal*, 317 (29th August, 1998), 596-598. See also H. J. Dyos, *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History*, ed. David Cannadine and David Reeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Craik reiterated her views on this topic in several essays, including 'Benevolence – or Beneficence?' (1875).

is so largely subdivided as to be in the responsible hands of very few, and the work and the pay generally follow in an opposite ratio of progression” (110).

Craik's depiction of complacency and self-interest is pessimistic and condemnatory. It invites comparison with the idealism characterising the earlier part of the century, personified by John Halifax, whose campaigns for reform bore fruit, whereas Max's continually fall on stony ground. One exception is the response of traditional landowner, Colin Granton who, very like Sir James Chetham in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), readily agrees to build new, healthier homes for his tenants, as much through genuine concern as through his wish to impress Dora. Although the exodus of Max and Dora to Canada at the end of the novel is a necessity, since Max, despite having served his sentence, would not be accepted back into respectable English society or able to practise, it also conveys a sense of his rejection of a culture which fails to respond to his ideas of progress.

A Life for a Life was written at a time of intense discussion about the training and professional status of doctors, culminating in the Medical Act of 1858, which, as M.J.D. Roberts explains

gave statutory recognition for the first time to a distinct occupational category of “legally qualified Medical Practitioner” [...]. It also set up a general medical council with powers to monitor standards of professional training, to register qualified practitioners.¹

Despite this recognition, there was still some doubt as to whether a doctor could be considered a true gentleman. Roberts describes how an ‘opponent of medical training

¹ M.J.D Roberts, ‘The Politics of Professionalization: MPs, Medical Men, and the 1858 Medical Act’, *Medical History* 53.1 (January, 2009), 37-56, (p.37).

uncombined with the preliminary gentlemanly socialization of a degree in classical languages' was 'scandalised' at meeting 'one gentleman, the holder [of a Scots medical degree] who was ignorant of the name of the most commonly known works of Homer'.¹

Craik appears to be considering this question when Dora expresses surprise that Max has never read Schiller, even in translation. Although educated at St. Andrews and Dublin Universities, Max describes himself as 'coarse, uneducated', with his work allowing 'few opportunities of refinement' (94). Sparks observes that, in the Victorian novel, doctors were increasingly portrayed as 'detached from the common feelings of the civilised, feeling person'.² However, the hero's appreciation of nature, and his compassion and chivalry, are clearly intended as testimony to a cultivated sensibility. Max's plans to set up his own practice are thwarted by his having 'no income except [his] pay', unlike the local 'consulting physician', indicating the advantage of independent wealth to those embarking upon the profession (174). He is, however, comfortable with his social position – 'as if we did not all come alike from Father Adam' (72) – and shows disdain for his idle 'superiors'. His assessment of the aristocratic Francis's temperament in terms of pathology – 'the nervously sensitive organisation of a modern "gentleman", as opposed to the healthy animalism of a working man' (340) – indicates the author's belief that those who seek to live by the old code of gentility acquired by birth rather than through personal endeavour, are impaired and emasculated. Despite his crime, Max is clearly intended to epitomise Craik's highest ideal of gentlemanliness based on Christian virtues. The spiritual

¹ Roberts, p.41.

² Sparks, p.17.

encouragement Max gives to Dora, integrated into his medical care, is described in the language of Christian confession and prayer, with Max the murderer provocatively cast as a Christ-like figure:

This was his “sermon” [...] and it seemed as if, mortal man as he was, with faults enough doubtless [...], I “saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” And I thanked God who sent him to me. (239)

As Chandler suggests, ‘the physician takes over the preacher’s interpretative authority precisely because he is located at the interface of sacred and secular, and has the cure of both body and soul’.¹ Max’s comfortable assimilation of the scientific with the religious reiterates the message of *Olive*. Although acknowledging that ‘our profession is that which, of all others, most inclines a man to materialism’, he has ‘never found it so’, his experiences with the dying having convinced him that there is a spiritual element ‘quite distinct’ from the corporal (138).

The tension between Max’s naturally empathetic nature and the inner torment and aloofness caused by his secret guilt, makes him a compelling romantic hero. Sparks proposes that the conventional marriage plot is incompatible with the doctor-hero, whose work alienates him from the romantic and the domestic. Max’s belief that a doctor is particularly in need of a wife, to be ‘his rest, his comfort, and delight’ (156), implies the reverse of Sparks’s premise by suggesting that domesticity is an essential antidote to a role that brings daily contact with brutality and coarseness. However, his poignantly romanticised vision of the ‘virtuous middle-class home’ presided over by an ideal wife ‘to sit by his happy hearth’ (114), reveals a patronising view of women not supported by the author. Max sees his work, both as a doctor and in the area of

¹ Chandler, p.193.

social reform, as ‘exclusively a man’s’ (176). While he acknowledges the sense of purpose his own work gives him – “‘labour is life to me’” (20), and is sympathetic to Dora’s ennui, his answer to her request to do “‘more than listen – help’” with his ‘plans and projects’, is a condescending “‘listening is helping’”, then an unprevaricating “‘no’” (176). The novel suggests that medicine, and by implication any masculine vocation, can be compatible with marriage and domesticity, but only if there is equality and shared endeavour between husband and wife. Craik avoids what Sparks terms the ‘collision between public and private interests’ embodied in the doctor-hero,¹ through the presentation of Max’s work as an extension of domestic values into the public sphere; through his acceptance of Dora’s right to fulfilment; and through the shattering of his rose-tinted vision of the domestic domain – the clergyman’s home is revealed as a site of coldness and indifference, in which a son’s depravity has been nurtured, a maidservant seduced, and female potential repressed. As important a part of his moral development as his atonement for his crime, is Max’s acknowledgment that ‘women as well as men require something to do’ (105), and his appreciation of Dora, not for the ‘meek household ways’ (154) he had mistakenly attributed to her and found attractive, but as an equal, ‘united with me in every work which my conscience once compelled as atonement’ (310).

Max’s change of view can be explained by his seeing the effect of purposelessness on Dora, the strength she demonstrates throughout their trials, and by his experience of illness and imprisonment, as a result of which he ‘br[eaks] down utterly’ (384). This sublimation of ‘will’ is a necessary part of his spiritual redemption, and enables him to understand the powerlessness of a woman’s life. Dora’s feeling of being as restricted

¹ Sparks, p.25.

as a caged bird invites comparison with Max's imprisonment, during which, to fill the empty hours, he 'took to making mats' (384), just as a woman might do within her domestic confinement. This futile occupation, contrasting with his former productive working life, also emphasises how much more useful his life has been as a free man. Although there is a sense of exile in the final scene of the novel, where, evoking Ford Madox Brown's painting *The Last of England*, (1854-6),¹ the newly-married pair stand 'close-clasped' together as they embark for Canada, this is outweighed by the promise of professional and personal fulfilment based on an equal partnership between the two protagonists who will find 'new work in a new country [...] together' (396).

In *The Woman's Kingdom* (1869), Craik again sees the profession of medicine as a partnership between husband and wife, charting the courtship and marriage of William Stedman alongside the establishment of his career. As the novel's title and its epigraph from 'Lilies – Of Queens' Gardens' suggest, the novel can be read as a consideration of the validity of Ruskin's ideas on the relative roles of men and women, with Craik emphasising the importance to a man's professional development, of a wife who shares his values. William's choice of the plain but 'sweet, good, sensible' (95) Edna, rather than her beautiful, materialistic twin sister Letty, proves to be the foundation for a 'calm, pure life [...] full of labour's reward – which is the making of a real man' (240). William's initial attraction to Letty points to the flaw in Ruskin's assertion that a woman's beauty is an expression of inner virtue, and 'cannot be too powerful'.² Ruskin uses great literature of the past to support his belief that women

¹The painting is described, but referred to as 'Ford Madox Browne's [sic] *The Last Look of Home*', in a similar scene in the final chapter of *Hannah* (1871), p.307, where hero and heroine also leave England for a more enlightened country. Craik may have confused the title with W. S. P. Henderson's painting of that name, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856, present whereabouts unknown.

² Ruskin, 'Lilies – of Queens' Gardens', p.151.

are morally superior to men, citing Shakespeare's heroines as 'faultless, conceived in the highest heroic type of humanity', and categorising those few who, like Lady Macbeth, do not conform to this ideal, as 'frightful exceptions'.¹ Craik draws from similar sources, blending allusions to Shakespeare, fairy tale and myth into a contemporary setting, but comes to a very different conclusion – that female beauty can be dangerous to susceptible men, since it is not necessarily an indication of inner worth, and that women like Letty, whose exquisite appearance proves 'deadly' (40) to William's brother Julius, are not evil aberrations, but merely shallow.

The two sets of siblings meet on the Isle of Wight while Letty and Julius are convalescing after serious illness, their similar circumstances, and the distance from the usual conventions of their lives, enabling them to form an 'association which seemed so friendly and natural here, [which] would, in their Kensington life, be utterly impossible' (101). Craik suggests that propriety, preventing men and women from getting to know each other before marriage, is the cause of many unhappy relationships. William is saved by being given a glimpse of Letty's true nature, and having the sense to recognise its implications. Her hysterical 'childish terror' and concern only for her own self-preservation, when the four find themselves cut off by the tide, break her spell over him: 'as he looked fixedly down upon the lovely face, a curious change came over his own' (105). The sense of bewitchment is heightened through the description of their respectable holiday destination as 'an Arcadia', 'an enchanted island of the sea – an Atlantis' (86). There are echoes of Shakespearean islands in the pairs of siblings and in the shipwreck off shore – a metaphor for Julius's destiny – and of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with 'these four young people, so

¹ Ruskin, p.131.

strangely thrown together in this solitary place' (52), becoming 'hapless mortals' (102) spellbound into love, perhaps with the wrong person. The second part of the novel, in which Julius returns transformed in appearance and in name, is equally rich in references to fairy tale. These allusions to enchantment, together with the recurring references to Fate, the 'grim invisible old Woman' weaving (70), suggest that individuals may not be in control of their destiny, a notion particularly destabilising to the Victorian model of masculine authority. However, this is balanced by Craik's insistence on personal responsibility, a quality that William possesses, but Julius lacks, and which challenges Ruskin's talismanic view of female morality.

William's suitability to his choice of vocation is revealed in his nursing of his brother through rheumatic fever, 'almost like a woman and a mother' (36). His devotion is not emasculating, but is 'wholly a man's tenderness - which none but strong men ever feel' (62). Despite his innate goodness, William feels tainted by the masculine world of work, 'his nature hardening and corrupting, and a kind of hopeless cynicism stealing over him', and in need of a wife who will 'save' him and 'make a man of [him]' (157). Edna not only provides the moral influence he craves, but also practical support, Craik observing that there are 'many professional men, who, like a doctor, are so engrossed by outside toil that they are obliged to leave everything else to their wives' (218). Sparks, referring to Craik's short story 'The Double House' (1857), suggests that the role of the doctor's wife is 'alienating', and the separate living arrangements of Doctor Merchiston and his wife, 'represents the separate spheres of wives and doctors literally'. However, Merchiston is not a practising doctor but a man of independent

income, and his profession is largely irrelevant to the plot.¹ Craik acknowledges the division between ‘the world without [...] [and] the world within’ (186), but there is no sense of separation between Edna and William, rather an emphasis on shared objectives. There is, however, a ‘dominant hardness’ (230) in William’s ‘obstinate’ nature (117), and a tone ‘approaching to sarcasm’ (112), which suggest that married to a less principled woman, both his character and his career would have developed differently. Throughout the novel, there are glimpses of a very different kind of marriage which might have taken place had fate determined otherwise. This, the unwritten story of William and Letty, is essentially that of George Eliot’s Lydgate and Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch*, published in 1872, three years after Craik’s novel. Without the influence of an unselfish wife who ‘sit[s] in his heart like a conscience’ (186), William, it is suggested, would have taken Lydgate’s route, giving up his research and reform interests to pander to wealthy patients in order to satisfy his wife’s social and material demands (218). Letty, after accepting Julius’s proposal, is ‘greatly occupied’ by thoughts of ‘her future carriage, and the difficulties of deciding whether it should be a brougham or a britzska’ (265). In contrast, when William wishes to buy a carriage ‘upon credit’ (232), as other ‘fashionable’ doctors have done in order to attract a better class of patient, he is challenged by his wife’s uncompromising disgust at what she believes would be ‘a deception, a cheat’ (234). His sneering jibe that she is “such an innocent”, suggests a willingness to consider living by expediency rather than principle. Looking back on twenty years of marriage, William acknowledges that he “might have been foolish sometimes” without a wife who “kept me in my balance” and “forbade the brougham [...] till I had a carriage I could honestly ride in” (419).

¹ Sparks, p. 64; Craik, ‘The Double House’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, (August 1856), collected in *Nothing New: Tales*, Vol.2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1857) pp. 251-315.

The novel gives an insight into the difficulties of establishing a career in medicine, for those without substantial independent means, and the resulting ambiguity of the doctor's social position. Despite his professional education and status, he and his brother 'must have starved' without his small inherited income. There is an expression of resentment in William's feeling that 'hardest of all' is having to associate with those 'who, in all but money, are fairly your equals; and who never suspect [...] how your every penny is as momentous as their pounds' (185). Letty's confusion over William's status is revealing of the problem of appropriately situating an impoverished man from one of the newer professions within the existing hierarchies of class. She is relieved to hear that William is a doctor and thus a 'real gentleman' (12), yet his 'very shabby' coat, prompts her to pronounce that "he isn't a gentleman, then" (13). For Letty, a 'poor gentleman' (13) is a contradiction in terms. For Edna, the threadbare coat is irrelevant, and it is Letty's supposition that a professional man is automatically a gentleman that is debatable. Her comment – "Supposing that a doctor is – and he certainly ought to be – a real gentleman" (12) – does not question the professional status of medicine but the presumption that such status necessarily equates with gentlemanly behaviour.

The differing perceptions of Edna and Letty as regards the doctor's role are an important indicator of their character, as well as revealing the demands of the profession at that time. For Letty, the doctor is "of all people alive, the person I should least like to marry", a husband "at everybody's beck and call", whose being "out all hours, day and night" would interfere with their social life, and who would "brin[g] home fevers and small-pox" from "nasty places and nasty people" (16). Edna is equally realistic about the hazards of the profession, but it is the one she would

have chosen for herself if she had been a man, because it offers “such unlimited influence over souls as well as bodies”:

“Of course it would be a hard life [...] but it would be a life full of interest, with endless opportunities of usefulness. I don’t mean merely of saving people’s lives, but of putting their lives right, both mentally and physically, as nobody but a doctor can do. Hardly even a clergyman could come so near my ideal of the perfect existence – ‘he went about doing good’”. (16)

William’s attendance at ‘fever-wards’, and at ‘those dens of misery and crime where a doctor is often the only messenger of good that ever comes’ (221) indicates that Craik’s ideal of the doctor extends well beyond the establishment of a family practice. He should be motivated by a desire for wider improvements in public health, and continually strive to extend professional knowledge. William starts his career by working unpaid for a large practice to gain experience, immersing himself in medical literature in his spare time. Having failed to get the ‘long-hoped-for hospital appointment’ (189), he is eventually offered a permanent post as physician to a charitable institution whose founder has become aware of his ‘incessant labours among the poor’. This work is fulfilled alongside his general practice, and gives him ‘opportunities for that continual study of his profession which a doctor so much needs, and which, at the beginning of his career, he finds so difficult to obtain’ (196). Craik acknowledges the weight of responsibility and the ‘infinite and never-ending self-denial’ (186) endured by the married man starting out in his profession. A salary of ‘£300’, rising to ‘£400 a year’, she notes, although ‘a solid foundation of annual income’ for a single man, is scarcely enough for one with a wife and children to live on comfortably (196). William’s growing reputation attracts ‘the sort of connections which gather round a man when he begins to rise in the world’. These are not merely social relationships, but include ‘grave, professional, eminently respectable’ men,

sharing his medical interests (338). This suggests that medicine has become increasingly professionalised and of higher status since the publication of *A Life for a Life*. However, Craik is careful to emphasise that William is still caring for less well-off patients and working actively with the poor.

Brigid Lowe misreads the novel to suggest that the marriage of William and Edna is one of ‘expedient self-interest’, with both Letty and Julius ‘cas[t] off’, ‘shut out’ ‘without money or means of supporting themselves’.¹ Both are, in fact, generously supported by William. Julius becomes ‘a mere wreck of a man’ (392), not through being rejected by his brother, or inability to earn a living, but through his obsessive passion. William had once thought that Edna would make a suitable wife for his brother, again suggesting an alternative scenario, perhaps resembling the marriage of Dorothea and Ladislaw in *Middlemarch*. ‘A strong, real passion for a good woman’, the author comments, might have ‘shaken’ him from his destructive path. (215). Julius’s downward trajectory is defined by a series of different occupations, each well outside Craik’s paradigm of masculinity. As an artist, modelled on the pre-Raphaelites, and earning a ‘tolerable livelihood’ (241), Julius lacks the diligence and insight to realise his potential, spending his time ‘among the floating spin-drift of literary, artistic, and semi-theatrical society, active by night, indolent by day’ (240). As Tosh points out, ‘London’s own version of Bohemia, composed of artists and writers’ was ‘on the margins of respectable society’.² Letty who ‘had always looked down upon the profession of artist as not quite the thing’ (265), encourages Julius to accept a position with an indigo planting business in India. Although this represents the sacrifice of his

¹ Lowe, p.179.

² Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p.114.

vocation to Letty's materialism, it proves that, motivated by the promise of marriage, he can work assiduously and successfully. However, his association with the indigo trade is not only an ironic comment on the prostitution of his talent – the artists' pigment was also used extensively for the dyeing of uniforms – but indigo production was recognised as exploitative, condemning the indigenous workers to poverty.¹ In his next incarnation, as pensioned-off private soldier John Stone, discharged 'invalided' from the Indian army, he is described as a 'sick soul in a worn-out body' (306), the spiritual aspect of his 'terrible deterioration' (286) caused by his bitterness over Letty's faithlessness in marrying the wealthy merchant, Vanderdecken, and the physical through his army service and his 'chief comfort in life', opium (337). Julius's addiction and his reference to 'loot' acquired in India, convey an impression of imperial domination as corrupt and degrading. His comment that "your millionaires – your Vanderdeckens, for instance – make their money in no more creditable way" (307), again suggests the injustices perpetrated by those enjoying the fruits of supposedly respectable trade. A more productive and benign vision of empire, however, is presented in the futures William imagines for two of his sons – one as a farmer in Australia, the other in the Indian civil service. Julius's disappearance in India, deliberately thwarting his brother's tireless attempts to find him, gives an insight into the way in which the empire provided men with the opportunity to escape from difficulties by 'drop[ping] out of the world' (396). Craik had written about this phenomenon more extensively in an essay of 1858, 'Lost':

What a number of people there must be in the world who are, not figuratively or poetically, but literally "lost"; who by some means or other, accident, intention, carelessness, misfortune, or crime, have slipped out of the home circle, or the wider round of friendship or acquaintanceship, and never

¹ This part of the novel is set in the 1840s; the Indigo Revolt took place between 1859 and 1860. See Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

reappeared more [...]. In the present times [...] when almost every large family has one or more of its members scattered in several quarters of the [...] world – cases such as these must occur often.¹

Returning to England, Julius again finds it easy to become ‘lost once more’ in the anonymity of London, where his soldier’s uniform, though shabby, identifies him as ‘neither a beggar nor a rogue, but just up to the decent level which makes a man an object neither of fear nor compassion [...] not much noticed by anybody’ (337).

Through Julius’s decrepit appearance and his secret observation of his brother’s ‘bright little house’ (395), Craik refers back to the painting for which he had modelled years earlier as the figure of the beggar looking wistfully into ‘another man’s garden’, and thus implicitly comments on the hypocrisy of a society in which narrative art can evoke sentiment, but real privation is ignored. Lowe claims that Julius ‘ends his tragic life alone, excluded from the family’,² but he is, in fact, ‘saved’ through his absorption into his brother’s welcoming household, where he resumes his career as an artist, producing ‘simpler’ paintings which reflect his transformation and becomes a mentor to his ‘devoted’ nephew Will, who has the integrity and application necessary to become a great artist (452). William’s sons, like those of John Halifax, are brought up to be demonstratively affectionate and considerate, Craik emphasising, through the future careers envisaged for two of them, that this is not incompatible with the manliness of empire, as was generally believed. As Tosh observes:

The dominant code of manliness [...] so hostile to emotional expression [...] can be interpreted as a by-product of a raised imperial consciousness – especially with regard to the imperial frontier and the manly qualities required there.³

¹ ‘Lost’, *Chambers’s*, Feb. 13th, 1858, collected in *Studies from Life*, pp.275-286 (276).

² Lowe, p.182.

³ Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p.49.

The ‘continually opening door’ (339) of the doctor’s ‘full and [...] busy house’, through which ‘people were perpetually coming and going’ (338), represents a physical and metaphorical bridge between the domestic and the public, a distinction already blurred through the family home’s use as a medical practice. Although the novel extols Edna’s moral influence, manifested in her creation of a harmonious household, it also portrays her as playing a full part in the ‘world without’. This integration of ‘male’ and ‘female’ spheres makes Craik’s philosophy very different from Ruskin’s. The benign influence of William and Edna thus not only encompasses the extended family but also reaches far beyond the narrow domestic sphere, and will carry on into the future through the values instilled in their sons.

Craik’s doctor-heroes are, like John Halifax, characterised by a strong sense of physical energy, activity and courage. Yet it was in a figure more usually associated with sedentariness and introspection – the ‘man of letters’ – that Craik, in her first novel, *The Ogilvies* (1849)¹, set out her criteria for manliness and gentlemanliness, which remained central to all her later work. Philip Wychnor is forced to postpone marriage and seek work in London, after being disinherited by his aunt for refusing to accept the curacy she has arranged for him, because, although not a sceptic, he cannot express belief in ‘all [the church’s] dogmas’, and has no sense of vocation (116). Discovering that his Oxford degree has not prepared him to earn a living, he blames his ‘misfortune’ on his ‘being brought up that very useless thing – a gentleman’ (148), Craik suggesting that, in the age of industry, the value of the traditional university

¹ *The Ogilvies* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1849; references to London: Macmillan, 1891).

education is questionable. Although he declares his intention to work as a farmer's labourer, noting 'bitterly' that "a mechanic's place is above me, unfortunately, as I had not even the blessing of learning a trade" (149), his proviso that he will leave London and change his name, indicates that his sense of shame would be too great for the plan to be carried out. His sentiments are familiar to successful writer, Pierce Pennythorne, from whom he seeks advice on securing a suitable occupation, and who is disdainful of the dilemma of "college youths, with heads more full of pride than of brains; [who] can't do this because they haven't been brought up to it – and won't do the other because it isn't gentlemanly" (134). Pennythorne suggests literature as a 'respectable' choice of career, and one 'of which a gentleman's son need not feel ashamed' (142). Countering Philip's protestation that he has no experience of authorship and 'no genius', Pennythorne assures him that genius 'has nothing to do with the matter':

"The best authors, and those who have made most money, have had no genius at all. With plenty of diligence and a good connection, a clever author may get a very good living; while the poor devils called men of genius – a term for unusual flightiness and conceit – lie down and starve" (142)

Pennythorne has become prosperous by learning to please the ever-expanding periodical market, producing the kind of material which Craik evidently felt debased the purpose of literature as a force for moral good:

His acute, decisive character impressed ordinary people with reverence, and his tact and quickness of judgment had enabled him to compel from the small modicum of talent which he possessed, the reputation of being a literary star of considerable magnitude.

For, after passing through various phases of life, Mr. Pennythorne had finally subsided into literature. He took to writing as another man would take to bricklaying – considering that

The worth of anything
Is just as much as it will bring

And, as literature brought him in some hundreds a year [...] and maintained respectably the house in [...] Kensington [...], he regarded it as a useful instrument of labour, and valued it accordingly. His was a most convenient pen too – a pen of all work. It would write for anybody, on any subject, in any style, – always excepting that of imaginative literature, in which road it had never been known to travel. But this, as its owner doubtless believed, was only because it did not choose, as such writing was all trash, and never paid. (131)

Philip's 'hero-worship of literary men', his 'imaginary picture of a great author, inspired by a noble purpose' is shattered by his exposure to Pennythorne's materialism:

Now this image crumbled into dust: and from its ashes arose the semblance of a modern "litterateur" [...] doling out at so much per column the fruit of his brains, no matter whether it be tinselled inanity or vile poison, so that it will sell. [...] And so, our young visionary began to look on books and book-creators with diminished reverence; and in the fair picture of literary fame, he saw only the unsightly framework by which its theatrical and deceitful splendour was supported. (189)

Mitchell considers that the novel's descriptions of literary London have 'regrettably little to do with the story' and are 'simply incidents from personal experience thrown in to make up the length'.¹ On the contrary, through Pennythorne's cynical expediency and Philip's youthful idealism, Craik makes an important contribution towards the 'Dignity of Literature' debate. *The Ogilvies* was published two years after Lewes's article on the 'Condition of Authors', and during the period when Thackeray's *The History of Pendennis* and Dickens's *David Copperfield* were being serialised, the former between 1848 and 1850, and the latter between May 1849 and November 1850.² Thackeray appears to be undermining Carlyle's vision of 'The Hero as Man of Letters' (1840) in the character of Arthur Pendennis, who loses the youthful romantic sensibility of the aspiring poet to become a hack writer selling his work as a

¹ Mitchell, p.29.

² See note, p.14.

commodity.¹ The novel was, as Richard Salmon points out, ‘viewed by some critics as a scurrilous attack on the moral integrity and social standing of the literary profession’.

² Through the dishonest and ostentatiously vulgar Pennythorne, Craik appears to similarly deflate the ‘dignity’ of the author. However, she does so in order to provide a contrast with the idealistic Philip, whose repugnance towards Pennythorne’s values, and subsequent gradual development into ‘a great and true author’, who ‘in all he writes, will [...] reflect the truth that is within him, not as the world sees, but as Heaven sees’ (341), echoes Carlyle’s belief that writers could be ‘the real working effective Church of a modern country’,³ and promotes the same principles regarding professionalisation advocated by John Forster and Dickens.⁴ Florian Schweizer considers David Copperfield to be ‘the exemplary professional writer of the Victorian age’, moulded after Carlyle’s hero as a man of letters’.⁵ However, in Craik’s novel – published before the relevant chapters of Dickens’s novel were serialised – her characterisation of the young author is more consciously in tune with Carlyle’s philosophy, and his story provides a considerably more penetrating, more idealistic, yet ultimately more realistic, vision of the literary profession than Dickens’ account of his hero’s more rapid success.

¹ William Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis* (1850), ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

² Richard Salmon, “‘Farewell Poetry and aerial flights’”: The Function of the Author and Victorian Fiction’, in *The Victorian Novel*, ed. Francis O’Gorman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 134-155 (p.141).

³ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*: Chapter 5, ‘The Hero as Man of Letters, Johnson, Rousseau, Burns’ (1841), ed. Carl Niemeyer (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 162.

⁴ See Florian Schweizer, ‘Authorship and the Professional Writer’, in *Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 117-124 (p.122); Craig Howes, ‘Pendennis and the Controversy on the “Dignity of Literature”’, *Nineteenth Century Literature*, Vol. 41.3 (December, 1986), 269-298.

⁵ Schweizer, p.122

Philip's experiences of learning his 'trade' in 1840s London are evidently based on Craik's own, and thus give a valuable insight into the difficulties of establishing a career. At the time the novel was written, Craik was living in lodgings in Tottenham Court Road, and, like her hero, she must have felt the strain of having to write 'merely for daily bread' (185). Her first published works were poems, and translations of articles from French for the Column for Young People in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*.¹ Philip also starts his career by using his knowledge of foreign languages to translate 'small articles' for newspapers and magazines – 'a sort of literary hodman, carrying the mortar with which more skilful workmen may build'. Although reproducing the work of others is 'not by impulse or inspiration', it develops his 'power of expression'. That Philip 'never put forth his hand from its anonymous shelter' (185), indicates the benefits of unattributed publication for novice writers, both men and women, honing their skills as contributors to journals. To become a writer also demanded social engagement, however. The novel's depictions of literary parties reveal the importance of networking, with its potential to gain the support and influence of established writers. Philip's mentor, impoverished genius David Drysdale, acknowledges 'how almost impossible it is for a literary man to work his way without entering into the general society of the fraternity, and making personal interests, which materially aid his fortune', but he also warns Philip against 'compromis[ing] his independence' (211). Craik is known to have attended the soirées of Anna Maria Hall, wife of Samuel Carter Hall. Mrs Hall, editor of *Sharpe's London Magazine* between 1852 and 1853, also recruited for *Chambers's* and may thus have secured her work with both journals.² It is likely that the character of Mrs Lancaster,

¹ Mitchell, p. 8.

² Mitchell, p.6. Craik was also giving her own literary parties from the 1850s, as Margaret Oliphant notes in her autobiography. See *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant: The Complete Text*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.43.

influential organiser of social gatherings for the ‘literary world’, is based on her, and that the brief satirical sketches of the various ‘sets’ (216) Philip encounters at her parties – the ‘dandy author’, the ‘sarcastic wit’ (214), the satirist, whose ‘tongue and pen are like lancets [...] which bleed Dame Society pretty freely’ (215), and the ‘timid aspirant, who sat in a corner and watched the scene with reverent and somewhat fearful eyes’ – are also drawn from life (214). The novel conveys a sense of these authors frenetically trying to live up to the image of themselves that they have created through their work. For example, two writers for a humorous (fictional) journal, *The Merry-go-round*, are described as having ‘a character of wit to keep up, and must do it, well or ill, like the king’s fools of old’ (215), the simile suggesting that Craik is referring to *Punch*. Mrs Lancaster also encourages writers of her own sex, but Craik does not include any in her descriptions of literary gatherings, perhaps because she did not wish to satirise them. They do, however, appear in the scene in the British Museum Reading room, where Drysdale, although acknowledging respect for ‘women of real intellect, regular workers in literature’, is scornful of the ‘small philosophers in petticoats’ undertaking research, who, he feels, would be ‘far better off at home making puddings’ (209), a sentiment which must have been familiar to many an aspiring woman writer.

Philip’s torment at having to keep up these social appearances when an established author, despite being in despair over his false belief of Eleanor’s faithlessness, conveys, perhaps, the author’s own sense of anguish at the necessity to put on a public face when coping with bereavement:

To those who suffer, there is no life more bitter, more full of continual outward mockery, than that of any author immersed in the literary life of London [...]. He must keep in the society which is so

necessary to his worldly prospects – he must be seen in those haunts which are to others amusement, to him business – in theatre, exhibition, or social meeting; so at last he learns to do as others do – to *act*. It is merely creating a new self as he does a new character; and perhaps in time this fictitious self becomes so habitual that never, save in those works which the world calls fiction, but which are indeed his only true life, does the real man shine out. (350)

This perception of authorship as a public activity, requiring engagement with influential people and with current cultural events, and necessitating the construction of an acceptable outer persona in ‘the hollow and frivolous world’ (272) of literary London, adds another dimension to the question of the integrity of the author. Craik suggests, however, that the writer’s exposure to the materialism of culture and the superficiality of society, though potentially contaminating, is, if resisted, a test of moral strength. Emphasising the public aspect of authorship is also a way for Craik to address the problem of the perception of the male writer as an inhabitant of the domestic, and thus feminine, sphere, rather than the masculine world outside it. The novel repeatedly refers to writing as ‘work’, ‘labour’, ‘toil’, indicating an awareness of this ambiguous position. As Danahay writes,

the contradictions in Victorian male subjectivity were caused by an ideology that termed work as masculine and muscular; this caused particular problems for Victorian male intellectuals whose work could be viewed as feminine because it was often carried out in the domestic space and certainly did not involve muscles.¹

Philip’s gradual development into an author is presented as a long and arduous apprenticeship, thus equating it with other more obviously masculine vocations. He ‘labour[s] [...] at his daily work; for it was work – real work – though he loved it well’. It requires application ‘day after day, not waiting for inspiration, as few writers can afford to do, but sedulously training his mind to its duties’ (279). Critics were hostile to Thackeray’s unheroic description of the ‘literary man’ as having to ‘work for his

¹ Martin Danahay, *Gender at Work*, p.4.

bread [...] just like any other daily toiler',¹ but Craik's novel celebrates the idea of literature as labour because her ideal of gentlemanliness is founded on the necessity for hard work. Philip's diligence is contrasted with the superficiality of Pennythorne, who writes on subjects he knows nothing about, reviews books he has not read, and who, despite his wealth, is not, as he believes himself to be, a gentleman.

Her hero's manliness is also fostered by his experience of the 'deep straits of poverty' (185), existing on the paltry sum he earns as tutor to Leigh Pennythorne. The descriptions of his loneliness in his rented attic room, 'braving the summer sunshine streets of London in a threadbare coat' (148) to visit art galleries and museums – 'places of amusement that were open free' (145), and his use of the British Museum Reading room not merely for research but as somewhere to keep warm, have a sense of authenticity about them, suggesting the author's first-hand experience of such hardship. As Philip's capacity to cope with adversity becomes more robust, so too does his strength as a writer: 'His powers of mind [...] had matured accordingly; and the more he used them the stronger they grew. The dreamer had become the worker' (184). Craik thus implies that writing requires as much effort as it does imagination. To underline that his masculinity is not compromised by his progress into authorship, Philip's physical appearance, earlier described as 'too refined – almost too feminine' (109), 'sharpens into the features of manhood; [...] there was a new strength and a new character about the whole head' (184).

¹ Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, p.450.

Significantly, this description is given in a scene where Philip, sitting by the bedside of his ailing pupil, reading aloud to him, displays the tenderness essential to Craik's model of masculinity. The reciprocal acts of nursing between Philip and Leigh, demonstrations of the mutually beneficial relationship between strong and weak, and an exploration of the possibility of a different kind of manliness gained through illness, prefigure those between John Halifax and Phineas. Philip awakes from a delirious fever to find that his pupil has been 'the most active and skilful of nurses – gentle and thoughtful as a woman' (160). Leigh exhibits his own kind of masculine courage in his quiet acceptance of death, becoming 'far older than his years' (184), and proves to be a significant influence on Philip in his encouragement that he can be "one of those great writers [...] who can make the best and wisest of people better and wiser still, and yet can bring comfort to a poor sick boy like me" (187). In the scene describing Leigh's death, in which he clasps 'the hand which had brought light into his darkness' (271), Philip's hand is not only a physical presence, but also a metaphor for the power of literature in bringing spiritual consolation. Philip fulfils Leigh's belief, achieving 'fame', but more importantly, a 'sense of duty fulfilled': 'he joined that little band of true brothers to whom authorship is a sacred thing; a lay priesthood' (269). Craik's words echo Carlyle's belief that 'in the true Literary Man there is thus ever [...] a sacredness: he is the light of the world; the world's Priest'.¹

Judging from an essay of 1858, *Silence for a Generation*, few of Craik's fellow-writers lived up to the ideals embodied in her hero.² The essay, another important contribution to the Dignity of Literature debate, and offering an interesting insight into the impact of mass print culture, expresses concern over the poor standard of much of

¹ Carlyle, p. 157.

² Craik, 'Silence for a Generation', *Chambers's*, June 1858; collected in *Studies from Life*, pp.28-42.

the vast quantities of literature produced by this ‘busy, gabbling, scribbling, self-analysing, self-conscious society’. It attacks those who, like Pennythorne, write solely for fame and prosperity, those who once had ‘the true vocation of the worker and the thinker’ but who ‘prostitute their gifts’ to maintain their status, and the ‘sorry pretenders to literature’ who have no talent at all. The essay reveals the author’s confidence in her own status as a writer, and underlines how her vision of literature can comfortably encompass it as both a ‘noble [...] profession’ and as a ‘trade [...] to be pursued in all love and reverence, but as steadily, honestly, and rationally as any trade’.¹

Returning to the subject once more, in her novel *Young Mrs. Jardine*, published in 1879,² Craik again casts the hero as a man whose literary career stems from the necessity to earn a living after disinheritance. The novel presents a view of authorship that is considerably more pragmatic, but no less principled, than in *The Ogilvies*. Roderick Jardine is cut off by his mother when he chooses to marry his Swiss distant cousin Silence rather than a rich heiress. Like Philip, he finds that, despite a Cambridge education, he has ‘been brought up to no profession, no business’ (204), but has grown up knowing ‘he would [...] never need to earn his bread unless he wished so to do’ (11). Although his upbringing has been modelled on that of the upper classes, Roderick’s wealth has come from new money. His maternal grandfather, starting as a lowly blacksmith, had ‘made such heaps of money in the iron line that his only child was able to marry a gentleman and become a lady’ (6). Craik uses the

¹ ‘Silence for a Generation’, p.35.

² *Young Mrs. Jardine* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1879) First published in *Good Words*, Jan-Dec 1879.

epithet 'lady' ironically. His mother is described as 'coarse and vulgar', and Roderick, though a dutiful son and not ashamed of her background, finds that her ostentation grates on the refined sensibilities inherited from his father, and nurtured at university. Craik's comments on the pretensions of the *nouveaux-riches* thus suggest a somewhat uneasy relationship between parents and their better-educated children. Although the family's wealth has come from industry, Roderick is discouraged from following his interest in engineering, because his mother "thought the profession not 'genteel' enough. She would have put me into 'the house', but, though I loved machinery, I hated trade" (213). Although the success and prosperity of the Victorian era was forged by engineers such as Watt, Brunel and Stephenson, and despite the recognised professional status of Civil Engineering by the late 1850s, Roderick's comment reveals how the occupation was, because of its association with manual work, misunderstood in a way which continues to this day.¹ Interestingly, his mother does not consider trade to carry such a stigma, but Roderick's intended position in the family business would have been nominal. The new middle-classes, despite owing their prosperity to work, are thus shown as aping the upper-classes in their association between gentlemanliness and leisure.

After marrying Silence, Roderick, determined to find a useful occupation, looks forward to 'a life full of [...] hard work' in which he will 'play a man's part [and] leave the world a little better than he found it' (203). His words suggest the importance of work to his sense of masculinity, and underline the author's view that

¹ See Dale H. Porter, *The Thames Embankment: Environment, Technology, and Society in Victorian London* (Akron, Ohio: [University of Akron Press](#), 1998).

the occupation of the gentleman should not only benefit the individual but contribute to the wider good. Roderick's discovery that to train for a profession 'cost[s] oceans of money and years of labour' indicates that the professions were still dominated by those from wealthy backgrounds. Authorship thus seems attractive, since, he believes, '[it] cost nothing but pen, ink and paper' (204), and, by setting his novel in ancient Greece, will draw from his gentleman's education. Craik, now writing as an established author, gently mocks the 'innocent and ignorant' optimism of the aspirant. Roderick's over-zealous approach, plunging straight into his first novel, confident that it will bring 'plenty of money' (208) contrasts with Philip's steady honing of his craft, and is typical of 'young writers before they learn that true authorship is a duty, not a passion – a daily labour, and not an accidental "mood"'. His separating himself from the domestic sphere by 'shutting himself up many hours daily' (206), suggests a need to delineate a masculine space within the home, but his work is also a joint enterprise, with Silence copying and editing the work. In describing Roderick's disappointment after his manuscript is returned, Craik warns of the difficulties faced by the novice author:

Celebrated authors are usually treated with courtesy and kindness by eminent publishers [...] but unknown and amateur authors who rashly send their MSS. to busy firms, unto whom their small venture is a mere drop in the bucket, an unconsidered nothing, [...] do not always meet the same consideration. (211)

After the novel's third rejection, Roderick, terrified by the prospect of real poverty, "the tide that will drown us both" (216), feels emasculated by his inability to provide, a failure attributable to his being "brought up for nothing" as a gentleman: "If I had ten sons [...] and a fortune for each of them, I would still bring them up to earn their honest bread" (216). His asking for work at the local mill, and being offered the job

of foreman, is a step that generates conflicting emotions: ““Having, they say, a little of my grandfather in me, I may drop, or rise, into a capital man of business after all””. Roderick’s uncertainty about the status of the ‘man of business’ reflects the general anxiety over the social standing of the self-made man, and makes an interesting comparison with John Halifax’s rise to fortune. Black’s initial reluctance to take him on is not, as Roderick believes, caused by any sense that the job is beneath him – ““He objected to me strongly at first because I was a gentleman”” (232) – but because the mill-owner has taken pity on him, offering a wage more generous than he is worth, ‘seeing it would be some months before an ignorant “gentleman”, however capable, could be equal in value to an experienced working man, even as foreman at a mill’ (234). The inverted commas around “gentleman” suggest that the term does not carry any sense of innate superiority, and the value of the gentleman’s education is again questioned.

Roderick’s claim not to feel ‘any disgrace in work, any dignity in idleness’ (233) proves false when he is faced with the prospect of neighbours of his own class discovering his circumstances. Echoing the similar scene in *The Woman’s Kingdom*, his edict to Silence that they must either decline any social invitations or hire a carriage and ““make believe [...] that we are rich people”” (246), is met with his wife’s response that this would be ““acting a lie””. Here the status symbol of the carriage is not considered as a strategy to improve career prospects, but simply to ‘keep up appearances’, a pretence Craik deplored as ‘mak[ing] life one long struggle and deceit’ (249). The emphasis on material possessions which led to such shams was also, she felt, responsible for the trend for late marriage, or for men not wishing to marry at all:

Such selfish luxury, worldliness, and the love of outward show, have brought our young men – ay, and some women too – to such a pass that they feel [...] every child born to them is a new enemy; and marriage, instead of being “honourable” to all, is a folly, a derision, or a dread. (230)

The disinclination to marry was, as Tosh suggests, considered to be a significant social problem at this period, since it consigned many women to spinsterhood, and increasingly large numbers of men to a single life outside the domestic ideal:

The scale on which men avoided marriage in the late nineteenth century implies that there were strong considerations working to counterbalance the traditional association of bachelorhood with diminished manhood. [...] Others again blamed both sexes for colluding in the view that marriage should be postponed until the newly-married couple could enjoy the same level of luxury as their parents.¹

The novel confronts both theories regarding the unpopularity of marriage, in its denunciation of materialism, and in attributing the hero's transformation into manliness to his 'venturous early marriage' (330) through which 'the youth had changed into a man, the man into a husband [...] the stay and support of the house' (249). A husband is thus an augmented, not 'diminished' state of manhood. However, Craik does not intend the term 'husband' to signify male authority. It is to Silence's influence that Roderick attributes 'all his happiness, all his success' (329). Through her guidance, he comes to realise that there is no shame either in working, or in acknowledging a need to do so, and that those with true gentility, like their aristocratic neighbours, the Symingtons, do not measure a man's worth by his wealth but by his character. The unpretentiousness of the Symingtons, who welcome Roderick and Silence as equals, is contrasted with the avarice and affectation of Roderick's mother, who disinherits her son for marrying a virtuous woman, and encourages her daughter, Bella, to marry a rich man known to be depraved. Through Silence's unequivocal view

¹ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 170-194 (p.172).

that Bella should leave her husband, Craik makes the case for legal separation and greater custodial rights for mothers. By extolling the ideal marriage of Roderick and Silence, Craik deliberately pre-empts criticism that the novel's support for reform of the marriage laws undermines the institution. Although their marriage appears to endorse traditional roles, it is an equal partnership. Silence works outside the home teaching the mill-girls, and becomes increasingly involved with her husband's literary work, criticising its content 'fairly' but 'severe[ly]' (310). Her hero and heroine also exemplify ideal parenting, with their children being brought up 'to abhor extravagance [...] or self-indulgence, aware that each will have to make his own way in the world, as is best for every man, and woman, too, perhaps' (329).

The fulfilment of the hero's literary ambition comes about through being invited to the Symingtons' soirees. These are not the vehicles for self-promotion described in *The Ogilvies*, but are attended by those with a genuine interest in meeting other intellectuals from various fields, and who 'neither knew nor cared how much he had a year' (303). Roderick's conversation impresses a 'man of letters' (302), who, after reading his rejected novel, suggests that he should write quarterly articles on 'a subject very popular just now [...] which he might examine, read up for, and write about [...], the first step on the ladder which, if taken cautiously and firmly, might lead him either by literature or politics, or both, to the very top' (304). This implies that Roderick will be writing on a socio-political topic, perhaps drawing from his life as an ordinary working man, experience that will be far more relevant than his knowledge of classics. These early 'solid' articles, though 'good', are 'not the highest work, or the utmost he was capable of doing' (310), but are part of his literary apprenticeship. It is significant that Roderick continues with his 'long, hard-working days [...] at the mill'

with ‘the perpetual whirr of machinery in his ears’ (290), after he is earning a comfortable living from his writing, and even when reunited with his mother:

When [she] [...] insisted on his giving up his work at the mill and living as a “gentleman”, he had refused point-blank, declaring his determination to carve out his own fortune, and make his own independent way in the world. (328)

Through Roderick’s attitude towards work, Craik reiterates the values embodied in John Halifax, and sends a clear message to the rising classes not to distance themselves from the industrial labour generating their wealth, but to acknowledge the contribution of mill and factory workers, and campaign for better working conditions. Roderick can do this in very different ways – as a fair-minded foreman, using his interest in machinery to make practical improvements, and, it is implied, through his writing, first in periodical articles, then a book, but ‘not a novel’ (310). Roderick, ‘working at the mill all day, writing his book at night, with little society’ (311), is a very different type of author-hero from Philip Wychnor. Although ‘a man of very considerable talent’ (329), he is not, like Philip, a ‘genius’ or a ‘poet-soul’ (268) completely absorbed in the production of great, spiritually ennobling, literature, or part of the London literary world. He is, however, no less principled, and, through his more prosaic style of writing, also influencing the world for the better. These different perceptions of the author’s role are an expression of the two strands of Craik’s own career as both novelist and journalist.

Manly disability

Although Craik's author-protagonists conform to the conventional pattern of the fictional hero in their physical attractiveness and vitality, the correlation between the development of their profession and their maturing masculinity suggests that the quality of manliness transcends the physical body. Such a view runs contrary to the increasing emphasis on male physicality at this period, as evidenced in what Tosh describes as the 'astonishing growth in athleticism' by the 1870s:

The high profile of organised sport was reflected in the heavy physical slant given to the concept of manliness. Indeed the statements of some enthusiasts implied that athletic prowess was *all* that was required for full manly credentials.¹

As indicated throughout this chapter, for several of Craik's heroes, it is physical frailty rather than strength that consolidates their 'full manly credentials', with periods of illness proving to be catalytic and transforming processes. Although these episodes of enforced passivity are 'feminising' in fostering humility and endurance, reflection and insight, they enhance, rather than undermine, manliness. The more conventional physical attributes of her heroes are not, however, diminished by illness for long, and they are able to demonstrate the necessary capacity for hard work. Secondary characters with infirmities are, as previously suggested, important in allowing the hero to display empathy and tenderness, to destigmatise disability, and to suggest an alternative model of masculinity. However, while both Phineas and Leigh Pennythorne exhibit courage which goes beyond stoicism, their physical limitations prevent them from fulfilling Craik's vision of ideal masculinity.

¹ John Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p.188.

In *A Noble Life*, (1866)¹, however, Craik suggests that severe and permanent disability can co-exist with ‘true manliness’ (166), by attributing the quality to a man so profoundly deformed and disabled that, apart from the pain and restrictions his body imposes, he seems almost without any corporeal substance – ‘a disembodied soul’ (297). Despite being born as ‘the smallest, saddest specimen of infantile deformity’ (16), the Earl of Cairnforth goes on to lead a purposeful, active life, respected and loved by his many ‘real friends affectionate and true’ (164), and by his tenants, whose lives he improves through schemes for housing and education. He is a well-educated participant in society and debate with the leading intellectuals of Edinburgh, a patron of the arts, a philanthropist, and a wise and influential surrogate father to his adopted heir. His satisfaction in also being a ‘good man of business’ derives, not from personal financial gain, but from its ‘human’ element – ‘[it] benefited other people beside one’s self’ (110). Described in terms which would normally be used for the strongest of able-bodied men, ‘the most energetic Earl of Cairnforth that ever came to the title’ (125) is ‘truly heroic’ (7), ‘accomplishing more than most men could do in ‘three lifetimes’ (125).

It has been suggested by feminist critics, however, that Craik’s disabled males are covert expressions of female constriction rather than explorations of masculine identity or of their own predicament. Showalter considers that the ‘struggles’ of women ‘are

¹ *A Noble Life* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1866; references to New York: Harper, 1875; University of Michigan Historical reprint series).

represented by afflicted characters of both sexes',¹ and that 'the behaviour and emotion of Craik's [male] invalids is always feminine'.² 'Through [...] Fletcher and other maimed male characters in her fiction', she argues, 'Craik expressed her sense of freakishness and abnormality', while Phineas's acceptance that 'stricken by hereditary disease, [he] ought never to seek to perpetuate it by marriage', reveals Craik's own dread that she might succumb to the 'hereditary madness' apparent in her father and brother.³ Mitchell similarly feels that the earl is a representative of 'an essentially feminine predicament', of 'a woman unhappily powerless in a patriarchal society [who] can hardly avoid feeling that she is a crippled and helpless specimen of mankind'.⁴ Similar interpretations have been applied to Craik's *The Little Lame Prince and his Travelling Cloak* (1875)⁵, a children's story with a theme very like that of *A Noble Life*. Prince Dolor, the disabled hero, is described by Mitchell as 'projection of the female situation. [...] He cannot help himself because he is physically weak and no one pays attention to him',⁶ and Showalter suggests that Prince Dolor's 'dilemma seems feminine', because, 'deprived of physical power, education, companionship, mobility, and a future, he accepts all these conditions as natural, and becomes gentle instead of bitter'.⁷ More recently, Lowe has endorsed the view that 'such figures are [...] really women in disguise'.⁸

¹ Showalter, p. 12.

² Showalter, p. 17.

³ Showalter, p.18.

⁴ Mitchell, pp.64-65.

⁵ *The Little Lame Prince and his travelling cloak* (London, 1875; references to Bibliobazaar reprint of unspecified edition).

⁶ Mitchell, p.89.

⁷ Showalter, p.8.

⁸ Lowe, p.171.

These interpretations of Craik's 'crippled' characters do not correspond with the assertive, independent woman who emerges from her writing, or with her strong, determined heroines. That is not to say that Craik did not intend her readers to make the connection between the limitations imposed by disability and by being born female, but in overcoming their restrictions, Prince Dolor and the Earl suggest that women can, and should, do the same. The considerate, 'feminine' characteristics embodied in both characters, and also present in her able-bodied heroes, are not symptoms of incapacity, but inspire energetic social reform. Both Mitchell and Showalter disregard elements of *The Little Lame Prince* inconsistent with a feminist reading, underestimating, for example, the significance of the Prince's travelling cloak, and focusing on his imprisonment in the first part of the story, rather than on the second, in which he escapes from the tower and becomes, like the earl, a dynamic, munificent ruler, improving the lives of those in the 'miserable little back alleys' he had seen from his magic cloak. The cloak is thus a symbol not only of the power of imagination, but of the empathy which stimulates a desire 'to make the world a little more level' (*The Little Lame Prince*, 61). As Lily Philipose argues, *The Little Lame Prince* 'is not a book about female passivity', but should be read as an allegory of Craik's belief that feminine influence should be at the heart of political life, and that the woman writer could be a powerful instrument in conveying these values:

The "domestic" women of letters crossed gender boundaries (just as the lame prince does), by occupying both the private and public spheres of existence.¹

Phineas Fletcher is similarly able to move between the private and public sphere and, as the recorder and narrator of the life of John Halifax, can also be said to represent the woman writer. Far more than a mere 'crippled looker-on at other people's happy

¹ Lily Philipose, 'The Politics of the Hearth in Victorian Children's Fantasy', p. 137.

marriages and lives’,¹ he plays a significant part in the development of the plot, is a teacher to John and to his sons, and a valued friend fully involved in all the family’s activities. *A Noble Life* was published the year after Craik’s marriage, (which proved to be very happy),² and it is highly unlikely therefore that the disabled earl represents any sense of unhappy spinsterhood or ‘freakishness’. Moreover, his title and wealth give him, despite his disability, more influence than most men, let alone women, could hope to wield, and is thus unconvincing as a symbol for the powerless woman. To conclude that Craik felt it necessary to express her views on issues concerning women covertly, through the disguise of disabled men, also disregards the fact that she addresses the issue confidently and directly throughout her work.

To interpret these male figures solely as coded representations, also ignores the possibility that Craik may have intended to write about disability for its own sake. Henry James, reviewing *A Noble Life*, evidently thought so, sneeringly referring to her ‘lively predilection for cripples and invalids by which she has always been distinguished ; but we defer to this generous idiosyncrasy; it is no more than right that the sickly half of humanity should have its chronicler’.³ As suggested above, Showalter believes that, for Craik, this ‘sickly half of humanity [...] meant women – invalids [...] by nature of their sex alone’,⁴ but Mitchell’s admission that she finds *A Noble Life* ‘embarrassing to read’ because ‘we feel uncomfortable in the presence of deformity and pain; we feel sensitive about staring so openly at a cripple’, suggests

¹ Showalter, p.18.

² She wrote to a friend, “How lucky I was to find such an exceptional character as my own husband. One does not like to talk of such things – but oh – we are *so* happy”. From ‘Letter to Miss Rawkin’, AM 17229, in Morris, L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists, Princeton University Library. Quoted in Showalter, p.19.

³ Henry James, ‘Dinah Maria Mulock Craik’, p. 846.

⁴ Showalter, p.11.

that her reading may not be entirely metaphorical, thus undermining her feminist interpretation. Her view that the novel ‘becomes even more embarrassing when we realize that Craik's friend Frank Smedley died not long before the book was written’¹, seems to acknowledge the possibility that the novel was perhaps, in part, a tribute to a man who, though disabled from infancy, became a successful author, particularly of adventure stories for boys. A contemporary tribute to Smedley is strikingly similar to Craik’s description of the Earl.² For both, the gift of imaginative storytelling, gives them, like the Prince’s cloak, a sense of freedom from immobility:

And [the Earl’s] tales were always the last that they would have expected from one like him – wild exploits [...] shipwrecks or desert islands; astonishing feats of riding, or fighting, or travelling by land and sea – everything, in short, belonging to that sort of active, energetic, adventurous life, of which the relator could never have had the least experience. (79)

It should also be remembered that Craik’s husband was disabled after losing a leg in a railway accident in 1861, and it is thus not surprising that she would wish to write on the issue.

The different interpretations, both literal and symbolic, of Craik’s physically impaired characters, are particularly interesting in the light of the recent upsurge of interest in cultural representations of disability. Such studies have encouraged a more balanced evaluation of relevant texts by giving an insight into the perception of disability within the socio-political and medical context, and its portrayal in literature and other media. They add greatly to an understanding of Craik’s writing, in particular of *A Noble Life* where disability is the central theme. The novel has not, to date, been included in any study of disability, yet it is a text which reveals the author’s engagement with many of

¹ Mitchell, p. 64.

² See Stewart M. Ellis, ‘Frank Smedley’, in *Mainly Victorian* (London: Hutchinson, 1924), pp. 113-128.

the major issues pertinent to contemporary disability theory. Craik's motives for writing the novel can perhaps be better appreciated in the context of works describing the increasing medicalisation of disability in the Victorian period. Bill Hughes, for example, writes of 'the Victorian penchant for excluding people from social participation on the grounds of what today might be called 'difference' [...] summed up by Foucault's (1969) notion of the 'great confinement':

The segregation associated with confinement was not only equivalent to a custodial sentence – often for life – but was also a sentence of social death. [...] These institutional spaces of exclusion, into which disabled people were cast, were [...] civilised 'by medical jurisdiction'.¹

As Lilian E. Craton has pointed out, however, 'the Victorian relationship to images of physical difference was complex, marked by conflicting impulses to reject, exploit, and celebrate the odd body', which was hidden away, yet displayed in the popular 'freak' show.² Confinement accentuated the sense of otherness, and added to the titillation enjoyed by spectators of these public displays of the physically different. As Craton explains, disquiet about the morality of such exhibitions of deformity was allayed as it became legitimised, as the century progressed, as being of scientific and medical interest. Contemporary writing on evolution and heredity encouraged this more clinical approach. Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) and Robert Knox's *The Races of Men* (1850), both focusing on the notion of 'progressive development' and 'improvement' of the human species, and Darwin's theory of natural selection in *The Origin of Species* (1859), all had consequences for

¹ Bill Hughes, 'Disability and the Body', *Disability Studies Today*, ed. Colin Barnes, Mike Oliver, Len Barton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 58-97 (pp. 60-61).

² Lilian E. Craton, *The Victorian Freak Show: the Significance of Disability and Physical Difference in Nineteenth century Fiction* (New York: Cambria Press, 2009), p.2.

the perception of disability.¹ The greater understanding of the link between disease and heredity led to an association between disability, particularly blindness, and parental immorality, and fostered anxiety about the possible degeneration of the human species. Such fears fuelled the eugenics debate and resulted in the increasing emphasis on athleticism.² The issue was further complicated by concerns about the economic inactivity of some of the disabled poor, and the need to distinguish between what Henry Mayhew termed the ‘professional’ and the ‘involuntary’ beggar, with the latter category being genuinely ‘physically disabled for labour’ and thus deserving of help.³ The inability to contribute economically to society, however, added further stigma to disability. Michael Oliver sees the rise of capitalism as being the cause of segregation of the disabled, prior to which they ‘were integrated within their communities and had a legitimated number of social (and economic) roles’.⁴

Representations of physical abnormality in the Victorian novel generally reinforced stereotypes and added to the stigmatisation of the disabled. As Lennard J. Davis has suggested, the novel generally places emphasis on the universality of the experience of the protagonists – ‘the plot and character development of novels tend to pull towards the normative’, with the few minor disabled characters serving ‘to bolster the novel’s preoccupation with ‘normalcy’:

If disability appears in a novel, it is rarely centrally represented. It is unusual for a main character to be a person with disabilities, although minor characters like Tiny Tim, can be deformed in ways that arouse

¹ Robert Knox, *The Races of Men*, (1850; Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850); Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation and other writings* (1844; ed. James A. Secord, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

² See Stoddard Holmes, and John C. Waller, ‘Ideas of Heredity, Reproduction and Eugenics in Britain, 1800 – 1875’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 32.3 (September, 2001), 457-489.

³ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol.1 (London, 1851), p.311.

⁴ Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p.61.

pity. [...] On the other hand [...] more often than not, villains tend to be physically abnormal: scarred, deformed or mutilated [...]. I am not saying that novels embody the prejudices of society toward people with disabilities. That is clearly a truism [but] [...] this normativity in narrative will by definition create the abnormal, the Other, the disabled, the native, the colonized subject, and so on.¹

Rosemarie Garland Thomson also writes of the tendency of the novel to focus on the ‘otherness’ of the disabled character, but suggests that this is not unique to the genre but deeply rooted in earlier narrative forms.

Main characters almost never have physical disabilities [...]. When literary critics look at disabled characters, they often interpret them metaphorically or aesthetically, reading them without political awareness as conventional elements of the sentimental, romantic, Gothic, or grotesque tradition [...]. From folktales and classical myths to modern and postmodern “grotesques”, the disabled body is almost always a freakish spectacle presented by the mediating narrative voice. Most disabled characters are enveloped by the otherness that their disability signals in the text.²

David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder similarly note that disability has been used intentionally, from the Oedipus myth onward, as ‘a metaphor of personal and social ruin’.³ Stoddard Holmes observes that ‘Victorian discourses of disability, and the texts that convey them, are overwhelmingly “melodramatic”’ and that this connection with stage melodrama ‘evolved into a generalised, melodramatic mode of imagining disability’ which led to an ‘association, in literary and other texts, between physical disability and emotional excess’.⁴ The fictional disabled character was thus, as Leslie A. Fiedler also suggests, utilised to heighten emotions of fear, horror, or pity,

¹ Lennard J. Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 21-2.

² Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 9-10.

³ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: disability and the dependencies of discourse* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 10.

⁴ Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, pp. 4-5.

‘rendered as something more than or less than human’¹ and, as Stoddard Holmes notes, this mode of characterisation extended into non-fictional genres:

Not only fiction writers but also educators, social reformers, journalists and even physicians habitually characterised people with disabilities in terms of their melancholy, spiritual, or suspicious tendencies [...]. Physician William Lawrence [...] introduces a series of lectures on blindness as ‘one of the greatest calamities that can befall human nature short of death; and many think that the termination of existence would be preferable to its continuance in the solitary, dependent, and imperfect state to which human life is reduced [...] to a dreary blank – dark, solitary and cheerless – burthensome to themselves and to those around them’.²

Craik’s essays on blindness have an entirely different tone. In ‘Blind’ (1860), she describes how the education and training provided by the recently established Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind encouraged independence. ‘Light in Darkness’ (1882), a biographical study of Francis Campbell, the founder of the Royal Normal College for the Blind, focuses on the achievements of this remarkable man, and the unusually enlightened methods of education he encouraged in his school, which, she explains, was founded ‘on the principle that the blind should be encouraged from the very first [...] to consider themselves not as aliens from ordinary life and education, but able to acquire [...] everything that other children can acquire’.³ Craik’s description of her visit to the school conveys the normality and happiness of the pupils, who ‘laughed and chattered, worked and played [...] just like other children’ and, when invited to her home for a picnic, ‘ran about the field and tumbled in the hay

¹ Leslie A. Fiedler, ‘Pity and Fear: Images of the Disabled in the Popular Arts’, in *Tyranny of the Normal: essays on bioethics, theology and myth* (Lincoln, Massachusetts: David R. Godine, 1996), pp. 33-47 (p. 34).

² Martha Stoddard Holmes, ‘Working (with) the Rhetoric of Affliction: Autobiographical Narratives of Victorians with Physical Disabilities’, in *Embodied Rhetorics: disability in language and culture*, ed. James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki Wilson (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), pp. 27-44 (p.29).

³ Craik, ‘Blind’, *Macmillan’s* (November, 1860), collected in *The Unkind Word*, pp. 223-230. ‘Light in Darkness’, *Good Words* (January-February 1882), collected in *Plain Speaking* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1882), pp. 193-252, (p. 247).

with shrieks of enjoyment, so that to pity them, or even to guide and help them, seemed wholly unnecessary ('Light in Darkness', 199).

Read within the context of disability studies and informed by an understanding of Victorian attitudes and representations, it is clear that Craik's fictional portrayals of disabled characters are also very enlightened for their time. *A Noble Life* is particularly unusual, not only in its positioning of a disabled man as hero, thus placing the debate at the centre of the novel, but in the way it challenges contemporary thinking about the treatment of those with disabilities. The author's insistence on the worth and accomplishments of her protagonist can be seen as an appeal against segregation and confinement. The Earl recounts how his first ten years were spent 'lying on a sofa all day' – the dominant image of the Victorian invalid – until he begged not to be 'shut [...] up any longer' (51), to be allowed to go out of doors, carried, or pulled in a carriage, by his nurse's son, to receive an education, and to take up his place as head of the family estate. His physical limitations are not a bar to achievement, but develop valuable qualities including 'spiritual insight' (66). He has 'the rare power [...] of guiding and governing' and 'what he could not do himself he could direct others to do' (111). The novel's setting 'many years ago'¹ in a remote Scottish castle, the orphaned, exiled, heir who reclaims his title, and the presence of disguised evil in Captain Bruce's deceit of the virtuous Helen, give the work a fairy-tale quality which counters the traditional association in myth between deformity and evil. The feudal society which the Earl inhabits is also perhaps a reminder of a more inclusive, pre-industrial age.

¹ The novel is set early in the nineteenth century, in 'the Byron era' (p.132).

The eugenics debate is dramatised in the conversation between the Reverend Cardross and the family doctor, the latter believing that an ‘opportune death’ for the infant Earl would be the best outcome, and appearing to condone the Spartan practice of leaving such babies to die. Reverend Cardross, however, expresses the Christian view that this “would be [...] sheer murder”:

“And we are not Spartans, but Christians, to whom the body is not everything, and who believe that God can work out His wonderful will [...] through the saddest tragedies and direst misfortunes”. (18)¹

In its reference to the Spartans, the passage challenges the contemporary emphasis on male athleticism and physical perfection based on the classical ideal.² Helen’s fear that her son Cardross may have inherited some of his father’s character traits underlines Craik’s belief – expressed in her writing on the reform of marriage laws – that the inheritance of spiritual corruption is far more damaging to humanity than that of physical incapacity. It is Cardross, the Earl’s appointed heir, ‘a most masculine character’ (223), physically strong and competitive in sport – the epitome of what the empire required in its young men – who must be improved and shaped to be more like his ‘impaired’ mentor, and his genetic paternal inheritance as son of the dissolute Bruce eradicated. His legal claim is justified, however, since Bruce is the Earl’s closest living relative. Bruce, a decorated soldier, who has styled himself on the Byronic model, seems at first to have the making of an ‘elegant and gentlemanly’ (139) romantic hero. His own ill-health is perhaps intended by Craik to differentiate

¹ Francis Galton’s first work on eugenics was published after Craik’s novel, in 1869, but theories of human ‘improvement’ based on the theories of Knox, Darwin, and Chambers were already affecting perceptions of disability.

² See Tosh, and J.A.Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (London: Routledge, 2000).

between the innocent sufferer and the man for whom it is the result of, and symbol of, an immoral life.

The Earl's experiences of 'doctors coming about me and hurting me' (51) as a child, and the painful and fruitless 'experiments' which he undergoes as an adult (82), convey the author's disapproval of the medicalisation of disability which, in its aim of 'normalising' difference could cause unnecessary suffering. The device which the Earl's doctors believe may improve his mobility, but in fact results only in greater, lasting pain and the crushing of raised hopes, has been invented by a 'skilled mechanician' (82), perhaps reflecting the Victorian faith in technology. Although Craik's criticism of unhelpful medical intervention implies an antipathy towards the lack of acceptance of bodily difference, she understands the initial instinctive revulsion which can be experienced when first encountering someone with severe abnormalities. She confronts the issue by describing the compassionate Helen's reaction to meeting the Earl, withdrawing the hand she had offered, when seeing his 'poor, helpless, unnatural-looking fingers [...]. They actually shocked her – gave her a sick sense of physical repulsion; but she conquered it' (49). Even her father, the beatific Reverend Cardross, feels nervous at the prospect of meeting his new pupil, and experiences a 'slight repulsion' at his appearance, but this is soon overcome by the Earl's 'inexpressible loveableness' (60). Craik argues that familiarity, and thus inclusion, soon neutralises, and makes irrelevant, the shock of difference. The Earl becomes, to those around him,

so familiar and dear, that [...] all who knew him, had long since forgotten that [he] was – what he was. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should sit [...] absolutely passive to all physical things; but interested in everything and everybody, [...] completely one of the circle as if he took the

most active part therein. Consulted by one, appealed to by another, joked by a third – he was ever ready with a joke – it was only when strangers happened to see him, and were startled by the sight, that his own immediate friends recognised how different he was from other people. (81)

The ‘startled’ reaction of strangers, and the ‘stares’ of ‘curiosity’ or ‘pity’ his appearance first provokes when he is staying in Edinburgh (164) are again gradually replaced by respect and love for the intelligent, cultured and honourable man within the ‘afflicted’ body. The Earl ceases to be defined solely by his disability but by his character. Craik condemns the superficial spectacle of the ‘freak’ show and advocates a different way of seeing disability, in her comment that ‘some few, of noble mind, saw in him the grandest and most religious spectacle that men can look upon – a human soul which has not suffered itself to be conquered by adversity’(164). It is the perseverance demonstrated by those with disabilities, not their physical appearance, which is remarkable. The Earl’s acceptance within the ‘brilliant circle – all clever men and charming women – of whose notice the cleverest and most charming were always proud’ (166), conveys an important message that there is no stigma or potential physical harm in close association with the disabled, and that their inclusion in society is of benefit to all. In emphasising that there are women amongst his friends, Craik counters the concern, which continued well into mid-century and beyond, that a pregnant woman viewing the deformed or disabled body put her unborn child in danger of taking on its characteristics.¹

Craik explores the definition of masculinity throughout the novel, emphasising the Earl’s ‘strong, manly soul, counteracting all physical infirmities’ (212). His realisation that others may not see him as a man, however, is conveyed poignantly but with

¹ See Craton, pp. 28 – 40, and Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, pp. 65-67.

restraint: “I am a man now, or ought to be”, he tells Helen, explaining why he no longer wishes to be carried in Malcolm’s arms (93). His guardian, Mr. Menteith, surprised by his ‘intelligent and pertinent observations’ when learning about the management of the estate, confesses that he had ““never thought of him as a young man, or a man at all; nevertheless he is one and will always be. That clear, cool head of his, just for [...] pure brains, is worth both his father’s and grandfather’s put together”” (109).

The Earl has to convince himself of his right to be defined as masculine, his words reflecting the confusion he feels about his status, while the author’s voice makes her own view clear.

“I am nearly twenty-one. Any other young man would have been a man long ago. And I will be a man – why should I not? True manliness is not solely outside. I dare say you could find many a fool and a coward six feet high.”

The Earl lifted his head – the only part of his frame which he could move freely, and his eyes flashed under his broad brows. Thoroughly manly brows they were, wherein any acute observer might trace that clear sound sense, active energy, and indomitable perseverance, which make the real man, and lacking which the “brawest” young fellow alive is a mere body – an animal wanting the soul. (104)

Despite the confidence of his words, he remains sensitive about how he is perceived by others. When Helen expresses surprise that he will accompany her son when he leaves home to attend university, he misunderstands her response:

“You think I shall be useless? that it is a man and not such a creature as I, who ought to take charge of your boy?”

The earl spoke with that deep bitterness, which sometimes, though very, very rarely, he betrayed. (279)

In scenes such as this, Craik avoids making the earl so saintly that the purpose of the novel is obscured. Her attitude towards the worth of the disabled reflects her

Christian faith, but the novel is not overly pious in tone. Although the earl is described as ‘what God willed him to be’ (71), this does not mean mute submission but a ‘determination not to sit down tamely to misery, but to strive after [...] lawful happiness’ (195). The novel suggests that suffering can develop spiritual qualities, but Craik does not underestimate the misery of pain and immobility. She avoids sentimentality and melodrama by describing little of the Earl’s feelings, suggesting that it is impossible for others to understand his ‘special solitude’ (80), or to convey ‘the awful individuality of suffering’ (923). This acknowledgement makes it clear that the Earl is not intended as a metaphorical figure. The folktale elements, however, give his story a sense of universality, making it more than just the tale of one man but conveying a message relevant to all.

Lennard J. Davis suggested, in 1997, that ‘one of the tasks for a developing consciousness of disability issues is the attempt [...] to reverse the hegemony of the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal.’¹ Writing against a culture in which representations of disability were frequently intended to arouse emotions of fear, pity or disgust, to endorse exclusion, and to accentuate otherness, Craik is a rare example of an author who did indeed aim to encourage an ‘alternative way of thinking’.

¹ Davis, p. 26.

Chapter Three

About Women

The Womanhood of Ordinary Life

As the previous chapters illustrate, Craik made a dynamic contribution to literature defining masculine identity, and wrote on political, legal and social issues generally considered outside the remit of the woman writer. It was, however, as a writer of ‘women’s novels’ that she was generally regarded in her day, as is clear from the posthumous evaluation of her work in the *Dictionary of National Biography* of 1894, where Richard Garnett summed up her contribution to literature as follows:

She was not a genius, and she does not express the ideals and aspirations of women of exceptional genius; but the tender and philanthropic, and at the same time energetic and practical womanhood of ordinary life has never had a more sufficient representative.¹

Garnett’s praise of Craik’s empathetic depictions of the lives of ‘ordinary’ women does acknowledge one of her major strengths as a writer, but the patronising tone, with its implicit comparison with George Eliot, and its suggestion that Craik confined herself to portraying an acceptably conformist view of women’s experience, underestimates her work, and indicates that, like most female authors of her day, she was assessed largely on how she wrote about her own gender. Interestingly, as Nicola Diane Thompson notes, twentieth century feminists, in their ‘recovery’ of neglected women writers, tended to appraise texts in much the same way as Victorian critics:

¹ Richard Garnett, ‘Mulock, Dinah Maria’, *Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 39 (London: Smith, Elder, 1894), pp. 280-281.

Consistently, Victorian and modern critics tend to label works by women novelists according to their apparent position on the woman question, creating such categories as domestic novels, sensation novels and New Woman novels.¹

Joseph O'Mealy also observes how

in their search for admirable female role models, feminist critics have found it difficult to engage sympathetically with the apparently conservative characters and agendas of so many novels produced by important Victorian women writers [...]; they tend to focus on works like the sensation and New Woman novels – those, above all, which lend themselves more overtly to feminist interpretations.²

Thus, as Thompson suggests, 'alongside the residual ideological limitations of nineteenth century criticism [...] the feminist movement, ironically, has itself complicated the entrance into the canon of most Victorian women novelists',³ with a judgement of being 'insufficiently subversive' being 'used implicitly as a criterion for their continuing neglect'.⁴ That is not to say that antifeminist novelists have been entirely neglected, but, as Valerie Sanders points out, 'the definition of antifeminism naturally hinges on how we perceive feminism', and their work has been used primarily to contrast with, and thus define, that of their feminist contemporaries.⁵ Finding evidence of ambiguity and contradiction has been the chief focus of most studies of their writing, and while such tensions are undoubtedly interesting and revealing of the constraints imposed upon women and women writers, the result has been that those authors who, although evidently not entirely accepting of the *status*

¹ Nicola Diane Thompson, 'Responding to the woman questions: reading non-canonical Victorian women novelists', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-23 (p.7).

² Joseph O'Mealy, Reviews of *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive*, ed. D.J.Trela (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1995), and Margaret Rubik's *The Novels of Mrs. Oliphant: a Subversive View of Traditional Themes, Writing about Women, Vol.8* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), *Victorian Studies* 39.2 (Winter 1996), 249-51, quoted in Thompson, p.12.

³ Thompson, p.15.

⁴ Thompson, p.12.

⁵ Valerie Sanders, *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-feminist Women Novelists* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p.3.

quo as regards women's role, but nevertheless deemed broadly conservative, tend to be viewed as being cautious, ambivalent, and, as suggested in the previous chapter, able to express views diverging from the patriarchal model only through clandestine means. Showalter, for example, writes, with reference to Craik, that 'women writers expected their readers to understand these covert messages, but not to betray them'.¹

The most recent studies of antifeminist novelists, in which Craik is assessed alongside Oliphant, Yonge and Linton, have challenged the over-simplistic binary categorisation, and suggest that even the most conservative of writers held some explicitly progressive views. Surprisingly, however, in these same studies, Craik's work has been misread and misquoted to construct an interpretation of her as reactionary and 'naive', with one critic remarking on her 'overt, crude and comprehensive partisanship with the dominant social and domestic ideology of her time'² and another suggesting, with reference to *John Halifax, Gentleman*, that Craik's female characters are all either 'doomed [...] silenced [...] or reviled'.³ That the critical evaluation of her work continues to suffer from those same prejudices held by the majority of her contemporary critics is made particularly clear in the 2004 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, where Mitchell ends her entry on Craik by suggesting that 'the evaluation provided by Richard Garnett in 1894 remains fitting'.⁴ John Sutherland, in *Lives of the Novelists*, also echoes the Victorian response in his comment that 'no

¹ Showalter, 'Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment', p.6.

² Lowe, p.182.

³ Mascarenhas, p.267.

⁴ Mitchell, 'Dinah Mulock Craik', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

novelist was more domestic than Miss Mulock’, despite naming *A Life for a Life* – with its pessimistic scrutiny of Victorian domesticity – as her ‘most interesting work’.¹

It is important then to consider further how Craik’s work responded to and represented relevant contemporary issues concerning women’s role and status. Her endorsement of a domestic ideal in which ‘one [the husband] is abroad, the other at home; one external, the other internal’ (*AWT*, 14), and her denunciation of the ‘blind clamour for ill-defined “rights”’ that seemed to discourage ‘duties’, has inevitably been interpreted as distinctly antifeminist.² By ‘duties’, however, Craik does not mean service to others, but ‘the duty of self-dependence’, ‘the silent practice of which will secure to them almost every right they can fairly need’ (*AWT*, 34). Although Craik does not appear to have been formally associated with any reformist organisations, her active support for many of their causes – for example that of the Society for the Promotion of Employment for Women founded by the Langham Place group in 1859 – is clearly evident in her writing.³ Far from showing ‘partisanship’ with the patriarchal establishment, it is clear that Craik consistently challenged the ‘dominant domestic and social ideologies’ of the period.

Craik started her career at a time when Sarah Stickney Ellis’s conduct books provided the popular model for middle-class women’s lives as daughters, wives and mothers,⁴ a model which was entirely at odds with Craik’s own experience of family life, and, as

¹ John Sutherland, *Lives of the Novelists, a History of Fiction in 294 Lives* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2012) pp. 150-1.

² For example, Showalter, p.20.

³ See Ellen Jordan, *The Women’s Movement and Women’s Employment in Nineteenth century Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 147-197.

⁴ See page 96.

the 1851 census revealed, for the thousands of ‘surplus’ women who would never marry. *A Woman’s Thoughts about Women*, first published as a series of twelve essays in *Chambers’s* between May and December, 1857, was a direct response to the debate about what these single women could or should do. The overriding theme running through the work is the need for women to be autonomous, a topic she returned to in several subsequent essays, including ‘About Money’ (1886), ‘Sisterhoods’ (1886), ‘Decayed Gentlewomen’ (1882), ‘What is Self-Sacrifice?’ and ‘Gather up the Fragments’ (1875)¹. A strong advocate of education and training for women, particularly in business and finance, she argues that they should be equipped with the necessary skills to be able to live independently of men if necessary. Lucidly explaining her position on marriage, she urges a radical change in attitude towards the assumption that it is a woman’s sole destiny, but at the same time decries those who refuse to acknowledge that it is natural to desire its fulfilment:

Would that, instead of educating our young girls with the notion that they are to be wives or nothing, [...] we could instil into them the principle that, above and before all, they are to be *women* – women, whose character is of their own making, and whose lot lies in their own hands. Not through any foolish independence of mankind, or adventurous misogamy: let people prate as they will, the woman was never born yet who would not cheerfully and proudly give herself and her whole destiny into a worthy hand, at the right time, and under fitting circumstances. [...] But marriage ought always to be a question not of necessity, but choice. (*AWT*, 343)

That Craik believed marriage to be the ‘natural and happiest life’ for a woman, (*AWT*, 63) at the same time as advocating independence, has been interpreted as ‘ambivalence’ by Shirley Foster.² Yet there is nothing contradictory in believing in the possibility of ‘a perfect married life’, even though ‘it is the rarest thing under the sun’

¹ Craik, ‘About Money’ (1886), ‘Sisterhoods’, (as ‘About Sisterhoods’), *Longman’s* (January 1883), both collected in *About Money and other things*; ‘Decayed Gentlewomen’, in *Plain Speaking*; ‘What is Self-Sacrifice?’ and ‘Gather up the Fragments’, both in *Sermons out of Church* (1875).

² Shirley Foster, ‘Dinah Mulock Craik: Ambivalent Romanticism’, in *Victorian Women’s Fiction: marriage, freedom and the individual* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 40-70 (p.47).

(‘For Better’, 29), and that ‘however [...] dreary and toilsome a single life may be, unhappy married life must be tenfold worse [...] an incurable regret, a torment’ (AWT, 344).

Craik’s representation of single life is, in fact, far more optimistic than ‘dreary’, and at odds with Showalter’s view that, in Craik’s fiction, ‘unmarried women were the cripples,[...] freaks in a society that had no use for them’.¹ Her implicit advocacy of self-sufficient singleness for the vast majority of women, and her fictional portraits of purposeful single women, conflict with the prevailing view that to be an ‘old maid’ implied disappointment and lack of fulfilment. Far from being ‘reverent of [...] conjugal bliss’,² as Showalter suggests, her work constantly shatters the myth of Victorian domestic concord, and, as the last chapter has indicated, her novels include more depictions of troubled marriages than of those which are happy. Josephine, in *A Brave Lady*, is one of the most convincing portraits of a desperate and disappointed wife to be found in any nineteenth-century novel, perhaps because her husband, unlike, for example, George Eliot’s Henleigh Grandcourt in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), or Anne Brontë’s Arthur Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), is not obviously malevolent or depraved, but the type of selfish, outwardly charming, man likely to be familiar to many of her readers. Deborah Wynne has noted the ‘remarkable’ similarities between that the heroines of *A Brave Lady* and Eliot’s *Middlemarch*. Both are described as being superior to other provincial women. Compared with that of ‘everyday people’, Josephine’s conversation is ‘as different as passing from Shakespeare to the daily newspaper’ (24), while Dorothea’s ‘plain garments’ (like

¹ Showalter, ‘Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment’, p.11.

² Showalter, p. 20.

Josephine's 'excessively simple' dress (26)), 'gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible [...] in a paragraph of today's newspaper'.¹ Both are compelled through a sense of duty to remain loyal to an ailing, unsatisfactory husband, and both are enthusiastic philanthropists, who become 'engrossed' (*A Brave Lady*, 334) in designing cottages for their tenants. From her 'quiet corner', the widowed Josephine uses her wealth to 'stretch invisible comforting hands half over the world' (316), while Dorothea, in her 'hidden life', contributes 'unhistoric acts' to 'the growing good of the world'. Such echoes, Wynne believes, 'certainly suggest that Eliot "borrowed" a number of details' from Craik. *A Brave Lady* was published in Macmillan's between May 1869 and April 1870, and it is known from her letters, that Eliot was reading the magazine at this time.²

Some of Craik's readers would have also recognised in their husbands, the brutal Alexander Thomson, Roderick's brother-in-law, in *Young Mrs. Jardine*. It is from men such as this that the novel urges women to escape, the heroine Silence advising Bella, to 'defy the law [...] change [her] name, earn [her] bread, [...] save [her] child and go' (*YMJ*, 283). Selina's loveless marriage to Peter Ascott, in *Mistress and Maid* (1862), again exemplifies the silent suffering, the suppressed 'angry bitterness' endured by the wives of outwardly respectable men (*Mistress*, 279). The unhappy marriage of Harold and Sara, and of Angus and Sybilla, both in *Olive*, are caused by incompatibility rather than any particular fault, with both men realising too late that a frivolous, empty-headed young woman makes an unsatisfactory wife. Even in novels

¹ Deborah Wynne, 'George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Brave Lady*', *Notes and Queries*, 51.2 (June, 2004), 160-162 (p. 160).

² Wynne, p. 161. Wynne also finds similarities between Edward Scanlan and both Rosamond Vincy (in her social aspirations) and Casaubon (in his vanity). These are interesting, but less convincing.

where the heroine marries an honourable man, marriage is problematical. For two of Craik's heroines, Dora (*A Life for a Life*), and Hannah (*Hannah*)¹, it means exile to another country to avoid social and legal restrictions, in the latter's case to be able to marry her late sister's husband, illegal in England. The novel, written in support of the Deceased Wife's Sister Act again openly challenges the church's authority to make decisions affecting women's lives.² *Agatha's Husband* (1853)³ and *Christian's Mistake* (1865)⁴ underline how financial and social pressures and the lack of any viable alternative, frequently propelled women into unhappy marriages. Both novels warn that 'regard, liking, honour, or esteem' are not enough to sustain a marriage, and that it is 'dangerous' to marry without love (*Agatha*, 58). Agatha, an heiress, is a commodity in the marriage market, prey to unattractive suitors, and the subject of gossip. It is a wish to escape from 'this friendless desolation, this contemptible, scheming, matchmaking set' (35) that prompts her into accepting a proposal from Nathaniel, a man she scarcely knows. In a marriage blighted by a lack of mutual understanding compounded by Nathaniel's unfounded jealousy, Agatha wonders "“why we torture each other so?”", and her husband rails at "“fate! That has netted us [...] to make us the misery of one another”" (226). Agatha's loss of independence is described in terms of captivity, a 'tightening pressure of that chain with which her life was now bound' (133). In describing Agatha's 'terror' (238) at realising the implications of becoming 'not two, but one flesh' (102), Craik hints at the misery of a

¹ *Hannah* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1871; references to New York, Harper: 1872); first published in *St. Paul's*, Feb-Dec 1871.

² The Marriage Act of 1835 prohibited marriage to a deceased wife's sister. Despite numerous attempts to have the prohibition lifted – the Bill was debated forty-six times in Parliament, and had eighteen successful second readings in the House of Commons – it remained illegal until the Deceased Wife's Sister Act was finally passed in 1907. See Jennifer Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), pp. 145-174.

³ *Agatha's Husband* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1853; references to London: Macmillan, 1875).

⁴ *Christian's Mistake* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1865).

physical relationship without love: “I suppose he is in his room – our room.” And all the solemn union of married life – the perpetual presence, the never parting night nor day, – rushed upon her with unutterable terror’ (238).

The heroine of *Christian’s Mistake* also feels panic and entrapment, ‘as of a free creature suddenly caught, tied, and bound’ at the irrevocability of her situation, immediately after her marriage to the dry academic, Reverend Arnold Grey (*Christian’s Mistake*, 27). Christian has agreed to be his wife, feeling ‘not love but only affection and gratitude’ (6), to escape from her life as a governess, and to have the security of a home of her own:

Suddenly she caught sight of her wedding ring. She regarded it with something very like affright; tried convulsively to pull it off; but it was rather tight; and before it had passed a finger-joint, she had recollected herself, and pressed it down again.

“It is too late now. He is so good, - everybody says so. And he is so very good to me.” (10)

Re-reading the Marriage Service in her prayer book, she shudders, ‘as if only now she began to comprehend the full force of that awful union - “one flesh,” and “till death us do part”’ (27). Her acknowledgement of Grey’s goodness combined with revulsion at the thought of being legally subject to his physical demands, prefigures the relationship between Sue Bridehead and Philotson in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895), where Sue feels ‘repugnance’ at ‘the dreadful contract’ which entails ‘the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally!’¹ Craik’s heroines are not generally depicted as being sexually repressed, however. This comes across clearly in *Hannah*, for example, where the frustration of the heroine and

¹ Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1895; London: Macmillan, 1972), p.221.

her brother-in-law – sharing a home, yet prevented from expressing their ‘passionate love’ in marriage – is palpable, with Hannah’s ‘self-control [...] sorely tested’ by ‘liv[ing] [...] in an atmosphere of mingled bliss and torment’ (*Hannah*, 212).

While the conclusion of *Agatha’s Husband* sees the resolution of the protagonists’ misunderstanding through open communication and a shared purpose – the necessity to work –, Arnold Grey, ‘the great difference in age between himself and his wife [...] beginning to tell every year more plainly’ (319), remains an unsatisfactory hero compared with the young, energetic Nathaniel. Although she becomes ‘wholly satisfied’ (320) by the love of her husband and stepchildren, Christian must ‘smother up all regrets’ (320) at not having children of her own, a lack implying, perhaps, an absence of physical passion. The reader cannot help but wonder if the novel’s title refers to Christian’s marriage rather than to her previous love for the attractive, decadent, but subsequently reformed, Sir Edwin Uniacke.

Craik’s fiction thus frequently resists the conventional association between the heroine’s wedding and her living ‘happily ever after’. There would be ‘fewer disappointed and unhappy marriages’, she writes in *Agatha’s Husband*, if ‘young lovers’ realised the importance of time and compromise, (*Agatha*, 108) and in an essay of 1875, ‘Gather up the Fragments’, she implicitly criticises the traditional ending of the romantic novel, in her observation that, ‘every young couple married believe[s] they are stepping from the church door into entire felicity’.¹ Even the most contented of Craik’s married heroines, Edna, in *The Woman’s Kingdom*, Ursula Halifax and

¹ ‘Gather up the Fragments’, in *Sermons out of Church*, (pp. 215-268), p.242.

Silence Jardine endure years of financial privation and relentless hard work, conveying the sense that the reader is being disabused of any unrealistic expectations. As suggested in Chapter Two, (page 43), a woman's domestic role is described as the equivalent of her husband's occupation, both physically and emotionally demanding. Edna, for example, proves correct in her envisioning of her future married life as 'not an easy one'. Like Ursula and Silence, she does not expect to obtain 'ease, and luxury, and position, and all the benefits which "a good marriage" is supposed to confer', but is prepared for married life to 'exact unlimited patience, self-denial, courage, strength'. In return, she will have the satisfaction of being treated as an equal, not as 'a man's toy and ornament' (*The Woman's Kingdom*, 165). In contrast, although her sister Letty's mercenary marriage fulfils her dream of 'hav[ing] nothing to do all day long, and everything pretty about one' (167), she finds that, without love, her life is deeply unsatisfying.

Although motherhood is presented as one of the greatest joys of marriage, Craik also underlines the physical danger of childbirth, through which both Edna and Silence nearly lose their lives, and, through Edna, and Susannah, in *King Arthur, not a love story* (1886),¹ the grief of losing a newborn child. That children bring emotional pain as well as pleasure, is conveyed in the rift between Edwin and Guy Halifax, the latter's estrangement, and the blindness and early death of Muriel. In *Olive and Hannah*, the role of stepmother is fulfilling, but Christian's experience conveys the difficulties of assuming the maternal role with older children. In *King Arthur*, Craik argues the case for legal adoption, a subject about which she had personal experience, having brought up an abandoned baby as her daughter, Dorothy. The novel describes how the bond

¹ *King Arthur – not a love story* (London: Macmillan, 1886).

between adoptive mother and child can be stronger than the ‘natural’ one, yet, largely due to the stigma of illegitimacy and fears of hereditary ‘taint’, it was not recognised in law, as Garnett’s obituary indicates in its discounting of eighteen years of devoted motherhood in the statement that Craik ‘had no children’.¹ Craik’s extension of the possibility of motherhood beyond the biological, suggests that single women can also fulfil their maternal instinct. In *A Life for a Life* and *Mistress and Maid*, an unmarried older sister takes on the mother’s role, while in *Olive, Agatha’s Husband*, and *Mistress and Maid*, Flora Rothesay, Ann Valery and Miss Balquidder respectively, become trusted mentors of younger women. Through Flora, Craik suggests an alternative all-female familial mode of living, whilst all three of these influential women of independent means reflect her view that ‘no position [is] more happy, more useful’ since it has ‘all the advantages of the matronly position, and almost none of its drawbacks’.² Other female households – that of mother and daughter in *Olive* and *My Mother and I: a girls’ love story* (1874)³, the Leaf sisters and their servant Elizabeth in *Mistress and Maid*, and Josephine and her maid Bridget in *A Brave Lady* – are all portrayed positively, with the close bond between mistress and servant in the latter two novels providing mutual support and generating domestic harmony. For those women of ‘limited income and equally limited capacity’, unable to cope alone, Craik considers that Anglican Sisterhoods, offering useful secular work – usually teaching or nursing – and companionship ‘would have saved many a woman from the lunatic asylum’.⁴ It is through scenarios and observations such as these that Craik redistributes the balance of fulfilment between the married and unmarried, suggesting that women do not become

¹ Garnett, p.281. Adoption was not recognised in English law until 1926. See Jenny Keating, *A Child for Keeps: the History of Adoption in England, 1918-45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

² Craik, ‘On Sisterhoods’, *Longmans* (January, 1883); collected in *About Money* (1886), pp. 130-156, p. 143.

³ *My Mother and I: a girl’s love-story* (London: W. Isbister, 1874; New York: Harper, 1874). First published in *Good Words*, Jan-July 1874.

⁴ Craik, ‘On Sisterhoods’, p.148. Craik, condemns, however, the futility of Roman Catholic convent life.

‘wives, or nothing, [...] with an acknowledged position and duties, or with no position and duties at all’ (*AWT*, 344), but that ‘happiness is [...] a much more equally spread thing than [is] supposed’ (*Gather up the Fragments*’, 242). Like their male counterparts, Craik’s heroines are not defined solely by their romantic relationships but through their other connections, their capacity for work, their courage and self-reliance, and their willingness to challenge the conventions and restrictions limiting their lives.

The Want of Something To Do

In *A Woman’s Thoughts*, Craik had condemned the way that girls were conditioned to consider ‘lovely uselessness [...] and delicious helplessness’ as desirable qualities rather than as symptoms of a wasted existence (*AWT*, 3). Most of her heroines are self-supporting before they marry, and those few who do not need to earn their own living are not portrayed as being fortunate, but as leading restricted and futile lives within their more comfortable surroundings. Katherine, in *The Ogilvies*, spends her time reading novels and poetry, and her lack of experience of the real world has disastrous consequences, leading her to mistake her romantic delusion for reciprocated love. The heiress Agatha is described as suffering from the ‘misfortune’ of ‘having nothing to do’ (*Agatha*, 13), and, after her marriage, is ‘thirsting for some opportunity [...] of redeeming the long waste of years and unemployed fortune’ (219). Craik’s fullest exploration of the frustrations of the single young woman who does not ‘think the grand climax of existence is “society”’ comes through Dora, in *A Life for a Life* (*A Life*, 7). Wanting more from life than the household and parish duties which occupy her elder sister, or the social engagements and flirtations which entertain the younger,

Dora does not fit into either model of femininity, instead yearning for a purpose, a fulfilment of the dreams she had as a girl, a time she recalls wistfully in her journal:

Theodora Johnson aged fifteen. What a different creature that was [...], running wild over the moors, or hiding itself in the garden with a book; or curling up in a corner of the attic [...] with a pencil and the back of a letter, writing its silly poetry. Thinking, planning, dreaming, looking forward to such a wonderful, impossible life; quite satisfied of itself and all it was to do therein, since

The world was all before it where to choose:
Reason its guard, and Providence its guide

And what has it done? Nothing. (32)

Dora's use of the gender-neutral pronoun implies her recognition that it is her status as a woman which has barred her from the activities and aspirations which were central to her being as a child. The glimpses of Dora's imaginative and free-spirited girlhood evoke other contemporary heroines – Emily Brontë's Catherine Earnshaw (in *Wuthering Heights* 1847), in her affinity with her native moorland, and Eliot's Maggie Tulliver (in *The Mill on the Floss*, 1860), in her love of reading, and solitary retreats to the attic. However, the eventual satisfaction of her dreams allies Dora more closely with heroines of American women writers, particularly Jo March, in L. M. Alcott's *Little Women* (1868). Unlike Brontë's and Eliot's heroines, Dora suggests that women can defy convention and succeed, without compromising their integrity. Craik condemned Eliot's decision to write a tragic death for Maggie, believing that, although artistically the novel is 'perfect' (199) and the ending 'magnificent' (203), its 'preach[ing] of 'the perilous [...] doctrine of overpowering circumstances' fails to encourage 'the hundreds of clever girls, born of uncongenial parents, hemmed in with unsympathising kindred [...] [who] must fight their way [...] alone and unaided' .

And thank heaven, hundreds of them do, and live to hold out a helping hand afterward to thousands more [...]. Will it influence for good any other lives – this passionately drawn picture of temptation never conquered, [...] of sorrows which teach [...] only bitterness. ('To Novelists', 202)

Craik's rewriting of the quotation from *Paradise Lost* in the passage quoted above, subtly underlines how her novel differs from Eliot's in suggesting that women can control their own destiny. In Milton's epic, the lines come after Adam and Eve have been cast out of paradise as a result of Eve succumbing to the wiles of the serpent:

The World was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.¹

The poem reinforces the myth that Woman was responsible for the fall of humankind, and that women are thus inherently more corruptible than men, and in need of male protection and authority. Craik's substitution of the phrase 'reason its guard' for 'their place of rest', suggests that women are equally capable of applying and being governed by rationality, and thus able to participate actively in the world. The reference to *Paradise Lost* is also significant to the novel's commentary on the hypocritical attitude towards the 'fallen' woman, Craik rewriting the myth by suggesting that women are strengthened, rather than tainted, by knowledge of good and evil. Although the worldly Francis Charteris's seduction of the naive Lydia makes him the more guilty party, it is Lydia who, like Eve, bears the shame. Dora is admonished by Francis when, overhearing him spread a false rumour that Max has a mistress, she demands that he either backs up or retracts his claim. Francis, who has a fiancée, a mistress and an illegitimate child, declares that these are 'extraordinary questions' for a woman to ask, and that 'young ladies ought to know nothing about such things' (213). Dora deplores the false propriety which makes a woman's

¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1674), Book X11, 646-7.

awareness of sexual immorality more shocking than the immorality itself, and which prevents women from speaking out:

Perhaps she should have crept blushing away, or pretended not to have heard a syllable of these men's talk. But, girl as she was, she scorned to be such a hypocrite – such a coward. What! Sit still to hear a friend sneered at and his character impeached [...] because she happened to be a woman! I should despise the womanhood that skulked behind such rags of miscalled modesty as these. (212)

A reviewer in the *Christian Remembrancer* shared Francis's disapproval of Dora's character, complaining that she 'has a way of asking questions which we can hardly sanction'.¹ Dora does indeed constantly question contemporary interpretations of morality, and her strong and controversial opinions on topics generally considered inappropriate for women, make her an unusual heroine for the period. She reflects on her unconventional curiosity, after a conversation she has had with Max about capital punishment. Although it is 'the one question of our time' (168), it is a 'strange' subject for a woman to discuss: 'my sisters might have been shocked at it; and at my freedom in asking and giving opinions' (169). This curtailment of voice makes her feel 'utterly powerless – a mere iota in a house [...] [her] opinion [...] not a straw's weight with anyone' (60). It is Max's willingness to 'listen, answer, explain', to converse on matters that she would 'never dream of discussing' with her father or sisters (166), that makes him attractive to her. Before meeting Max, Dora's journal has been her only means of self-expression, a 'safety-valve' (90) which, she explains, 'I can't help writing [...] – it relieves my mind'. In it she can 'spurt out [her] wrath in the blackest of ink with the boldest of pens' (5). Her masculine handwriting and her spending of money intended for a new bonnet on her 'capital' journal, suggest a wish to assert herself in opposition to the expectations of society regarding feminine conduct. The journal is thus not only

¹ Review of *A Life for a Life*, *The Christian Remembrancer*, Volumes 37-38 (October 1859), 305-321 (p.314).

a useful narrative device, but conveys the heroine's intellectual vitality, as well as its repression. A sense of constraint and necessary secrecy is implied in her 'locking herself' in her room to write, and in her satisfaction that her journal has a 'first-rate lock and key' (5).

The securing of door and journal also suggests a lack of closeness between family members, undermining the contemporary idealisation of domesticity. Dora reveals the truth behind the 'snug' and 'pleasant' façade of 'English domestic life' (73) – the cold, domineering father, the lack of affection and intimacy between the three sisters, and the crushing boredom of her own existence:

I wonder, do sisters ever love one another [...] out of voluntary sympathy and affection? Do families ever live in open-hearted union [...] closer than acquaintance, friendship or any tie in the world, except marriage? That is, it ought to be. Perhaps it may so happen once in a century, as true love does, or there would not be so much romancing about it. (62)

At the end of the novel, as she embarks for Canada with Max, Dora rejects the definition of 'home' as separate spheres within a confining domestic space, rewriting it as a shared set of values nurturing freedom of action and expression: 'Together, everywhere was Home' (396).

Dora's deep discontent with the emptiness of her life is compounded by an antipathy towards marriage, at odds with the contemporary view that it is woman's natural destiny. Marriage, she believes must be 'an awful thing [...] even viewed as mere companionship':

Putting aside love, honour, obedience, and all that sort of thing, to undertake the burden of any one person's constant presence and conversation for the term of one's natural life! The idea is frightful! (85)

In Max, however, she finds someone who is not only appealing as a lover, but whose ideals she can respect and share as an equal, a circumstance which the *Christian Remembrancer* reviewer found disturbing and unromantic:

To this writer, the thought of being sought, persuaded, wooed [...] is almost repugnant. Mind should rather meet with mind on equal terms. The reason of each must be likewise at work; the attraction in each must be mutual and simultaneous [...]; even the decisive question – to speak coarsely, the *offer* itself – must be a sort of joint affair.¹

Dora's refusal to comply with her father's edict not to marry Max, encouraged 'the defiance of all law, custom and authority',² influencing 'young readers [to] turn to any self-willed purpose'.³ The review indicates how deeply entrenched were contemporary attitudes regarding women's subservience, and it is significant that, in a Christian periodical, no mention is made of the novel's exposure of masculine hypocrisy concerning the double standard.⁴

The equality between Dora and Max is emphasised in the dual narrative construction – 'Her Story' and 'His Story' – which gives parity to the thoughts and opinions of each writer, expressed in both journal and letters. Catherine Delafield has suggested that Max's, albeit unfulfilled, request, that Dora should tie up her journal with their letters, and throw them into the sea, as they start their voyage to Canada, 'assume[s] that the diary is a lower form of literature and a male order for its destruction, however loving, is to be obeyed'.⁵ Any such impulse to destroy the journal would reflect his wish to

¹ Review, p. 308

² Review, p.310.

³ Review, p.320.

⁴ The journal was affiliated with the High Church movement.

⁵ Catherine Delafield, *Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) pp. 59-80 (p.75).

start a new life, but Dora immediately qualifies the remark, ‘forget[ting] [whether] he threatened me or I him, [...] but I doubt if we shall ever have courage to do it. It would feel something like dropping a little child into this “wild and wandering grave” (383). Craik here indicates mutual understanding and shared decision-making, as well as underlining the importance of the journal as a record of personal growth. The first person narrative, both in her journal, and in her letters to Max, makes Dora’s responses powerful and provocative, conveying the sense of an intelligent, enquiring mind, with the capacity to accomplish much in the world, unjustly and irrationally repressed by social conventions:

I am not, and never pretend to be, a humble person. I feel there is that in me which is worth something, but a return for which I have never yet received. Give me its fair equivalent, its full and honest price, and oh, if I could expend every mite, how boundlessly rich I should grow. (90)

Her assertion of ‘worth’ challenges the ideal of self-effacement and self-sacrifice expected of women, but contrasts with her growing realisation that she is condemned to a ‘wretchedly idle life’ (105), which ‘lies before [her] [...] bleak, barren, and monotonous’ (121). Her illness, precipitated by fever, but prolonged by such a sense of purposelessness –“I have no work to do” – (238) that she does not wish to recover, is a metaphor for women’s wasted potential, that ‘want of something to do’ described in *A Woman’s Thoughts* as ‘the chief canker at the root of women’s lives’ (AWT, 3). The illness is not intended to signify an irrational, ‘nervous’ state, or bring about a subjugation of spirit, as it might have done in the novels of Charlotte Yonge for example.¹ As Max brings her ‘out of the narrow sickroom world [...] toward the current of outward life – his own active life, with its large aims, duties and cares’,

¹ The heroine of Yonge’s *The Young Step-Mother* (1889) is advised that ‘docility in illness may be self-resignation into higher Hands’. See Gavin Budge, *Charlotte M. Yonge: Religion, Feminism and Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 256-7.

Dora, quite reasonably, longs for a fulfilling occupation ‘in some way resembling [...] his own’ (236).

Dora’s illness is the turning point of the novel, prompting Max to declare his feelings and to disclose his secret, revelations that compel Dora to find her voice in defying her father. The second half of the novel charts her transformation from despair to resolve, her separation from Max allowing the author to focus on her development into an independent, decisive woman, an outcome as important to the novel as the resolution of the marriage plot. Before meeting Max, Dora’s longing to be useful is nebulous, ‘belonging only to dreams’, but through him, she has learned of the ‘reality’ of ‘the struggling, suffering, sinning world’ (176), in which she can make a practical contribution to the alleviation of poverty and inequality. She had rejected the parish work considered suitable for a clergyman’s daughter, finding the idea of teaching ‘perfectly intolerable’, and ‘district visiting – poking about in poor people’s houses’ (106) – patronising and intrusive. Through her rescue of Lydia, however, she discovers that she can contribute towards ‘large aims’ (236) within her own community. Dora’s intervention goes beyond the provision of temporary alleviation, however. Her response to Lydia’s predicament scrutinises the question of sexual morality in its wider context, challenging the authority of the church, and defying the rules of propriety. Her arrangement for Lydia to teach women prisoners is, like her marriage to Max, a public statement of her personal ideology. Her enthusiasm for Max’s schemes is also indicative of a radical impulse for reform, a belief that ‘while there is so much misery and sin in the world, [...] a woman has hardly any right [...] to sit still and dream’ (120). Dora’s words echo *A Woman’s Thoughts*, where Craik urges her readers to go ‘into the world which perhaps never at any time so much needed the help of us

women' (AWT, 15). Dora's letters to Max when he is working as a prison doctor – very different from the typical love-letter – suggest that she will be fully involved in her husband's professional and humanitarian aims in Canada:

Tell me more about those poor prisoners, in whom you take so strong an interest [...] and give me a clearer notion of [...] your practice and schemes, your gratis patients, dispensaries and so on. Also, Augustus said you were employed in drawing up reports and statistics about reformatories, and on the general question now so much discussed: What is to be done with our criminal classes? How busy you must be! Can I not help you? Send me your MSS to copy. Give me some work to do. (292)

That her input will go much further than copying manuscripts is indicated by her assertive handling of Lydia's predicament and by her gaining parity of authority with Max. It is Dora who arranges the marriage, and who makes the decision that they cannot remain in England. All women should lead 'active, intelligent, industrious lives', Craik decreed in *A Woman's Thoughts* (17), and in the character of Dora, she conveys the frustration of thwarted potential and the benefits of allowing it to flourish, not only for the individual but for the wider society. The exodus of Max and Dora, echoing the earlier reference to *Paradise Lost*, suggests, perhaps, that English society is too entrenched in out-dated beliefs to allow a woman with Dora's curiosity and intellect to flourish.

A Woman of Business

While Craik argued for women's right to work, she was, of course, well aware of the difficulties faced by those who, like herself, had no choice but to earn their own living. Her novel of 1862, *Mistress and Maid: a Household Story*,¹ is a convincing depiction

¹ *Mistress and Maid* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862; references to Iowa: First World Library reprint of unspecified edition: 2005). First published in *Good Words*, Jan-Dec 1862.

of the life of a single working woman in London, its authenticity of detail, and evocative representation of the innermost ‘needs and desires’ of the central character suggesting that it was based on her own experience (*Mistress and Maid*, 149). The novel is important in the way it conveys to women the possibility of an alternative way of living, independent of men, self-reliant, yet within a supportive network of other women who recognise that their shared experience is more important than social rank. The novel is particularly revealing of how women’s work was inextricably bound up with notions of class, Craik realising that the stigma of being seen to do work associated with a lower class, as well as fear of impropriety, were significant restricting factors for middle-class women. Read in the context of contemporary writing, it is clear that the author deliberately addresses and dismisses the arguments commonly used to discourage such women from seeking paid work, as well as making clear that, for many, it was not a choice.

In *A Woman’s Thoughts*, Craik had criticised the way girls were brought up to be idle, while their brothers ‘have each had it knocked into him from school-days that he is to do something, to be somebody’ (AWT,4). *Mistress and Maid* probes one of the major flaws in this encouragement of female ‘helplessness’ (AWT, 5) – the problem of what happened to such women if their male provider ceased, for whatever reason, to provide. This was a topic that Craik returned to throughout her career and which those promoting the separate spheres ideology chose to ignore.¹ Hilary Leaf and her two older sisters are left with an income too small to live on after the death of their father and older brother, both profligates. As the sole surviving male, their nephew Ascott is

¹ See, for example, ‘Decayed Gentlewomen’, and ‘About Money’.

deemed by social convention to be the most important member of the family despite his youth and the selfish and improvident character inherited from his male relatives. While his aunts mend their shabby clothes and go without food in order to save the best for him, he contributes nothing, wasting an allowance from his godfather on fashionable dress and entertainments. Far from being the 'protector' of the family, it is Ascott's decadence that threatens the household's security and reputation, bringing the debt-collector and policeman to the door. 'Yet he was ostensibly the head, hope and stay of the family. Alas! Many a family has to submit to, and smile under, an equally melancholy and fatal sham' (*Mistress*, 193).

The assumption that men are more suited to being the head of the family by virtue of their gender alone is thus ridiculed, but, in the sisters' 'pathetic [...] idealisation' of their nephew, 'who, everybody else saw clearly enough, thought more of his own noble self than of all his aunts put together' (34), there is a recognition of how women encourage such arrogance. It is tempting to connect the portrayal of Ascott, loved by his aunts but causing them distress and financial hardship, with the relationship Craik had with her brother Ben at the time the novel was written. Margaret Oliphant's appraisal of the situation is very like Craik's criticism of the sisters' deference to Ascott. Ben, Oliphant noted, 'appeared and disappeared, always much talked of, tenderly welcomed, giving her anxieties much grudged and objected to by her friends, but never by herself'.¹ However, although her brother's returns home between various, largely unsuccessful, ventures, and his increasing mental instability, caused Craik

¹ Margaret Oliphant, 'Mrs. Craik', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 57 (1887), p.82.

much concern, and, in a letter of 1859 she ‘scold[s]’ him for wasting money,¹ it is clear from other correspondence that the relationship was mutually supportive, both emotionally and financially, and that Ben, evidently a morally upright and conscientious man who worked hard to establish himself in a profession, was nothing like the self-indulgent Ascott Leaf.²

One of the major challenges facing women, Craik thus suggests, is to learn to value their own personal development and well-being as highly as that of their male relatives.³ Essential to this, is to provide girls with an education comparable to that of their brothers. Hilary, only two years older than her nephew, has shared and excelled in his lessons in classics and mathematics, Craik challenging the common belief that to study such subjects at a higher level was unfeminine and too taxing for the female brain.⁴ While Ascott’s modest ability and distaste for study are sufficient qualifications for him to train for a career in medicine, Hilary’s intelligence and passion for knowledge are frustrated by the limitations of having to ‘wast[e] her life in teaching small children’ when ‘she would have liked to be learning, learning – every day growing wiser and cleverer, and stretching out into that busy, bright, active world’ (37). She is a gifted teacher, but despite her education, is considered qualified to teach only infants, ‘Stowbury having the vague impression that the Misses Leaf, born ladies and brought up as ladies, were not competent educators except of very small children’

¹ Craik, Letter to Ben Mulock, (23rd October, 1859), Charles E. Young Research Library at University of California, Los Angeles, quoted in Bourrier, ‘Narrating Insanity’, p.215.

² See Karen Bourrier, ‘Dinah Mulock Craik and Benjamin Mulock’.

³ Craik also wrote on this topic in the essays ‘What is Self-sacrifice’; ‘Victims and Victimisers’ (*Good Words*, July, 1880), collected in *Plain Speaking* (1882); ‘Concerning Men’, and ‘For Better for Worse’.

⁴ As late as 1884, a poem in *Punch* expressed concern that women studying the subjects Hilary enjoys would be made ‘half a man’. See ‘The Woman of the Future: a Lay of the Oxford Victory’, *Punch*, May 10th 1884.

(36). The novel gives an insight into the social standing of teachers, revealing that while it was considered respectable for the ‘distressed gentlewoman’ to teach infants in her own home, or to work as a governess, there were no opportunities for middle-class women to train to teach at a higher level in a school. As Elizabeth Edwards explains, because such training was possible for working-class girls, teaching was considered a lower-class occupation:

The inability of the profession to attract women from the middle class proper until well into the twentieth century [...] was due above all else to sensitivities within the middle class. The working class status of school teaching had been firmly established with the introduction of the pupil-teacher system in 1846.¹

Thus, even a career so evidently requiring the quality of moral influence that women were supposed to possess, was not considered suitable for those of the middle class. After the sisters have moved to London, and realized that, without connections, they are unable to attract pupils, Hilary must seek work as a daily governess. However, the novel actively discourages women from following this path and proposes an alternative.

Craik realised how difficult it was for middle-class women to think of work as a satisfying outcome, when brought up to consider marriage as their ‘whole hope and aim [...] not *the* man, but any man’ (AWT, 9). Martha Vicinus observes how, in the mid-Victorian period, this limited perspective was exacerbated by the fact that ‘women themselves were isolated from each other and almost wholly lacking in positive role

¹ Elizabeth Edwards, *Women in Teacher Training Colleges 1900 -1960, A Culture of Femininity* (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 15-16.

models'.¹ In *Mistress and Maid*, Craik creates two such exemplars in Hilary and Miss Balquidder, bringing to life the creed of *A Woman's Thoughts* and drawing from her own experience at different stages of her career. The inclusion of the details of everyday life, the 'small, ridiculously small, things' (43), makes the novel convincing as a guide to ordinary women. Craik preempts criticism by acknowledging that some readers may think the novel's 'treating of [...] common people' 'unideal' and 'uninteresting', but her aim, she explains, is 'not to excite the compassion of the rich towards them but to show them their own dignity' (188).

Although Hilary eventually marries, the novel is concerned with her years as a single woman participating in the 'male' business world, taking on a job which would have been deemed unsuitable in terms of both gender and class, and dealing with the challenges of living and working in the city after having grown up in a small rural town. The novel is set earlier than its publication date, and precisely dated, with the sisters moving to London just after the coronation of Queen Victoria (1838). Setting their move at the start of this new era underlines the contrast between a simpler pre-industrial age, where older, unmarried women had a respected place within their community, and the 'strange desert' (110) of the modern metropolis, in which their position was less sheltered and often redundant. The first part of the novel has much in common with Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851-3) in its sense of imminent, unsettling social change, its provincial location 'where everybody [...] knows who or what we are' (11), and in its focus on the everyday concerns of three unmarried sisters and their servant. Both Miss Matty and Hilary come to earn their living by keeping a shop, but while

¹ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985), pp.10-45 (p.13).

Miss Matty can remain in the haven of Cranford, Hilary must confront the starker realities of urban life to support herself and her siblings, just as Craik herself had done. The lodgings where she was living in the mid-1840s, in an ‘obscure’ street off Tottenham Court Road,¹ perhaps provided the model for the Leaf sisters’ dismal accommodation in an unfashionable part of London near St. Pancras:

No. 15 was on the shady side of the street – cheap lodgings always are; and no one who has not lived in the like lodgings – not a house – can imagine what it is to inhabit perpetually one room where the sunshine just peeps in for an hour a day, and vanishes by eleven a.m.; leaving behind in winter a chill dampness, and in summer a heavy, dusty atmosphere, that weighs like lead on the spirits in spite of one’s self. (117)

Hilary’s search for employment as a daily governess, going unchaperoned through London streets in answer to advertisements, also reflects how Craik herself must have frequently made such solitary walks to editors’ offices, offering her poems, stories and articles for publication, as she started to establish a career. The woman-only household of Hilary and her sisters, disrupted, until his eventual disappearance, by Ascott’s intermittent visits, reflects Craik’s sharing of lodgings with Frances Martin after her surviving brother left home. This was an unusual arrangement for the time, as a contemporary noted, describing the two women as ‘handsome young girls, living in lodgings by themselves, writing books and going about in society in the most independent manner with their latch-key. Such a phenomenon was rare, perhaps unexampled in those days’.²

¹ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 8.

² Footnote to letter from Catherine to Emma Shaen, January 15th, 1851, in *Memorials of Two Sisters, Susanna and Catherine Winkworth*, ed. Margaret Shaen (London, 1908), p.64.

Deborah Epstein Nord also suggests that it was uncommon for young women to live independently, particularly in a city:

It was a later generation of middle-class women born in the 1850s and early 1860s [...] [who] attempted to live outside the sphere of family, but chose not to enter into the alternative domestic structures created by like-minded women. [...] The city also represented the antithesis of those private and protected spaces that middle-class women had traditionally occupied. The metropolis offered anonymity, community [...] but it also proved a difficult and threatening place to be a woman alone.¹

Craik undermines the concept of the ideal domestic environment requiring a male provider, by suggesting that the female household can offer a more secure, pleasant atmosphere than one threatened by the failings of an unstable man. However, in her description of Selina's hysterical temper, which 'disturb[s] the current of household peace' (24), she does not pretend that women can always coexist harmoniously. After Selina's marriage and Ascott's disappearance, Hilary and Johanna, living 'above the shop' with the two female shop assistants, can enjoy 'that best blessing – peace at home' (260). A similar description of the pleasures of independence is given in *The Woman's Kingdom*, where Edna, about to be married, feels 'a tender regret for the peaceful, maidenly, solitary days left behind'. She and Letty, like the Leaf sisters, have been 'teaching tradesmen's daughters' in their home (*The Woman's Kingdom*, 86), and Edna takes pride in the knowledge that 'every atom of furniture had been bought with their own money' (*The Woman's Kingdom*, 135). Craik is realistic about the precariousness of the life of the working woman, however; both Edna and Hilary are frequently anxious about lack of money. After Letty's illness has necessitated the temporary closure of their school, Edna, trying and failing to balance her weekly accounts, is struck by a 'morbid dread of the future [...], a bitter sense of helplessness

¹ Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1995), pp.181-2.

and forlornness which all working-women have at times, [...] and [it] made her think with a strange momentary envy of the women who did not work, who had brothers and fathers to work for them' (*The Woman's Kingdom*, 27). Hilary is similarly 'aghast' at the realization that there is no money left to pay the next week's rent (*Mistress*, 142). Despite her desperate need to earn a living, however, she hesitates in accepting Miss Balquidder's offer of a position as book-keeper and manager of one of her shops, thus revealing how hampered middle-class women were by notions of what was considered proper employment for their station:

Her bringing up had been strictly among the professional class; and in the provinces sharper than even in London is drawn the line between the richest tradesman who "keeps a shop", and the poorest lawyer, doctor or clergyman who ever starved in decent gentility. (151)

She is anxious about what Robert Lyon will think about her working in an occupation that is not only 'in trade' but also exposes her to the public gaze. Even her teaching, she recalls, 'sometimes [...] had seemed to vex and annoy him':

But being a governess was an accredited and customary mode of a young lady's earning her livelihood. This was different. If he should think it too public, too unfeminine: he had such a horror of a woman's being anything but a woman, as strong and brave as she could, but in a womanly way; doing anything, however painful, that she was obliged to do, but never out of choice or bravado, or the excitement of stepping out of her own sphere into man's. Would Robert Lyon think less of her [...] because she had to earn to take care of herself, to protect herself, and to act in so many ways for herself, contrary to the natural and right order of things? That old order – God forbid it should ever change! – which ordained that the women should be "keepers at home"; happy rulers of that happy little world, which seemed as far off as the next world from this poor Hilary. (155)

The passage is typical of the way Craik subtly undermines the conservative dogma her words appear to support. The 'old order', as Craik reiterates throughout her writing, was not available to all women and, in any case, only rarely satisfying. Generations of

women in the Leaf family, living with the ‘hereditary evil’ (218) of the male line, have carried the burden of keeping up the sham of a ‘happy little world’. Robert’s disapproval of women stepping outside their allotted sphere reflects the hypocrisy of the male viewpoint, acknowledging that women need strength and bravery to survive in a patriarchal society, but can only exhibit such qualities ‘in a womanly way’ that does not challenge the conventions that harm them. That they may be ‘obliged’ to enter a man’s sphere out of necessity suggests a failure in the social order that is supposed to protect them. Though cautioning against seeking ‘excitement’, the words convey the sense of ‘exhilaration’ Hilary feels when first experiencing the ‘stirring, active, incessantly moving life’ of a crowded London street (108).

The novel’s emphasis on Hilary’s continuing virtue and attractive, ‘womanly’ appearance is intended to challenge the prevailing view that women would become sullied and defeminised by contact with the world of work. As the following passage emphasizes, Hilary remains unscathed by an occupation that contravenes both class and gender boundaries, and which even the maidservant Elizabeth at first considers inappropriate. As well as providing an exemplary role model to the two young women shop assistants of whom she is in charge, Hilary brings qualities considered feminine – order, calm and diligence – into the workplace:

Entering [the shop], for there was no private door, she saw, in the far corner above the curtained desk, the pretty curls of her dear Miss Hilary. Elizabeth had long known that her mistress “kept a shop”, and with the notions of gentility which are just as rife in her class as in any other, had mourned bitterly over this fact. But when she saw how fresh and well the young lady looked, how busily and cheerfully she seemed to work with her great books before her, and with what a composed grace and dignity she came forward when asked for, Elizabeth secretly confessed that not even keeping a shop had made or could make the smallest difference to Miss Hilary. (271)

More challenging still to her reputation, Hilary must walk through insalubrious areas of the city to secure Ascott's release from gaol, but she 'did not shrink from traversing London streets alone at seemly and unseemly hours; from going into sponging houses and debtor's prisons' (326). The frequent references to Hilary's walking are significant. Although working-class women walked to and from their place of employment, for a middle-class woman to walk alone transgressed the bounds of propriety, and to do so at night placed her in danger of being mistaken for a prostitute. As Epstein Nord notes, 'women alone on the street in the mid nineteenth-century were considered to be [...] "either endangered or dangerous"'.¹ Virginia Woolf's Pargiter sisters, in a novel set in the 1880s, 'could not possibly go for a walk alone [...]. To be seen alone in Piccadilly was equivalent to walking up Abercorn Terrace in a dressing gown carrying a bath sponge'.² Hilary's going 'cheerily, and fearlessly, up one strange street and down another' (189), signifies not only independence and freedom, but a disregard of false propriety and an adherence to her own standards of virtue.

Hilary's mentor, the wealthy businesswoman Miss Balquidder, who has risen from humble shop girl to owner of numerous shops and warehouses, is another important role model. In essence a female John Halifax, she is intended to convey to women readers the potential, and respectability, of a business career. Moreover, her philanthropic schemes are an example for those who have become successful in the same and other areas of employment. Her 'pet project' is 'to induce educated women to quit the genteel starvation of governesships for some good trade' (152). However,

¹ Deborah Epstein Nord, p. 3, quoting from Mary Ryan, *Women in Public Places: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1990), p.86.

² Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters: the novel-essay portion of The Years* (1932) ed. Mitchell Alexander Leaska (London: Hogarth, 1977), p. 37, quoted in Epstein Nord, p. 4.

her mission to answer ‘the one cry – familiar to how many thousands [...] of helpless young women – “I want work!”’ (149), is hampered by their lack of basic education. Hilary is unusual, Miss Balquidder tells her, in having the necessary skills for bookkeeping. Vicinus confirms that limited education restricted employment options for ‘women who [...] often found themselves poorly equipped to do so and without the necessary foundation to learn new skills. An early group of feminists found that they had to teach ladies elementary arithmetic before they could apply for jobs as shop clerks’.¹ In ‘About Money’, Craik argues that, regardless of any other higher education a girl might have, ‘it is necessary that she should be a woman of business’ (‘About Money, 7).

As a female businesswoman and entrepreneur, Miss Balquidder is an unusual character for a novel of this period. It was not unheard of for women to manage a business, as the censuses of 1851 and 1861 confirm,² but, as Nicola Phillips observes, the domestic ideology of the Victorian period resulted in such women rarely being mentioned in contemporary discourses.³ Ann Valery, in *Agatha’s Husband*, is another of Craik’s single female characters who successfully undertakes work usually done by a man. As manager of her own large estate, a prudent and ethical investor in various enterprises, and a fair employer improving working and living conditions, Ann is a respected adviser to the men in the Harper family, and an example to Agatha of what women can achieve whilst retaining their femininity: “I have had a great deal to do always, and in all my labour was there profit. It comforted me, and helped me to comfort others” (Agatha, 385). However, her inherited wealth, and her heartbroken idealisation of her

¹ Vicinus, p. 22.

² Nicola Phillips, *Women in Business 1700-1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), pp. 230-262.

³ Phillips, p. 230.

lost love, which contributes to her early death, makes her a less convincing and effective role model than Hilary's mentor.

Miss Balquidder shares Ann Valery's preference for schemes providing work rather than financial aid. "I don't believe in charity", she tells Hilary (153), choosing instead to invest her money in shops where she can employ women, with the more successful ventures subsidizing those less so, and overall making a small profit. As in *John Halifax*, Craik demonstrates that economic individualism and altruism are not mutually exclusive, and profit can benefit the poor. Miss Balquidder's views on charity are Craik's own. In an essay of 1887, 'Work for Idle Hands', she praises a scheme set up by a Mrs. Ernest Hart to help poor Irish women weavers, explaining that 'her aim was not that of giving charity, but of helping people to help themselves so as to have no need of charity' (129).¹ Successful though she is, and having 'a consciousness of her own capabilities as a woman of business, and a pleasure at her own deserved success' (150), Miss Balquidder feels the need to tell Hilary that she is "not a lady [...], that is, not an educated gentlewoman like you" (149). The novel stresses Miss Balquidder's respectability, however, her lack of ostentation marking her as a 'gentlewoman' despite her birth. Hilary and her mentor recognize the 'common womanhood of both [...], never supposing for an instant that mere money or position could make any difference between them' (149). This sense of sisterhood across classes is evident throughout the novel. Craik herself donated the proceeds from the sale of *Bread upon the Waters: a governess's life* (1852) to the Governesses'

¹ Craik, 'Work for Idle Hands', *Cornhill Magazine*, July 1887, collected in *Concerning Men and Other Papers*, pp. 120-138.

Benevolent Institution,¹ and her annual £60 a year Civil List Pension, awarded in 1864 for her services to literature, was given to young female writers trying to establish a career. As Mitchell observes, ‘she served as mentor and pathbreaker for other ambitious young women; she was always full of enthusiasm for their projects and designing schemes to promote them’.² She also supported various organisations giving practical help to other working women including shop girls, as her essay ‘A House of Rest’ (1886) reveals.³

Craik’s contemporaries frequently stressed her service to others as a way of countering any ‘suspicion of unwomanliness’ arising from her successful career.⁴ In the same way, Craik emphasizes Miss Balquidder’s womanliness. Though unmarried, her practical assistance to the younger generation of women, whom, she insists, she does not want ‘turned into men’ (154), brings a sense of maternal fulfillment – “‘I suppose I was not meant to be a wife: I am quite certain I was meant to be a mother’” (152). Craik thus undermines the argument that the world of commerce is antipathetic to woman’s true nature, since maternal qualities can be channelled into supporting workers and improving their conditions. Ann Valery’s single state has enabled her to do more good than if she had had ‘a husband and four children. It is a blessing to society in general that [she] never married’ (*Agatha*, 219). Similarly, Miss Balquidder represents the single woman’s ‘well-spring of maternal passion’; a ‘stream, which might otherwise have blessed one child or one family’ can instead ‘flow out wide and far, blessing wherever it goes’ (240). Despite her motherly involvement with other

¹ Mitchell, p.18.

² Mitchell, p.12.

³ Craik, ‘A House of Rest’, *Murray’s Magazine*, June 1886, collected in *Concerning Men*, pp. 51-84.

⁴ Mitchell p.17.

women, however, Miss Balquidder is sometimes ‘lonely’ (240). While John Halifax’s business success can be combined with, even enhanced by, marriage and family, and can confer social status and a place in public life, it is implied that this is not the case for women.

It is significant that Miss Balquidder has made her fortune in the fashion industry yet is a compassionate and just employer, since the trade was well known to be exploitative of female workers, particularly seamstresses and milliners.¹ Craik’s ‘A House of Rest’ confirms that conditions had not improved substantially by 1886. She describes the long hours and appalling working conditions of many ‘shop-girls and needlewomen’ and comments that this class of woman, barely subsisting, and constantly living with the dread that ‘there is absolutely nothing but [her] work between her and hunger’ gets less help than those not so deserving (‘A House of Rest’, 53). Craik goes as far as suggesting that her readers boycott those shops that do not treat their employees well and recommending by name those that do. The constant fear of falling ill and thus being unable to work, and the spectre of ‘the workhouse’ (*Mistress*, 89), were realities faced by all single women who had to work to survive.

Working for a fair employer, Hilary’s life is pleasant and secure, but she still longs to be reunited with Robert Lyon. Allowing her heroine to marry conveys to women readers that working does not make them unmarriageable, and also addresses one of the arguments against employment for women – that they might prefer a career to

¹ See Lynn Mae Alexander, *Women, Work and Representation: Needlewomen in Victorian Art and Literature* (Ohio: Swallow Press, 2003), and Beth Harris, *Famine and Fashion, Needlewomen in the nineteenth century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

marriage. W.R. Greg had expressed such anxieties in ‘Why are Women Redundant?’ (1862):

To endeavor to make women independent of men; to multiply and facilitate their employments, to enable them to earn a separate and ample subsistence by competing with the hardier sex in those careers and occupations hitherto set apart for that sex alone; to induct them generally into avocations not only as interesting and beneficent and therefore *appropriate* but [...] as lucrative; to surround single life for them with so smooth an entrance, and such a pleasant, ornamented, comfortable path that marriage shall almost come to be regarded not as their most honourable function and special calling, but merely as one of many ways open to them, competing on equal terms for their cold and philosophic choice – this would appear to be the aim and theory of many female reformers.¹

Although Craik was not alone in advocating increased occupational opportunities for women – the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women was active at this time – Greg’s appears to have been the prevailing view.² Writing against a culture in which ‘redundant’ women were perceived as a symptom of ‘an abnormal [...] unwholesome, social state’,³ and where work was considered antagonistic to femininity, Craik portrays single working women as leading entirely normal lives, making a valuable contribution, both economically and morally, to a healthy society. She does not pretend that working life is an ‘ornamented, comfortable path’ for single women, but she does make clear that it can bring contentment, the satisfaction of independence, and, while in no way precluding the possibility of marriage, is a viable alternative. As she writes of her heroine, Hilary, ‘nobody need mourn over her because she is working too hard, or pity her because she is obliged to work [...]. No matter, she is happy’ (261).

¹ W.R.Greg, ‘Why are Women Redundant?’, *The National Review*, 14 (April, 1862), 434-460. References to London: Trübner, 1869, pp. 30-31.

² Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p.4.

³ Greg, p.5.

A Solitary Nomad: the Governess

Miss Balquidder's vehement wish to see 'a good clearance of one half the governesses into honest trades (*Mistress*, 150), is a reiteration of the author's view of the profession as 'the great chasm into which the helpless and penniless of our sex generally plunge' (*AWT*, 43). Craik believed that very few were suited to a role which, as she suggests with more than a hint of irony, demanded 'very many of a mother's duties, with the addition of considerable mental attainments, firmness of character, good sense, good temper, good breeding; patience, gentleness, loving-kindness. In short, every quality that goes to make a perfect woman' (*AWT*, 44). The large number of governesses possessing few, if any, of these qualities, lowered the prestige of the profession, she argued, and resulted in low pay even for those who were well qualified. Whilst sympathetic to those women who felt it was their only choice, she believed that the solution was to encourage them to enter other occupations, and for parents employing governesses to insist on higher standards. She comments on the disparity between the low pay governesses generally received and the exceptional qualities they were supposed to possess, and was particularly critical of those who thought their children's education worth only 'twenty pounds a year' whilst lavishing large sums on their 'house, dress and entertainments' (*AWT*, 45).

Craik's views were part of an active debate on the 'governess question', at its height in the 1840s and 1850s, when increasing numbers of unsupported middle-class women found themselves living in the homes of strangers, doing work for which they had neither the inclination nor skills, and facing the prospect of an impoverished old age. Contributing to the problem of over-supply were those 'half-educated' girls from a

working-class background who saw the work as a way of ‘step[ping] out of [their] own sphere into the one above it’. It was the figure of ‘the educated gentlewoman thrown upon her own resources’ (AWT, 44) however, which most disturbed the middle-class conscience. As has been suggested in several studies, the lady-governess was more than an object of pity, she was a focus for anxieties regarding the role of middle-class women generally.¹ Her position was highly ambiguous. She was a ‘lady’, but also a paid employee at a time when ladies did not work; neither a guest nor a servant; a symbol of middle-class success, yet also, as a woman who had been brought up as a gentlewoman, a reminder of the possibility of its failure. Her assumption of ‘very many of the mother’s duties’, in particular her close relationship with her charges, raised questions about the role of, and was frequently a cause of tension with, the mother herself. It is not surprising, then, that the governess figures so frequently in fiction of the period. Her position as an outsider, her ‘status incongruence’, as M. Jeanne Peterson terms it,² and her generally solitary existence within another family, not only made her a poignant character, but could also be used to observe and comment on social and domestic life and the manifestations of class, in particular the pretensions of the *nouveaux riches*. A little later in the century, as Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros notes, the governess of unknown provenance was a useful figure for the sensation and detective novelist.³ In both novel and journal, the governess was frequently portrayed as a ‘downtrodden and pathetic figure’, often ending up in the workhouse or insane asylum.⁴ Harriet Martineau complained of being ‘wearied [...]

¹ See Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros, *The Victorian Governess Novel* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2001); M. Jeanne Peterson, ‘The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society,’ in Martha Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973) pp. 3-19; Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (London: Hambledon 1993); Trev Lynn Broughton and Ruth Symes, *The Governess: An Anthology* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997).

² Peterson, pp. 3-19.

³ Lecaros, p.277.

⁴ Peterson, p.9.

with the incessant repetition of the dreary story of spirit-broken governesses', but acknowledged that their representation in literature was not far from the truth.¹ An alternative fictional outcome, seldom occurring in real life, was for her to escape her situation by marrying an eligible member of the household.²

The governess features in several of Craik's novels, but the author avoids the clichés generally associated with the character, aiming instead to convey a realistic rather than melodramatic or romantic impression of the work. Her governess-heroines are not 'spirit-broken', employers are generally considerate, and pupils amiable, but the life is unfulfilling, insecure and lonely, and satisfies neither social nor romantic aspirations. The figure is used primarily to expand on and illustrate the views expressed in her journalism, but also proves an effective plot device linking and developing different strands of the story. In *Christian's Mistake*, for example, Susan, employed to teach Christian's step-children, provides the connection between the heroine's present and former life, when her clandestine lover is revealed as the 'mistake' of Christian's past. The novel portrays the two very different types of governess described in *A Woman's Thoughts*. Susan epitomises the 'lazy, unconscientious' young woman 'whom one meets in hopeless numbers among middle-class families' (*Christian's Mistake*, 148). Such girls, 'above domestic service, and ashamed or afraid of any other occupation [...] take to teaching as 'genteel', and as being rather an elevation than not from the class in which they were born'(148). Although acknowledging that alternative occupations are 'only too difficult to be found', Craik is uncompromising in her

¹ Harriet Martineau, 'Female Industry,' *Edinburgh Review* (April 1859), 293-336, (p.294), quoted in Peterson, p.3.

² Peterson, p.16, and Hughes, pp. 138-40.

contempt for such governesses, describing them as ‘the dead-weight which drags down their whole class [...], do[ing] harm wherever they go’, and suggesting that they should be ‘made to use their hands instead of their heads or, at any rate, to learn themselves instead of attempting to teach others’ (148).

Unlike Susan, Christian has the necessary intellect and empathy to be a worthy governess, but her marriage to a man she does not love, is a mark of her desperation to escape an occupation necessitated by the death of her father, in order to secure a home of her own. As governess to the children of a prosperous high street jeweller, she has no private space, sharing with her pupils a sparsely furnished attic bedroom ‘in which not a thing was her own, either to miss or leave behind’ (*Christian’s Mistake*, 23). Her accommodation, in contrast with the ostentatious furnishings of the ‘splendid’ drawing room (7), suggests the governess’s lowly status, yet Christian is superior in terms of education, and has a refinement lacking in her ‘gaudily dressed’ employer (7). Craik thus comments on the difficult position of the governess born into a class superior to that of her employers. As a step-mother, Christian’s ‘strong maternal instinct’ can be partially fulfilled through ‘imaginary motherhood’ (56), but not, even though her charges were ‘loving little things’ (9), as a governess.

In *Hannah*, Craik explores more fully the sense of maternal frustration that many governesses must have felt, expected to love children but suppress a desire for their own. Hannah’s ‘one great want in her nature – the need to be a mother’, is both a blessing and a curse. It has ‘helped her to manage many a difficult pupil’ but the mutual love between her and her charges is ‘rather a sad kind of affection, as she knew

it could be only temporary. They would drift away from her and marry [...] and she would be no more to them than “our old governess”” (*Hannah*, 13). Employed by aristocracy, Hannah is treated with respect and has her own ‘homely furnished [...] sitting room’ (9). This is, however, no substitute for a home of her own, as is also emphasised in *The Woman’s Kingdom*, where Edna describes the pleasure she and Letty feel, after having been ‘governesses, who had lived for years in other people’s houses’, in having their own ‘very microscopic, maidenly establishment’ in which ‘every corner, from attic to basement, was theirs to do with as they liked’ (*The Woman’s Kingdom*, 136). Although Hannah’s position in the family is ‘a very happy one; she had everything her own way’ (16), her life is ‘one of complete isolation’, ignored by the servants, treated by her employers with ‘stately consideration’, but not affection. Even in the best of situations, Craik thus argues, the life of the governess is unnatural: ‘But for her pupils [...] she would have ceased to recognise herself as one of the great human brotherhood, and felt like a solitary nomad, of no use and no pleasure to anybody’ (16). Hannah’s unfulfilled potential as wife and mother strengthens the novel’s case in support of the Deceased Wife’s Sister Bill, since her experience makes her an exemplary step-mother to her niece. Her former employer’s position as a Member of Parliament allows Craik to explain the political context of this controversial legislation.¹

The sense of frustrated vitality in the first part of *Hannah*, also suffuses *Bread upon the Waters: a governess’s life* (1852)². Written in support of the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution, it is intended to evoke sympathy for the type of deserving

¹ See note, page 174.

² *Bread upon the Waters: a governess’s life* (London: The Governesses’ Benevolent Institution: 1852; references to Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1865).

woman who might benefit from its services, and to encourage charitable donations. The most common reason for a middle-class woman working as a governess was the death of a parent or husband or other sudden financial loss.¹ This is true of most of Craik's fictional governesses, but in *Bread upon the Waters* she adds a more dramatic element to the story by having the heroine flee the family home with her two younger brothers to escape the malign influence of her father, a situation not dissimilar to her own. The novel comments on the hypocrisy of society – the father's malevolent, low-class second wife, a 'public singer' (9), is accepted in 'high' circles, because of her husband's wealth, while Felicia's supposedly estimable work means the loss of her former status. The life of a daily governess, of lower rank than the residential or 'private' counterpart, is described as hard, physically tiring, and poorly paid. Felicia cannot afford to get an omnibus to and from her place of work, and, like Hilary Leaf, must walk unaccompanied through London streets, like a servant. Though employed because of her gentility, the governess does not merit the protection of a chaperone given to a lady. Although she is well-educated and accomplished, Felicia realises that it is 'a different matter to know a thing oneself, and to impart it to another' (30), Craik here advocating proper training for governesses, and supporting the Governesses' Benevolent Institution's foundation of Queen's College London in 1848, which aimed to provide such education.² The need for diligent private study as well as teaching duties is also noted in *Hannah* and in the novella *The Laurel Bush* (1876).

Craik's emphasis on the kindness and respect shown to Felicia in her last position in an aristocratic household is intended to influence by example those readers who employ a

¹ See Hughes, pp. 27 -33.

² See Broughton and Symes, pp. 124-152.

governess. The figure of the gentlemanly Sir Godfrey Redwood, his modernity suggested in his 'celebrated parliamentary career' (42), is used to voice Craik's views on the importance of the role:

"What is more honourable than a governess; when she is a lady by birth, or at least by education, as all governesses ought to be? [...] If I ever have a wife and children [...] I will teach them, that after father and mother, there is no one on earth to whom they owe such reverence as to her on whom depends the formation not only of their intellect, but of their whole mind and character". (55)

At the beginning of the novel, the mutual attraction between Sir Godfrey and Felicia suggests that the work will conclude with their marriage. Sir Godfrey's praise of Felicia's virtues seems at first to be leading to a declaration of love, but his speech, ending instead with a proposal that she would make an excellent governess for his future children, thwarts the reader's (and, it is hinted, the heroine's) expectations. Instead, it underlines the fact that, despite Sir Godfrey's assertion that she is a 'true lady' (55), her role has made her unsuitable to be considered as his wife. Felicia finds some 'comfort' in Sir Godfrey's 'honouring' of her 'sisterhood', joined in 'humiliated despair' but its 'heavy chains' now worn 'as the badge of a worthy service' (56), her words conveying the sense of mutual support that was one of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution's key aims, but also the job's overwhelming repression. Undermining Felicia's claim that her duties have fostered acceptance, is the feeling of frustrated potential that permeates the novel. In a scene resonant with suppressed sexuality, Felicia is persuaded by her young charges to take her turn on the Redwoods' garden swing. The beauty of the spring day, with the budding horse chestnuts a symbol of the fertility of the natural life cycle from which she has been excluded, fills her with 'a strange excitement' (74). Pushed on the swing by Sir Godfrey, 'dashed on from height to dizzy height, his great strength urging me forward', the staid governess

experiences ‘the wild delight of flying through the air, [...] sweeping backwards, forwards with my bonnet coming off and my hair dropping over my face’ (75). Distracted by the sight of Blanche, the beautiful eldest daughter of Felicia’s employers, Sir Godfrey pushes the swing aslant into a tree and Felicia is badly injured. His subsequent proposal of marriage, which reinforces the sense of sexual indiscretion, is rejected because Hannah knows that it is prompted, not by love, but guilt and pity. The scene’s symbolism enables Craik to broach a taboo subject, and is intended as a reminder that a governess is not a sexless being, but has to repress the natural feelings of a woman. As Broughton and Symes observe,

The mid-century debate about the ‘Governess Question’ is largely silent about her potential as a marriage partner, as a possible mother, as a sexual subject, or indeed as a subject of desire of any kind. [...] Throughout the century there seems something overemphatic about the public image of the governess as ‘spinster’, as ‘redundant’ or ‘surplus’: as if she were a sort of a third sex beyond the pale.¹

Peterson suggests that ‘the denial of a governess’s womanliness – her sexuality – was another mode of reducing conflict’ within the home.² A contemporary writer observed that attractive women were seldom employed for fear of any relationship with male members of the family: ‘Is she handsome or attractive? If so, it is conclusive against her’.³ Another describes the governess as ‘a bore to any gentleman, as a tabooed woman’.⁴ Thus, although not considered as an equal by the male members of the household, the governess was perceived as a threat by the mistress. This fear is reflected in *The Woman’s Kingdom*, where Letty’s beauty had ‘cost her a situation or two’ and ‘had been the real hindrance to her governess-ship. [...] Mothers dreaded her

¹ Broughton and Symes, p. 176.

² M. Jeanne Peterson, pp. 13 – 15, (p.15).

³ Mary Maurice, *Governess Life: its trials, duties and encouragements* (London: John Parker, 1849), quoted in Broughton and Symes, p.182.

⁴ Elizabeth Rigby (Lady Eastlake), review of *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*, *Quarterly Review*, 84, (December 1848), 153-185, quoted in Hughes, p.117.

for their grown-up sons; weak-minded wives were uneasy concerning their husbands' (14). Louise Silver is the only one of Craik's governesses to marry into the family where she works. The kindly, inclusive attitude of the Halifax family is a mark of their true gentility, but there is also a suggestion that the rift Louise causes between the two brothers is a punishment for their obtaining such an obvious symbol of material success. Although both Felicia and Fortune Williams (in *The Laurel Bush*), receive proposals from the middle-aged widowed father of their charges, they are rejected, Craik emphasising her belief that it is wrong to marry without love.

Like Felicia, Cassandra, the governess-narrator of the short story 'The Half Caste' (1851)¹, finds that her occupation makes her ineligible to be the wife of a man who had formerly been her social equal. Cassandra's thwarted devotion to Andrew Sutherland, never overtly acknowledged, but subtly revealed in a series of disappointed expectations, is made more poignant by her being responsible for the blossoming of her unpromising charge, Zillah, his orphaned mixed-race ward, who eventually becomes his wife. 'The Half-Caste' can be read as a metaphor for imperial exploitation, confronting the issue of racial prejudice in a way that is remarkably radical for the period. The governess figure is used to provide insight into the effect which the contempt of Zillah's English relatives has upon her character, Cassandra's intelligence, respectability, and close relationship with her pupil, validating her judgement.² Of interest to her father's family only for the fortune she will inherit from her Indian mother when she comes of age, Zillah is treated like a servant and described disparagingly by her uncle as an 'ugly little devil' (341), having a 'modicum of

¹ *The Half-caste: an old governess's tale* (1851; published with *Olive*, 1999, above); first published in *Chambers's Papers for the People* 12, 1851.

² The family's surname, Le Poer suggests that Craik is criticising European attitudes generally.

intellect [...] not greater than generally belongs to her mother's race' (340), and, falsely, as illegitimate – the result of the 'not overscrupulous ties between natives and Europeans' (340). Although considered fit only to be an '*ayah*, and that is all', her uncle plans to trick her into marriage with his son in order to appropriate her wealth. Though sympathetic and affectionate towards her new pupil, Cassandra is herself initially prejudiced in believing that Zillah's character flaws are due to the racial heritage evident in her 'olive complexion, full Hindoo lips' and 'very black eyes' (337) – 'she was lazy – full of the languor of her native clime' (341). However, she comes to realise that her apathy, like her 'stupidity' (337) and 'desperate sullenness' (340), is not innate, but the result of her ill-treatment:

It is a great mistake to suppose that every victim of tyranny must of necessity be an angel. On most qualities of mind oppression has exactly the opposite effect. It dulls the faculties, stupefies the instinctive sense of right, and makes the most awful havoc among the natural affections. (341)

Through Cassandra's care, Zillah develops into a vivacious, intelligent young woman, 'beautiful in mind as well as in body' (362), completely overturning the earlier racial stereotype. Her marriage to Sutherland is a contentious resolution in the context of contemporary attitudes, particularly as it produces children. Robert Knox's *The Races of Men* (1850), for example, argued that races were innately physically and morally different, these differences were immutable, and that interracial marriage could produce 'a monstrosity of nature'.¹ As Kaplan suggests,

'The Half-Caste' is a liberal parable for its time, arguing for education, nurture, and environment as the most important factors in analysing and creating parity between races [...]. At a moment when scientific racial thinking was promoting the immutable difference in capacities between races, and decrying

¹ Robert Knox, *The Races of Men*, p.66.

hybrid unions as a sign of the unnatural or perverse, 'The Half-Caste' carried [...] an unmistakable political thrust.¹

Kaplan believes that the novel 'boldly [...] affirms the full integration of mixed-race children into English bourgeois life', yet considers that Craik 'recycles typical biologically based prejudices' in that Zillah's 'beauty [...] is always described as surmounting as well as depending on racial otherness'.² This fails to consider that the narrator's viewpoint, though reflecting a genuine devotion to her pupil, is tinged with jealousy – Zillah's 'dark, Oriental eyes' (362) have captivated the man she herself loves. Although Cassandra claims that she 'never compared' herself with her charge (362), she frequently comments on the difference between them. Her own, 'pale grey-blue eyes – [are] not dark like Zillah's' (363), and her 'pale' complexion (341) and 'quiet little face' (362) a contrast with the statuesque exoticism of the younger woman. Thus when Cassandra concedes that 'even though her skin was that of a half-caste, and her little hands were brown not white, there was no denying that she was a very beautiful woman' (367), she is rationalising Sutherland's choice of Zillah as his wife. Kaplan's view that the blonde-haired daughter of their marriage reflects the contemporary belief that in miscegenation, 'all traces of the weaker [i.e. non-white] race must in time be obliterated'³ is negated by Zillah's own genetic inheritance in which the inferior moral and physical characteristics of her father have been eradicated. The possibility of a more ethical relationship with other nations is represented in Sutherland's principled association with India as a 'merchant' (335), and in his respect for Zillah, which is manifested in his 'settling his wife's property upon herself' (372).

¹ Kaplan, introduction to *Olive*, p. xxiv – xxv.

² Kaplan, xxv.

³ Knox, p.67; Kaplan, xxv.

Cassandra becomes a cherished member of the Sutherland family, and Felicia similarly lives as a beloved aunt in her brother's home. Few governesses would have had such an option, and, through Felicia's injury, Craik conveys the precariousness of the role, dependent on continuing good health. One of the functions of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution was the establishment of convalescent homes and insurance schemes for governesses too ill to work,¹ and in Craik's last governess-novel, *The Laurel Bush*,² it is suggested that such schemes have had a positive impact. The heroine, Fortune, another exemplary figure, who, with her 'strong motherly instinct' (39), is suited to the role but yearns for her own family, is, at one point, too ill to work, convalesces in 'one of those excellent Governesses' Homes' (42) and, when recovered, is given assistance by the Institute in finding her next post. Her love for Robert Roy, the tutor of her pupils' older brothers, gives an interesting comparison between two occupations – 'only a tutor and only a governess' (8) – that are essentially the same, but, in the man's case, provides a temporary means of support while completing academic studies leading to a fulfilling career, but, in the woman's, would lead nowhere. Fortune's strength of character and endurance are eventually rewarded by marriage to Roy in middle age, and, again suggesting the satisfaction of parental surrogacy, a family in the shape of their respective orphaned charges. Like all Craik's governess novels, *The Laurel Bush* elevates the status of the role, but also emphasises the enormous sacrifices it requires.

¹ The GBI also provided 'Annuity' and 'Provident' Funds, an 'asylum for the aged', funds for the 'temporarily distressed', and an employment exchange. See Preface to *Bread upon the Waters*, and Broughton and Symes, pp. 124-152.

² *The Laurel Bush: an old-fashioned love story* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1876; references to Bibliobazaar reprint of unspecified edition); first published in *Good Words*, June-November, 1876.

Only a Servant

Although the 1851 census had revealed that the number of governesses was only one thirtieth of that of female domestic servants,¹ the welfare of the latter appears to have provoked much less interest.² As M. Jeanne Peterson observes, ‘in many ways the position of the domestic servant in the nineteenth-century differed very little from that of the governess. But there were no crusades for nursemaids or domestic servants’.³ Servants were, after all, expected to know their place, and, as Peterson points out, they ‘had at least the advantage of an unambiguous position.’⁴ This is not to say that their presence within the home did not cause tensions. Maintaining a degree of privacy and keeping control over staff were seen as the major problems, particularly for middle-class families unable to afford an intermediary housekeeper. Elizabeth Langland suggests that the issues arising from the employment of servants undermine ‘the persistent myth of idle women in the home, isolated from industrial strife and class conflict’:

By employing domestic servants, Victorians were introducing class issues directly into the home, and setting up the home as a site for all the conflicts between labour and management that afflicted the nineteenth-century generally.⁵

Although the living and working conditions of servants were generally better than those of factory employees, the work, particularly for those on the lower rungs of domestic service, was physically hard. Julie Nash observes that ‘maintaining even a modest household was the work of long hours and heavy physical labour, work often

¹ See Broughton and Symes, p. 9.

² According to the 1851 census, there were over one million servants, 90% of whom were women. See Trevor May, *The Victorian Domestic Servant* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 2007).

³ M. Jeanne Peterson, in *Suffer and Be Still*, p.9.

⁴ Peterson, p.12.

⁵ Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1995), p.14.

done by one teenage girl'.¹ Pamela Horn has described the ill treatment some servants endured, documenting examples of extreme cruelty, and noting that even in more pleasant homes, they were treated as 'second-class citizens', expected to adopt a servile manner, and to be as 'invisible' as possible.² There was also some anxiety, however, that servants were becoming less subservient, as, for example, the Mayhew brothers' *The Greatest Plague of Life*, reveals. In this satirical work, the 'indulgent' mistress is forced to leave home to escape her servants' 'breakages [...], impudence [...], quarrelling [...], followers [...], wilful wastes and goings on [...], their pride, their airs and ill tempers'.³

Craik believed that the female servant should not be a focus for class conflict, but as important a member of the 'common womanhood in which we all share' (*AWT*, 98) as her mistress. A chapter of *A Woman's Thoughts*, is devoted to the topic, Craik addressing the problem from the point of view of both mistress and servant and acknowledging the tensions on both sides. By positioning the notion of 'service' within a Christian framework, quoting the New Testament text, 'He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant' (Matthew 23.11), she replaces the model of control and subservience with one based on mutual respect and understanding, a 'total and sublime equality', not of 'station' but of worth (*AWT*, 92). The equality between mistress and servant should, she argues, be recognised 'not as a mere sentimental theory but as a practical fact, the foundation and starting-point of all relations between them' (98). Craik realised that many would regard her plea for this 'recognition of a

¹ Julie Nash, *Servants and Paternalism in the Works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.19.

² Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), pp. 120-134 (p.127).

³ Henry and Augustus Mayhew, *The Greatest Plagues of Life, or the Adventures of a Lady in Search of a Good Servant, by One Who Has Been Almost Worried to Death* (London: David Bogue, 1847). Reference from (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847), p.14.

common nature' (98) between mistress and servant as subversive: 'To own that they and their servants are of like passions and feelings, capable of similar elevation or deterioration of character, [...] all "sisters" together, [...] would, I fear, be held simply ridiculous' (94). Yet, she goes on to observe, a loyal servant can not only contribute towards a harmonious and well-managed household, but can also provide better support than 'many an outside friend' (111), while a good mistress can be a great influence for good over her staff.

Although Craik's ideal draws from a feudal-paternalistic interpretation of the 'law of servitude' (92), in which service and duty are honourable not degrading, her insistence on self-fulfilment and self-dependence conveys a more modern sense of social responsibility and equality, at odds with prevailing attitudes. Service is not demeaning, but it should not preclude the opportunity for advancement. Thus when John Halifax accepts Abel Fletcher's shilling given "to show I have hired thee as my servant" (*JHG*, 49), John's response indicates an instinctive distaste for a term that seems to undermine his independence and ambition, but also conveys a realisation that 'honest work' (48), however lowly, can, if performed dutifully, be the first step to prosperity:

"Servant!" John repeated, hastily and rather proudly. "Oh yes, I understand: well, I will try and serve you well".

[Phineas's] father did not notice that manly, self-dependent smile. (*JHG*, 49)

Contemporary representations of servants in fiction tended to reinforce their inferiority, rather than any sense of potential advancement, as Bruce Robbins suggests:

‘She or he enjoys little or no existence apart from his or her effect on the destiny of the masters. [...] In this thin and functional figure there is very little either of the heroism or the sufferings of the working class’.¹ The fictional servant, Robbins argues, was little more than a stereotype, sometimes used to perform a narrative function, or to provide comic relief, or act as a foil for the protagonist. This may be an oversimplification. Julie Nash, for example, has suggested that, although ‘the place of servants was diminishing in British literature’, Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell ‘gave servants significant roles in their fiction.’² In *Mistress and Maid*, Craik’s own reference to fictional portrayals of servants supports the view that contemporary representations were stereotypical. Defending her focus being ‘solely [on] one domestic’, she criticises ‘some writers [who] have depicted, whether faithfully or not they know best, [...] life below stairs [...]; the butler and the housekeeper getting tipsy together, the cook courting the policeman, and the footman making love successively to every housemaid or lady’s maid’ (264).

Craik’s own portrayals are, in following the creed of *A Woman’s Thoughts*, very unusual for the period. Even as minor characters, servants are used to convey her views on the importance of mutual respect. In *John Halifax*, for example, the ‘kindness and sympathy’ with which John and Ursula treat their servants Jem and Jenny is a sign of their gentility, and is rewarded by their being ‘served all the better’ (*JHG*, 243). Josephine’s faithful Bridget in *A Brave Lady*, Jael, the Fletchers’ abrasive but loyal housekeeper in *John Halifax*, and Olive’s nursemaid Elspie, are all well-rounded characters accorded dignity by the author. In *Mistress and Maid*, Craik goes further,

¹ Bruce Robbins, *The Servant’s Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.6.

² Nash, p.12

choosing a lowly maid-of-all-work as one of the novel's two heroines. The Leaf sisters' servant, Elizabeth Hand, is a fully developed, credible character, whose importance is emphasised by having her story begin and end the novel, and whose inner thoughts and emotions are given as much weight as those of the other heroine, Hilary. The gradual development of Elizabeth's character from awkward, sullen girl to 'exceptional person' (255), 'most clever and efficient' (250), with 'quiet, solid, practical strength' (255), not only makes her much more than a stereotype, but elevates the status of her work. Although Elizabeth's appearance and clumsiness are described with gentle humour at the start of the novel, the portrayal is never patronizing. Her romance with Chartist Tom Cliffe, gives her an identity apart from her work, and the dignified manner in which she deals with the discovery of Tom's affair with a prettier maidservant, and the forgiveness and kindness she exhibits years later when he asks for her help, give the character a nobility and worth not usually associated with contemporary representations of the working classes. It also allows for a consideration of Tom's socialist creed alongside Elizabeth's acceptance of her position.

Elizabeth's surname is significant, intended to challenge the perception of servants as mere 'hands' and advocating that they should be treated as human beings with as much right to fulfilment as their employers. The novel emphasises the mutual benefits of a good relationship between mistress and servant. The Leaf sisters come to depend on the practical and emotional support of their maid, while Elizabeth flourishes under Hilary's kindly influence. Craik intended the novel to be read both 'upstairs' and 'downstairs', and this is reflected in their being fewer literary and classical references than usually found in her work at this period. Just as she had asked in *A Woman's Thoughts*, that middle-class readers should send the work 'down to be read in the

kitchen' since it 'concerns maids just as much as mistresses' (AWT, 98), so too does she request in the Preface to *Mistress and Maid*, that readers will

disseminate this tale as widely as possible; that mistresses will send it down to the kitchen; that [...] Sunday school teachers and district visitors will lend it among the poor; and that masters – if any read it, for it is not exactly a man's book – will try to circulate it among mechanics and mechanics' wives and daughters. It may thus reach the class for whom it was specially written, and with a view to whom it was originally published in "Good Words". (Preface)

Craik's hope that her writing on this topic would be read across classes, is a powerful statement of her belief in the importance of collaboration between women, and of her desire to use her writing to effect social change.

For most middle class families, the servant was not an individual worthy of respect, but an important symbol of wealth, signifying the leisured status of the mistress.

The performance of menial housework was consequently considered as degrading, Sarah Stickney Ellis warning that, while it was necessary to be an active manager of the household, ladies should never do 'what would be more appropriately left to the servants'.¹ Craik, however, feels the need to justify the Leaf sisters' hiring of a servant, making it clear that for them it is not a mark of status but a necessity.

Hilary has taken over much of the housework, including the 'blacking of grates and scouring of floors'(5), that her increasingly frail sister Johanna has performed for the past twenty years, but she is already occupied with teaching. Selina's snobbery makes her unwilling to perform such tasks, but, even though Hilary's 'bent was not in the household line' (6), she and Johanna are 'ladies who thought no manner of

¹ Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Wives of England*, p.261.

work beneath them'. (19) Housework is thus not presented as something that middle-class women should be ashamed of doing.

The difference between Selina and her sisters in their behaviour towards Elizabeth is used to convey the author's views on how servants should be treated. Selina's attitude would have been considered correct, conforming to the majority of advice books, yet she is portrayed as morally weak, emotionally unstable, and idle. At their first meeting, Selina belittles Elizabeth by speaking across her in the third person, decreeing that she should be called Betty, as Elizabeth is 'far too long and too fine' for a maid (7), and insisting that she should wear a cap as a 'proper and indispensable badge of servant-hood' (64). While Selina would have liked to 'institute a regular system of authority' which would include locking doors and drawers, Hilary is adamant that this would show lack of respect for Elizabeth, a notion that Selina finds ridiculous (63). Elizabeth Langland notes how the bunch of household keys became a symbol of the mistress's authority and implied servants' untrustworthiness: 'all those keys to interior drawers, closets and doors, helped to secure household goods from servants, presumed to have an interest in stealing them'.¹ Selina's attempts at exerting control, and her harsh criticism of Elizabeth's mistakes, are portrayed as weakness, the novel emphasizing that a good relationship with servants is based not on domination but on trust.

Published a year before Craik's novel, Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, (1861), had outlined an astonishingly long list of duties appropriate for each rank of

¹ Langland, *Nobody's Angels*, p. 53.

servant, but even Beeton felt that the ‘maid of all work’ was ‘deserving of commiseration. Her life is a solitary one, and, in some places, her work is never done’.¹ Horn suggests that in most homes it was considered appropriate that ‘[the servants’] sleeping quarters fell well below the standard provided for the rest of the house,’² and Nash notes that the maid-of-all-work ‘often slept on a pallet on the basement kitchen floor’.³ Craik herself comments on such ill-treatment in *A Woman’s Thoughts*, noting how maids were usually ‘compelled to sleep in damp, heat, uncleanliness’ and ‘kept at work constantly’ (AWT, 142). The respect and understanding with which Johanna and Hilary treat their maidservant would thus have been uncommon. Against Selina’s wishes, she is to be called Elizabeth, her bedroom is ‘as tidy and comfortable as the rest’ (19), and she is ‘never stinted [...] in anything in which they did not stint themselves’ (88). She shares any ‘small and few [...] luxuries’, including ‘the newspaper and the borrowed book’ (63), and becomes ‘absolutely one of the family, sharing in all its concerns. [...] Nothing was either literally or metaphorically “locked up” from Elizabeth’ (63). Hilary not only trains her in household tasks, but also gives up her spare time to teach her to read, write and sew, her encouragement allowing Elizabeth’s good sense and intelligence to blossom. Craik demonstrates a modern understanding of the link between social disadvantage and poor educational attainment, in her comment that working-class children are held back not only by lack of good schooling, but also by growing up in an impoverished environment with low parental expectations. This contrasts with ‘upper class children who have been unconsciously undergoing education ever since the cradle’ (56). Hilary’s sharing and discussing her own favourite books with her maid is a sign of her

¹ Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (London: S.O. Beeton, 1861), quoted in Nash, p.19.

² Horn, p.127.

³ Nash, p.19.

respect, but Selina is horrified to discover that Elizabeth is being encouraged to read ‘stories, novels, even poetry’ (66), and even Johanna thinks it might be “dangerous” thus to put before Elizabeth a standard of ideal perfection [...] – life in its full purpose, power and beauty – such as otherwise never could have crossed the mind of this working girl’ (66). The implied fear that her exposure to literature might lead to dissatisfaction, perhaps rebellion, proves baseless. Instead it contributes to the improvement of her character. Elizabeth’s being allowed to spend time with Tom on Sundays is also unusual. To become a live-in servant frequently meant the end of a girl’s marriage prospects, as ‘followers’ were discouraged and little free time allowed, a situation reinforcing the servant’s lack of autonomy.¹ Craik, however, believed that female servants should be allowed to meet suitors openly during their leisure time, since to forbid them was to encourage dangerously secretive relationships often resulting in the downfall of ‘many a wretched girl who once was innocent’ (256).

A contemporary conduct book advised employers: ‘never stoop to the degradation of making confidants and companions of your servants; [...] never on any account treat them as equals’.² Elizabeth, however, is a valued, loyal friend and confidant, trusted with the knowledge of Ascott’s shameful debt. She plays an important part in preventing Ascott’s disgrace from becoming publicly known, fending off the intrusions of their suspicious landlady and discreetly informing Hilary of her nephew’s arrest, and, at the end of the novel, she is responsible for reuniting the reformed Ascott with his family. Brian W. McCuskey observes that, although ‘many nineteenth-century novels feature servants prominently as snoopers, voyeurs and blackmailers’, the

¹ See Nash, p. 21, quoting advice from *Cassell’s Household Guide*, published in several editions during the nineteenth century, that followers should be forbidden, and free time limited.

² *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentleman*, (1862), quoted in Langland, *Nobody’s Angels*, p.51.

figure of the trustworthy servant, who allows ‘the family [to] confront and resolve its own guilty secrets without compromising itself before the eyes of all the world’, was used in Wilkie Collins’s detective novel, *The Moonstone* (1868).¹ The importance of Elizabeth’s support, as well as a sense of her equality, is suggested in Hilary’s taking her arm as she faces the return home along busy London streets, to tell her sisters of Ascott’s disgrace (219). It is ‘only a servant [...] to whom she could look for any comfort in this sore trouble, this bitter humiliation. There was no attempt at disguise or concealment between mistress and maid’ (181). Craik repeats the phrase ‘only a servant’ several times throughout the novel, each time negating the implied inferiority by describing Elizabeth’s worth.

Despite Selina’s initial disdain for Elizabeth, she recognizes her value by employing her in her own household after her marriage, when Hilary and Johanna can no longer afford to keep her. In placing Elizabeth in this grand establishment, Craik comments on the strict division between employer and servants in such a house ‘divid[ed] against itself’, a system which she believed was ‘the source of incalculable evil’ (265). Although the servants have their own status hierarchy, they are united in their enmity for their employers, an attitude that shocks Elizabeth:

She, who had been brought up in a sort of feudal relationship to her dear mistresses, was astonished to find the domestics of Russell Square banded together into a community, which, in spite of their personal bickerings and jealousies, ended in alliance offensive and defensive against the superior powers, whom they looked upon as their natural enemies. (264)

¹ Brian W. McCuskey, ‘Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle Class Transgression’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28.2 (2000), 359-375 (p.361; p.366).

While the other servants gossip about the frequent rows between Selina and her new husband, Elizabeth is the only member of the household she can turn to in her misery. It is Elizabeth alone who comforts her as she lies dying after childbirth, and to whom she entrusts the care of her son. Elizabeth's devotion to the child, 'who fills up every corner of her heart' (340), helps to compensate for the disappointment of her hopes for marriage and children, but the novel's ending is poignant in its suggestion of her continued sadness over Tom.

Craik felt the need to justify her sympathetic portrayal of Elizabeth:

I know I am painting this young woman with a strangely tender conscience, a refinement of feeling, and a general moral sensitiveness which people say is seldom or never to be found in her rank of life. And why not? Because mistresses treat servants as servants, and not as women; because in the sharp, hard line they draw, at the outset, between themselves and their domestics, they give no chance for any womanliness to be developed. (256)

The passage conveys how unusual it was for a servant to be treated with humanity, not only in fiction, but in life. Craik's criticism of women's lack of empathy towards their own sex underlines her belief that female solidarity should override artificial barriers of class.

A Woman's Genius: Olive

Craik's working heroines have the satisfaction (as well as the anxieties) of self-dependence, but only one, the artist Olive, discovers a true vocation. In her chapter on 'Female Professions' in *A Woman's Thoughts*, Craik considers 'painting or art' as the

‘most arduous’ of the four vocational ‘paths at present open to women’ (AWT, 58)¹ since, among the ‘indispensable’ studies required, life-drawing and anatomical dissection might elicit a ‘not unnatural repugnance’ (50). Yet, she goes on to argue, if a woman feels a genuine calling in any field ‘in which she shall do most good, and best carry out the aim of her existence – let her fulfil to the last iota its solemn requirement’ (53). This was a bold statement in the context of attitudes towards women and work generally, and women artists in particular. As Dennis Denisoff² and Antonia Losano³ have described, the requirement for anatomical studies was not the only perceived barrier to women’s entry into the profession, but was perhaps the most obvious of the several ways in which the career was presented as being improper and distastefully unfeminine. Drawing and watercolour painting, on the other hand, were, if confined to a limited range of botanical and domestic subjects, considered appropriate amateur accomplishments for women, and were desirable skills for a governess to pass on to her female pupils. As Denisoff suggests, to aspire to professional status implied an unhealthy desire to trespass into the masculine sphere:

The predominant conviction that men were both naturally and culturally better suited than women to artistic professions led society to configure women who attempted to infiltrate the hegemony as a sexually deviant, masculine threat.⁴

As both Denisoff and Losano note, cartoons of the time, for example in *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*, reflected this widespread anxiety concerning female artists, caricaturing them either as amateurish or physically unattractive.¹

¹ Craik considers the other three vocational paths to be ‘the instruction of youth [...], literature; and the vocation of public entertainment – including actresses, singers, musicians’ (*A Woman’s Thoughts*, 42).

² Dennis Denisoff, ‘Lady in green with novel: the gendered economics of the visual arts and mid-Victorian women’s writing’, in Nicola Diane Thompson (ed.) pp. 151-169 (p.151).

³ Antonia Losano, *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), pp. 25-30.

⁴ Dennis Denisoff, pp. 151-156 (p.151).

In her portrayal of Olive, an ambitious and successful professional artist, who is also an example of ‘perfect womanliness’ (*Olive*, 127), Craik directly challenges such dogma. Olive’s tutor, Michael Vanburgh, a painter of grand, classical pictures, at first tries to deter her by warning of the necessity to ‘wield not only the pencil but the scalpel’ (125), and argues that ‘it is impossible for a woman to become an artist – I mean a *great* artist’ (124), because the profession requires uniquely masculine qualities:

“Have you ever thought what that term implies? Not only a painter, but a poet; a man of learning, of reading, of observation. A gentleman – we artists have been the friends of kings. A man of high virtue, or how can he reach the pure ideal? A man of iron will, unconquered daring, and passions strong – yet stainless. A man who, feeling within him the divine spirit, with his whole soul worships God!” (124)

Vanburgh’s view of art as a gentlemanly profession echoes the contemporary debate regarding the professional status of authorship and the ‘dignity of literature’, particularly in its use of military metaphor.² Some critics have, however, misunderstood Vanburgh’s beliefs as representing Craik’s own. Showalter, for example suggests that Vanburgh is ‘one of the many spokesmen in [Craik’s] novels for patriarchal rule and female submission’,³ and Bronwen Rivers believes that ‘[Olive’s] comments [...] throughout the novel affirm women’s inferiority’, and ‘the narrator, too, makes authoritative statements about women’s inferiority – for example arguing that no woman can be a great artist’.⁴ Woven into Vanburgh’s hegemonic defence, with its overwhelmingly masculine vision of the artist, however, is a counter-argument representing Craik’s own stance. In the preceding passage, Vanburgh appears to

¹ See ‘Female School of Art,’ *Punch*, May 30, 1874, in Dennisoff (p.152), and ‘Lady Students at the National Gallery’, *Illustrated London News* 87, (November 21, 1885), in Losano (p.183).

² See G.H. Lewes, ‘The Condition of Authors in England’, Thomas Carlyle, *The Hero as Man of Letters*. See Chapter One, p.14, and Chapter Two, p. 138.

³ Showalter, p. 16.

⁴ Bronwen Rivers, *Women at Work in the Victorian Novel: the Question of Middle-class women’s employment 1840-1870* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), pp. 127-139(p.131).

contradict himself by implying that gender is irrelevant, and that it is foolish to suggest otherwise:

“I am not such a fool as to say that genius is of either sex, but it is an acknowledged fact that no woman ever was a great painter, poet, or musician. Genius, the mighty one, does not exist in weak female nature, and even if it did, custom and education would certainly stunt its growth”. (123)

Vanburgh’s inconsistent pronouncement points to the true explanation for women’s failure to achieve – they are disadvantaged by a lack of education and encouragement which denies them not only the requisite knowledge and skills, but the acquisition of cultural capital and access to men’s networking arenas. Despite these barriers, Craik notes that women *have* become successful artists – Vanburgh’s sister Meliora gives Olive several examples of such. Olive’s dedication and moral strength overturn the suggestion that female nature is inherently weak, while Vanburgh’s assertion of having the required ‘high virtue’ is undermined by his misogynistic callousness which contributes to Meliora’s death. Most significantly, Olive’s success proves that, given equal training and support, women can achieve as much as men. Craik’s focus on the woman artist can be read as a metaphor for women’s entry into all professions, and is particularly relevant to authorship.

The complicated subtext of deliberate ambiguity recurs throughout the novel, with statements seeming to adhere to a patriarchal vision of women’s limitations always qualified or subtly contradicted. Although, for example, Craik appears to concede, that ‘man has the advantage,’ therefore ‘let him take the pre-eminence’ (126), this is not, she explains, due to superior talent, but because his nature allows him to free himself

from 'human ties'. 'He, strong in his might of intellect can make it his all in all, his life's sole aim', but

there scarce ever lived a woman who would not rather sit meekly by her own hearth, with her husband at her side, and her children at her knee, than be crowned Corinne of the Capitol. Thus woman, seeking to strive with man, is made feebler by the very spirit of love which, in her own sphere, is her chiefest strength. (126)¹

Craik understands that the barriers to women's success are not only those of 'custom and education', but stem from their greater investment in human relationships and unwillingness to sacrifice these for a profession. Women who do not have family ties, she suggests, are free to allow their 'genius to expand and grow mighty', and can compete on equal terms with men:

Sometimes chance, or circumstance, or wrong, sealing up her woman's nature converts her into a self-dependent human soul. Instead of life's sweetnesses, she has before her life's greatnesses. (126)

Although this stance can be interpreted as anti-feminist, as it implies that it is natural for women to prefer domesticity over professional achievement, it is, in recognising the attractions of the former, arguably more in tune with what most women believe, than the polemic of strident twentieth-century feminism which decried any domestic or maternal instinct as subservience. Olive's creation of a comfortable and attractive domestic environment in which she can not only exhibit traditionally nurturing characteristics in looking after her blind mother, but can also work, indicates Craik's belief that domesticity and professionalism are not, in fact, mutually exclusive. In a passage which describes Olive's 'domestic life' as being 'full of many dear ties, the

¹ Craik is referring to Madame de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), the heroine of which was considered a role-model for the woman artist. See introduction to Oxford World's Classics edition, ed. Sylvia Raphael (2008).

chief of which was that wild devotion [...] she felt for her mother', we are also told that 'her genius developed' and 'her intellectual life grew more intense and all-vivifying' (128). Olive's partitioning of the drawing room to create a studio, is, as Patricia Zakreski suggests, a symbol of the possibility of the coexistence of work and domesticity.¹ Olive has 'softened by many a graceful adjunct of comfort and luxury' the 'once gloomy barrenness' of their drawing room:

Half of it, by means of a crimson screen, is transformed into a painting-room [...]. She did this for several reasons, the chief of which was, that whether the young paintress was working or not, Mrs. Rothesay might never be out of the sound of her daughter's voice. (140)

It is significant that the screen is crimson, as Zakreski notes, since, although it partially shields Olive, its brightness negates any sense of timidity.² Olive's domestic and nurturing skills are evidence of her credentials as 'a type of true woman' (331), but she is also described as having an 'almost masculine power of mind' (127), and an 'ardent, almost masculine, genius' (145). Acknowledging the growing accomplishments of his pupil, Vanburgh tells her: 'Though you are a woman, you have a man's soul. The soul of a genius' (157). Craik's emphasis on Olive's 'masculine' alongside her feminine traits deliberately confuses stereotypical gender attributes. If the 'genius' of a great artist requires a masculine soul, but a masculine soul can exist in the perfect woman, then a woman can also possess the genius of a great artist.

Olive's devotion to her mother comes before her ambition – a 'fatal interruption' occurs in the painting of what should have been her first submission to a Royal

¹ Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848 -1890: Refining work for the middle-class woman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 61-97 (p. 80).

² Zakreski, p. 97.

Academy exhibition, because she chooses to nurse her mother through an illness (134).

This reflects how, as suggested in Chapter One, women professionals found it necessary to demonstrate that they could still fulfil their domestic responsibilities.

That the painting is eventually completed and sold, however, again emphasises that feminine duty and vocation need not compromise each other, a view reiterated in *A*

Woman's Thoughts:

The days of blue-stockings are over: it is a notable fact, that the best housekeepers, the neatest needlewomen, the most discreet managers of their own and others' affairs, are ladies whose names the world cons over in library lists and exhibition catalogues. (*AWT*, 56)

We may paint scores of pictures, write shelves-ful of books – the errant children of our brain may be familiar half over the known world, and yet we ourselves sit as quiet by our chimney-corner, live a life as simple and peaceful as any happy “common woman” of them all (*AWT*, 58)

The “common woman” is a reference to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, (1856), from which Craik goes on to quote. Like Corinne, she was a fictional role model for the aspiring woman artist, but also a warning that vocational success might entail sacrificing the ‘happier’ lot of the ordinary woman.¹ Craik's own representation is altogether more encouraging in its integration of public and private spheres. In its description of the female author's books as ‘children’, *A Woman's Thoughts* echoes Olive's similar reference to her paintings. After the death of her mother, and believing that her love for Harold will never be requited, she finds comfort in the thought that her pictures will be her legacy:

Half-smiling, she began to call her pictures her children, and began to think of a time when they, a goodly race, would live and tell no tale of their creator's woe. This Art-life – all the life she had, and all she would leave behind – must not be sacrificed by any miserable contest with an utterly hopeless human love. (263)

¹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856), p.61.

A creative profession can be a substitute for marriage and family, the author suggests, but so too can other relationships – although Olive eventually marries, Craik is careful to construct the possibility of a satisfactory alternative. Welcomed into the household of her Aunt Flora, whose happy and useful life exemplifies that which Craik advocated for single women, Olive realises that, though single, ‘one’s life never need be empty of love’ (246).

Olive’s decision to put her mother’s welfare ahead of her desire to exhibit her painting has been interpreted as a sign of unwillingness to engage in the public and commercial aspects of art. Losano, for example, suggests that Olive escapes the ‘visual attention of male members of society’.¹ Such engagement was considered an unnatural trespass into the male sphere, and was yet another disincentive to female ambition. Craik does not, however, portray her heroine as reclusive or unable to deal with public transactions. Olive ‘mingled [...] among men, not as a woman, but as one who, like themselves, pursues her own calling’ (127), and, ‘she went out into society, and there saw men, as they are *in society*’ (147). Far from being unnerved by such exposure, it causes her to realise ‘how mean was the general standard of perfection’ (148) and that to remain single was not such a deprivation after all. Olive acknowledges the commercial aspect of her painting and remains untainted by it. Offering a mock ‘confession’ to her readers, Craik underlines that the initial motivation for her heroine’s career is unromantically financial, ‘to redeem her father’s memory, and to save her mother from any sacrifice entailed by this debt’:

¹ Losano, p.194.

And so – though this confession may somewhat lessen the romance of her character – it was from no yearning after fame, no genius-led ambition, but from mere desire of earning money, that Olive Rothesay first conceived the thought of becoming an artist. (119)

When the debt is repaid, Olive continues to be motivated by her desire to help her mother. Her painting, ‘Charity’, is sold to provide for her convalescence in the country, Olive’s altruistic motive thus removing any sense of unseemly materialism. Just as she does with her writer-heroes, Philip Wychnor and Roderick Jardine, Craik emphasises that financial reward need not conflict with either artistic or moral integrity, and that there is no shame in having to earn a living. Responding to her half-sister Christal’s sneering comment that ‘there is a difference between an artist working for a livelihood, and an independent lady’, Olive replies: ‘There is a difference; but, to my way of thinking, it is on the side of those gifted by heaven, not those enriched by man’ (183). Though ‘gifted’, Olive’s talent, again like that of an author, must be honed through long years of practice.

Although Olive’s work proves commercially profitable, Craik clearly intends her to represent the serious painter, not merely the popular ‘woman artist’. Mitchell, however, believes that ‘Olive works specifically in women's art because she lacks the strength and the self-absorbed ego to scale the heights reserved for males’,¹ and Losano also suggests that

Olive is not moving in the high art circles but caters instead to a wealthy public. Vanburgh’s ‘High Art images of historical classical, or biblical subjects [are] [...] empty of life, value, or popular appeal [while] Olive’s art – sentimental, morally uplifting, and popular – represents woman’s art.’²

¹ Mitchell, p.108.

² Losano, p.193.

However, Vanburgh – intended to represent the great painter, as the sale of his ‘Alcestis’ to the discerning connoisseur Lord Arundale confirms – recognises Olive as ‘the child of his soul, to whom he would fain transmit the mantle of his fame’ (145), proving that she epitomises the exceptional artist. So too does the author’s comment on her ‘arduous’ training, which enables her to pass ‘from the mere prettiness of most woman-painters to the grandeur of sublimer Art’, and ‘make herself worthy of being ranked amongst those painters who are not of the passing hour, but for all time’ (127). The emphasis on Olive’s training contradicts the contemporary view of ‘her sex’s [...] want of perseverance’ (127) and the anxieties regarding anatomical study. In ‘A Paris Atelier’, (1886) an essay describing an art school for young women, Craik, though writing thirty-six years after *Olive*’s publication, still felt it necessary to report that the students’ serious work left them ‘unscathed’ and ‘without being unfeminised’.¹

As Losano notes, Olive’s alteration to her painting, ‘Charity’, to suit the request of the purchasers to have their sons, horse and hounds included in it, suggests it is not a masterpiece. However, ‘Charity’ is distinguished from her ‘Academy picture’ (141) which, it is implied, is intended for a more discriminating market. The title of ‘Charity’ may be an ironic comment on the *nouveaux riches* choosing to spend their wealth on ostentatious self-display, but it may also indicate that art can be a moral influence, in this case intended to evoke sympathy towards the poor. Art can thus be of value, not only financially and aesthetically, but also morally. Losano’s argument that Craik ‘use[s] the actions and productions of a woman painter to [...] negotiate the trials and rewards of novel-writing’, is persuasive, although, in underestimating the

¹ Craik, ‘A Paris Atelier’, *Good Words* (May, 1886), collected in *About Money*, pp.183-197 (p.196).

importance of Olive's art, it also underestimates Craik's belief in the serious purpose of the novel.¹

Olive's belief in her 'gift' makes it unlikely that the reader is intended to assume that she gives up her painting upon marriage, although it has been suggested that this is the case. Showalter's reading is that Olive 'lays down her brushes with a grateful heart',² Denisoff considers that she 'discards her artistic career',³ Foster writes that Olive 'readily gives up her independence',⁴ and Losano believes that her marriage 'effectively ends her artistic career.'⁵ Zakreski suggests that 'Craik portrays Olive's ideological self-negation in marriage', but she does allow that Olive's art may not be 'entirely abandoned' and that she and Harold are 'economic equals' in marriage'.⁶ The possibility of Olive's continuing career is, in fact, suggested in a number of ways. When Olive encourages Harold to fulfil his desire to study and teach abroad, she persuades him to allow her to use her income to provide a home for his mother and daughter, and to agree that 'they should both work together for their dearest ones' (322). This takes place before their marriage, and after Harold has regained his faith. Rivers misreads the text in suggesting that Olive proposes a 'domestic arrangement to allow her husband the space to resolve his religious doubts, whereby she would live apart from him and work as a painter'.⁷ Although Aunt Flora's legacy provides the financial security for them to marry, Olive's wish to 'work together' is not negated. Earlier in the novel, Craik emphasises the importance to Olive of fulfilling her

¹ Losano, pp. 207-8.

² Showalter, p.17.

³ Denisoff, p.167.

⁴ Foster, p. 62.

⁵ Losano, p.195.

⁶ Zakreski, p.82.

⁷ Rivers, p.129.

creativity – after ‘a season of rest’ from her work, she is described as ‘long[ing] to go back to it, and drink again at its wells of peace. For dearly, dearly she loved it still (263)’. After her marriage, her ‘artist-soul’ ‘drinks in’ the beautiful scene framed by the window of her home (325), suggesting that this may be recreated in her art. In the author’s comment that ‘it was a natural and womanly thing that, in her husband’s fame, Olive should almost forget her own’ (325), the qualifying ‘almost’ strongly suggests the possibility Olive’s continuing career.

Critics have similarly failed to understand the irony of the final scene, where Olive appears to take the subordinate role in contrast to her husband’s ‘fearless’ stance (331). Rivers, for example, suggests that ‘the novel ends with a tableau of extreme womanly submission. [...] Olive is [...] restrictively brought within a marriage which emphasises her extreme wifely deference.’¹ Foster considers that ‘the novel concludes with a purely stereotypical image’, although she does concede that ‘even in her wifely submission, [Olive] does not totally relinquish her power [...]; she skilfully ‘beguiles’ her husband into doing what she thinks best’.² As author and reader know, this ‘stereotypical’ image belies Olive’s superiority over her husband. She is stronger both morally and spiritually, is responsible for his religious and his financial restitution, and has ‘led him in the way she wished’ (322).

The possibility of marital happiness for Olive seems unlikely at the beginning of the novel, since she is deemed unmarriageable because of her deformity – a slight curvature of the spine. Feminist critics have interpreted Olive’s impairment as a

¹ Rivers, p.131.

² Foster, pp. 62-3.

symbol of women's powerlessness. Showalter, for example, writes that 'Olive is crippled first because she is a woman',¹ and more recently, Losano has suggested that, in *Olive*, Craik uses 'the disabled female character, as a 'window through which the reader can view the ideological problems of being a woman and a woman artist in Victorian England'.² This reading would be more persuasive if Olive had failed to become successful. Her deformity is a more complex symbol than such critics have allowed, since, although it appears to indicate incapacity, it is, in fact, enabling. Olive's development as an artist stems directly from a 'sense of personal imperfection, which she deemed excluded her from a woman's natural destiny, [but] gave her freedom in her own' (127). It is 'a woman's natural destiny' that is restrictive, not Olive's impairment, the author thus suggests. The feminist misreading perhaps stems from its confusion between deformity and disability. Showalter, for example, refers to Olive not only as 'crippled' but as 'lame',³ and Stoddard Holmes describes her as disabled⁴, but she is, in fact, able-bodied, physically strong, and able to endure 'arduous toil'(127). As Nadja Durbach points out, in the Victorian period, those with deformities were not considered disabled if they were able to work.⁵ Rivers acknowledges that Olive's deformity is enabling, but considers that this makes her a failure as a representative of women's work:

The representation of deformity as a licence for artistic activity is reactionary, in that Olive's liberation cannot automatically be considered an example to other women because her deformity makes her an exception.⁶

¹ Showalter, p.17.

² Losano, p.182.

³ Showalter, p.16.

⁴ Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, pp. 48-9.

⁵ Nadja Durbach, *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 1-33.

⁶ Rivers, p.129.

Craik uses Olive's deformity to justify her heroine's initial motivation to work, but, by showing that, despite it, she can achieve success in her vocation, as well as a happy marriage, she is not an exception, but a role-model for all women.

The emphasis in the first chapters of the novel, on the physical and emotional difference between Olive's parents – her father a 'stern' (22), 'tall [...] rugged' Scot (28), and her mother a 'delicate English beauty' (9), sweet-natured but superficial – seems at first to suggest that Olive's defect is the result of miscegenation. Juliet Shields considers that Craik is indeed engaging with contemporary theories regarding the supposed racial variances within the populations of the British Isles, and that *Olive* can be read as a 'contribution [...] to mid nineteenth century debates over the meanings of race and of Britishness'.¹ Robert Knox believed the Celts and Saxons to be two discrete races, not suitable for intermarriage, and, like Robert Chambers, was concerned with the 'improvement' of the human species.² As suggested in Chapter Two, both hypotheses thus had implications for the perception of physical impairment.³ The novel does not support such racial theories, as Shields suggests, but contests them in two distinct ways – by emphasising that Olive, far from being an aberration, is superior to both her parents, a healing influence, and, as Chandler describes, the 'inheritor of the nineteenth century's cultural and religious capital',⁴ and by stressing that physical appearance is far less important than inner character, thus warning against any form of prejudice based on bodily difference. Shields interprets Olive's deformity as having 'significance as a symbol of the potential dangers and

¹ Juliet Shields, 'The Races of Women: gender, hybridity, and national identity in Dinah Craik's *Olive*', *Studies in the Novel*, 39.3 (Fall, 2007), 284-301 (p.284).

² Robert Knox, *The Races of Men*, p.128; Robert Chambers, *Vestiges*, p.199.

³ See p. 157.

⁴ Chandler, p.173.

rewards of racial hybridization’, and her ‘hybridity’ as ‘embracing the peoples of England’s inner empire while marginalizing those from Britain’s more distant imperial possessions’.¹ However, it is clear from *The Half-Caste*, (1851), and from her sympathetic portrayal of mixed-race women in *Olive*, (as will be discussed later in this chapter), that Craik advocated integration, not marginalisation. Olive’s moral perfection also suggests that the author is aiming to challenge the contemporary stigma arising from the association of disability with sexual transgression. Although Olive’s deformity and Sybilla’s blindness are, perhaps, suggestive of the taint of Angus’s immorality, the novel emphasises the innocence of his wife and daughter.

While such metaphorical interpretations of Olive’s disfigurement are valuable, the novel can also be read as a *bildungsroman* of a woman coming to terms with physical impairment and the fear of its socially isolating consequences. As Stoddard Holmes suggests, characters like Olive are ‘not simply metaphors for the social impairment of “women in general”, or warnings for nondisabled women to be happy in their lot, but also sites for investigating and managing particular concerns about the bodies and feelings of actual disabled women’.²

Stoddard Holmes observes that, while the disabled female was generally used in melodrama as a site of emotional excess and frustration, Craik overturns this by making her heroine a model of self-control and moral strength. ‘This much more optimistic placement of disabled women in culture’, she argues, ‘is predicated on their being, or becoming, the polar opposites of the conventional melodramatic disabled

¹ Shields, p.289.

² Stoddard Holmes, p.7.

heroines'.¹ Olive's sudden realisation of her difference from other girls, when Sara explains to her that her 'defect' might 'signify [...] especially with men, who think so much about beauty' (67), is described poignantly but with restraint. It is the physically perfect female characters, the young Sybilla, Sara and Christal, who are 'melodramatic', and 'who are either killed off or mortified and rehabilitated'² while Olive attains the fulfilments of marriage and family associated with physical normality.

Although critics have tended to view Olive as she views herself, by suggesting that she is 'exempt from the aestheticizing gaze directed at [...] fellow female artists',³ it is important to realise that Olive's self-perception of unattractiveness is based on the views of the novel's most superficial characters, Sara and Angus. Chandler observes that Sara, 'the product of the conduct book [...] speaks the male gaze',⁴ but Sara underestimates Olive's appeal. All critical studies have ignored the highly eligible Lyle Derwent's infatuation with her. Described as handsome, 'sentimental, poetical' (178) and, eventually, very wealthy, he reveals his love as "a dream I had, all my boyhood through, of a beautiful, noble, winning creature, whom I revered, admired, and at last have dared to love. [...] You seemed to me then, and you seem now, the most beautiful creature in the whole world". (281)

Harold also tells Olive, "To me, you are all beautiful – in heart and mind, in form and soul" (323). His declaration is a response to Olive's sense of being "unworthy" of

¹ Stoddard Holmes, p.48.

² Stoddard Holmes, p.48.

³ Losano, p.180.

⁴ Chandler, p.177.

his love, ““because I have not beauty; and besides – I cannot speak it, but you know – you know!””

She hid her face, burning with blushes. The words and act revealed how deeply in her heart lay the sting which had at times tortured her her whole life through – shame for that personal imperfection with which Nature had marked her from birth, and which, though now so slight as to be forgotten in an hour by those who learned to love her, still seemed to herself a perpetual humiliation. (323)

Olive’s humiliating sense of ‘personal imperfection’, still troubling her as a successful artist, reflects how women are conditioned to value themselves according to their appearance. It is interesting that several critics believe that Olive’s deformity has ‘mysteriously disappeared’¹ by the end of the novel, as if it is impossible to conceive of a deformed heroine achieving marriage to an attractive hero. Kaplan finds inconsistency in what she describes as Olive’s ‘magical recovery’, in the passage above,² but, though Olive’s deformity is less noticeable in her adulthood, it is alluded to throughout the novel. Just as in real life, familiarity makes the physical impairment of others unimportant, so too does the reader cease to be concerned that Olive is not a conventionally beautiful heroine.

As a child, Olive is described, in a way suggestive of fairy tale, as ‘elfin’, ‘supernatural’ and having a ‘spectral air’ (23), thus giving the narrative a sense of universality and timelessness. At her birth, her deformity is linked with an ancient ‘curse’ which dooms all ‘golden-haired’ female Rothesays to ‘never prospere[r]’ but to die, ‘unmarried and young’ (11). Chandler observes how ‘fairy [...] united the discourses of literature and religion’, both using allegory to convey a deeper meaning.³

¹ See, for example, Foster, p.62.

² Kaplan, note re p. 323, *Olive*, p.383.

³ Chandler, p.184.

Craik avoids the potential danger of making religion seem like a variation of myth, however, by emphasising that the lifting of Olive's 'curse' in her eventual marriage and prosperity, is not achieved through magic, 'the buried ashes of dead Superstition' (38), but through faith. Evoking John Bunyan's spiritual allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the metaphorical weight of Olive's stooped posture is, like Christian's burden, lightened by religious belief. As Chandler notes, Olive's inherited house, Morningside, which looks towards mountain scenery, echoes Bunyan's House Beautiful and Delectable Mountains.¹ A sense of Olive's otherworldliness is also conveyed in Sybilla's prophetic dream of a 'little angel [...] with a green olive-branch in its hand', an image echoed throughout the novel, endowing Olive with the qualities of a religious, healing spirit (12).

Faith is central to Olive's character, giving her the strength to overcome her 'bitter pain' (74) when first realising the significance of her deformity, and inspiring her art. Her sense of worth as a 'living soul [...] on whom Heaven [...] looked – not like man, with scorn or loathing, but with a Divine tenderness' (69), challenges prejudice against those with physical impairment, and suggests that suffering can foster spiritual growth. Olive is not, however, as Maison suggests, a stereotypical 'young churchwoman'.² Although she finds a 'pureness' in the liturgy of worship, she tells Harold: "I do not set up the Church and its ministrations between myself and God. I follow no ritual, and trust no creed, except so far as I find it in the Holy Word" (211). Her words suggest that the church is more of a barrier to faith than an encouragement. Read in the context of her other writing on religion, it is clear that Olive represents Craik's own

¹ Chandler, p.189.

² Maison, p. 218.

interpretation of Christianity – non-sectarian, respectful of all faiths, or even none. As she writes in *An Unknown Country* (1887), with reference to Ireland,

I believe that men of all faiths – nay, even those poor souls who have no faith at all – ought to live together in brotherly peace, neither meddling with nor condemning each other; sure that God can manifest himself through the righteous of every creed, or no creed. ¹

Although June Sturrock includes *Olive* alongside Charlotte Yonge's *Heartsease* (1854) in her study of Catholic anti-heroines, as will be discussed later, she nevertheless acknowledges that Craik is 'far less partisan than Yonge',² and that her 'generalised and tolerant piety contrasts strongly with Yonge's concern with the true [Anglo]-Catholic spirit'.³ *Olive* succeeds in restoring Harold's faith because she represents an expansive, open-minded spirituality rather than a narrow, judgemental and unquestioning orthodoxy. It is this liberality that makes the religious aspect of *Olive* palatable to modern readers. Craik feels it necessary, in fact, to explain to her contemporary readership why she has chosen a religious subject for her novel, a decision she fears some might find 'most incongruous, most strange', or even a sign of 'irreverence' (223). In a digression from the narrative, coming after *Olive*'s re-examination of Harold's letters, Craik justifies her decision:

Yet, what is a novel, or, rather, what is it that a novel ought to be? The attempt of one earnest mind to show unto many what humanity is – ay, and more, what humanity might become; to depict what is true in essence through imaginary forms; to teach, counsel, and warn, by means of the silent transcript of human life. Human life without God! Who will dare to tell us, we should paint *that*? (224)

¹ Craik, *An Unknown Country* (London: Macmillans, 1887) p.4, first published in *English Illustrated Magazine*, from January, 1887.

² June Sturrock, 'Catholic Anti-heroines: Craik, Sewell and Yonge', *Women's Writing*, 11.1 (2004), 89-98 (p.93).

³ Sturrock, p.90.

The passage explains the guiding principle behind all Craik's work, a principle she reiterated in her claim that 'the modern novel is one of the most important moral agents of the community' ('To Novelists', 236). The novelist, she implies, is in a position to perform, or even replace, the role of priest – a role, it is suggested in *Olive*, which is failing to adapt to the complexities of the modern world. Through the persuasive text of Olive's letters, and through her heroine's artistic expression, Craik identifies with her heroine's assumption of such a role. Harold responds to the 'plain, reasonable words' (211) of Olive's argument against atheism, but she also convinces him of the importance of allegory, earlier denounced in his ridicule of the 'penny tract' (188).¹ Novel-writing is thus allied with Biblical allegory in its depiction of truth through 'imaginary forms'. Olive's art is inspired by her intuitive sense of a 'God mercifully revealed' (192) in human love and in her response to the beauty of nature:

She had never even heard of Wordsworth; yet, as she listened to the first cuckoo note, she thought it no bird, but truly 'a wandering voice' [...]. She had never heard of Art, yet there was something in the gorgeous sunset that made her bosom thrill. (38)

Craik thus suggests that art, literature and religion all come from the innate human longing to find the meaning of existence, and to express this quest through image, symbol and story. This alignment of faith and art makes *Olive* an interesting text in relation to Matthew Arnold's essay, 'The Study of Poetry' (1888). Arnold found the same connection, but believed that the arts would become a substitute for religion, pronouncing that 'most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry'. As Barbara DeConcini explains,

¹ Harold is referring to popular books of religious instruction for children.

Arnold thought that only art could address his society's widespread loss of confidence in religion, fostered by the rise of modern science. Humankind needed art [...] "to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us".¹

In *Olive*, the artistic impulse is a confirmation of, not a substitution for, belief, and it is this sense of religious certainty that perhaps most clearly distinguishes *Olive* from *Jane Eyre*, a novel with which it has been compared. Mitchell, for example, perhaps referring to Olive's deformity, suggests that 'the emotional power of *Olive* is the power of *Jane Eyre* 'twisted one degree tighter'.² Kaplan describes *Olive* as 'both a companion, and a counter-text to *Jane Eyre*'.³ Both novels feature a heroine who feels unattractive and isolated, who uses her artistic talent as a means of self-expression, and who finds love with a stern hero who is tormented by a secret, and humbled by injury in a fire. In both novels, a woman of West Indian origin is an emblem of secret shame, and a threat to the heroine's happiness. Kaplan suggests that

each novel provided a related but alternative blueprint for female subjectivity and survival – Olive's passive endurance of both rejection and violence seems offered as a direct contrast to Jane's self-styled 'heathen' resistance to personal, familial, and institutional tyrannies – a resistance judged by some of Brontë's contemporary critics as profoundly 'unchristian'.⁴

Chandler suggests that '*Olive*'s re-inscription of *Jane Eyre* was an attempt by a woman writer 'to recuperate both the female text and the female reader from the wilder excesses produced by "Jane Eyre fever"'.⁵ Craik's emphasis on Olive's endurance can certainly be read as a response to what Elizabeth Rigby described as Jane Eyre's

¹ Barbara De Concini, 'The Crisis of Meaning in Religion and Art', *The Christian Century* (March 1991), 223-326 (p.223). Quotation from Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R.H. Super (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1973), 161-188 (161).

² Mitchell, p.30.

³ Kaplan, Introduction to *Olive*, p. ix.

⁴ Kaplan, ix. The contemporary critic who judged Jane Eyre 'unchristian' was Elizabeth Rigby (Lady Eastlake) in her review of *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*. See footnote, p.210.

⁵ Chandler, 178.

‘personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit’.¹ However, Olive’s determination to achieve self-dependence is far from ‘passive’. Her acceptance of her perceived limitations strengthens her resolve to succeed, Craik suggesting that self-discipline is more liberating than rebellion. While Olive channels her frustrations into her vocation, Jane’s artistic ability remains undeveloped. Unlike Olive, she does not seek a professional life, and the novel ends with her being absorbed entirely into her role as wife. Craik wanted to show that a woman could be independent and strong-willed without being ‘unregenerate’, and that faith could inspire a ‘divine boldness’ (200). Ultimately, despite its strong sense of religious belief, *Olive* is the more radical text.

The Lost Sisterhood

In *Olive*, the heroine’s self-control is contrasted with the instability and violence of her half-sister Christal, and the illicit passion of Christal’s mother Celia. The two women are among those of Craik’s female characters whose behaviour places them outside her model of ideal womanliness, but who are nevertheless treated sympathetically. As the mistress of Olive’s father, and the mother of his child, Celia exemplifies the fallen woman, that most troubling of figures to the Victorian conscience, and one to which Craik devotes a chapter in *A Woman’s Thoughts*, in which, she explains, she is concerned with those who have ‘fallen out of the ranks of honest women, without sinking lower still’ (AWT, 288). Studies of Victorian attitudes towards sexuality confirm that Craik’s distinction between different levels of ‘fallenness’ was very unusual. Brenda Mothersole, for example, notes how

¹ Elizabeth Rigby, Review, p.173.

the term “fallen woman” was used indiscriminately by the Victorian middle-classes to describe any woman who had lost her chastity: the common prostitute, the kept woman, [...] the innocent victim of a single seduction – all were categorised under this single heading regardless of the finer identifiable personal and social differences between each group.¹

Vehemently dismissing potential criticism that it is ‘incorrect, indelicate, unfeminine’ (AWT, 295) for women to discuss the issue, Craik firmly rejects the binary stereotype of angel and whore, arguing that chastity is not the only virtue defining women. Not only can ‘other virtues [...] exist and flourish, entirely distinct from, and after the loss of [...] chastity’, but many ‘fallen’ women are ‘of the very best; refined, intelligent, truthful, affectionate’ (291). Craik challenges the notion of irredeemable ‘ruin’, and gives Biblical authority to her view, in suggesting that such women should be encouraged to rehabilitate into society without stigmatisation, as long as they ‘*sin no more*’ (303).² Perhaps referring to Gaskell’s ‘obedient and docile, [...] unsuspecting and innocent’ Ruth, she complains that contemporary fictional portrayals of unrealistically naïve ‘angelic sinners’ contribute little to serious debate about the issue (298).³ Craik’s own, more complex, characterisations prompt a more honest consideration of the problem and its causes.

In *Olive*, Celia’s mixed race and her role as artist’s model add further to her marginalised and tainted status. Like Brontë’s Bertha Rochester, both Celia and Christal unsettle the veneer of white middle-class respectability and bring the issue of imperial exploitation into the text. Craik’s treatment of race is quite different from

¹ Brenda Mothersole, ‘The Fallen Woman in the Victorian Novel’, in *Exploring Stereotyped Images in Victorian and Twentieth-century literature and society*, ed. John Morris (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1993), pp.189-230 (p.189). See also Kellow Chesney, *The Victorian Underworld* (London: Temple Smith, 1970).

² John, 8:1-11.

³ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth* (London: Penguin Classics, 1997), p.53.

Brontë's, however. As Kaplan observes, although Bertha is ambiguously described as a 'white Creole', she is consistently referred to in terms that suggest and disparage her as being 'racially other'.¹ Celia, however, is portrayed as 'a grand, beautiful woman' with 'the form of the ancient queens of the world' (129), a perfect model for Vanburgh's painting of Cleopatra. Kaplan points out that 'few Victorians continued to believe that the early Egyptians were black',² but Craik reminds the reader of the cultural heritage of the North African people, from whom Celia, her physical characteristics suggest, has descended. Brontë's description of Bertha as a 'clothed hyena' who 'grovel[s] on all fours', is degrading.³ In contrast, Craik's use of animal imagery suggests beauty and dignity. Although the bed of straw Celia sleeps upon in her poor but 'respectable' lodgings (129) is a symbol of her poverty, and a potent contrast with her representation in art, Olive's perception of her as a 'lioness' (130) in her protection of her child, and of her 'strange beauty [...] like that of a Pythoness' (131), evokes the wild animal that is, though caged, and suggestive of the white hunter's trophy, still noble and potentially dangerous. This threat is implied in Olive's observation that Celia's reclining posture is evocative of a painting of the 'Three Fates' (130). This may be a reference to Sebastiano Mazzoni's painting of that name (1670) where the reclining figure of Atropos holds the threads of life and destiny in her hand. Although her power is largely symbolic, Celia's significance in shaping Olive's destiny, through Christal, is conveyed in this analogy.

¹ Kaplan, introduction to *Olive*, xxii.

² Kaplan's note on *Olive*, p.378. Kaplan compares Craik's portrayal of Celia with Brontë's 'unsympathetic' description, in *Villette*, of a painting of a dark-skinned Cleopatra.

³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847; London, Norton: 2001), p.250.

Erin Obermueller suggests that the figure of the black model can be read as another form of colonisation: ‘Though Craik has separated the role of artist and lover, both are configured as colonisers in their use of Celia’s body’.¹ Olive and Sybilla also model for Vanburgh, however, which complicates the interpretation of the artist’s model as victim, and suggests that Craik is challenging the perception of modelling as a form of ‘fallenness’.² It is the ‘lover’, Angus, not the ‘artist’, who is primarily responsible for Celia’s ‘wrecked life’ (130) as is made clear in Celia’s account of her background:

I come from a country where are thousands of young maidens, whose blood, half-Southern, half-European, is too pure for slavery, too tainted for freedom. Lovely, and taught all accomplishments that can ennoble beauty, brought up delicately, in wealth and luxury, they yet have no higher future than to be the white man’s passing toy –cherished, mocked, and spurned. (131)

This damning condemnation of European men’s use of indigenous women carries a disturbing sense of eugenic ‘improvement’, where, as Craik’s precise classification of Celia as a ‘quadroon’ also suggests, generations of miscegenation have resulted in a species of women increasingly European in appearance and attainments, but without the expectation of marriage. The passage’s description of girls brought up to be pleasing to men, could also, however, apply to those who are white and British. Celia is thus not only a victim of imperialist oppression, but also represents the exploitation of all races of women. Angus describes Celia as ‘one of that miserable race, the children of planters and slaves, whose beauty is their curse, whose passion knows no law except a blind fidelity’ (272). His implied condemnation of such women’s ‘lawless’ passion conveys his hypocrisy, since it is not the result of an innate promiscuity – a widely held racial stereotype which Angus himself contradicts at the

¹ Erin Obermueller, ‘The Artist’s Model in mid-Victorian Women’s Fiction’, *Women’s Writing*, 11.1 (2004), 55-72 (p.65).

² See Obermueller for a discussion of the perception of modelling as linked with prostitution.

same time as he upholds – but of their being denied, by men like himself, legal protection for themselves and their children. The surname ‘Manners’ adopted by Celia, is an ironic comment on the superficial respectability of such men. Celia’s ‘blind fidelity’, though not sanctified by a legal marriage, is, Craik emphasises, more honourable than Angus’s deception and adultery.

Christal’s ‘heritage of shame’ (133) appears to place her, though innocent, beyond the parameters of virtuous womanhood, suggesting that fallenness is a taint passed from mother to child. Olive wonders if ‘some proud honourable man, however loving, would scruple to take [...] as a wife one whose erring mother had never known that name’ (276). Miss Meliora, who had initially ‘deeply sympathised’ (131) with the plight of the two women, is made to feel ‘ashamed and frightened’ of having taken on such a ‘doubtful *protégée*’ by ‘prudish hints given by good-natured friends’ (150). Although swiftly replaced by genuine sympathy, Miss Meliora’s initial response to Christal’s return is portrayed as foolishly hysterical, and the epithet ‘good-natured’ intended to be ironic. Like her mother, Christal is described in terms that suggest danger and disruption. Beneath the superficial elegance she acquires at a Parisian finishing school, she has a ‘tigress nature’ (294). Her unexpected return to the Vanburgh household takes place, symbolically, during a violent thunderstorm, later echoed in her ‘storm of rage’ directed at Olive (285).

Kaplan suggests that the fury exhibited by both Christal and her mother, although having ‘its source in real injustices’, is ‘obliquely coded as a racial trait’.¹ Sturrock similarly believes that Craik uses ‘racial difference [as] a mark of moral inferiority’.² Christal’s most attractive qualities, however, – her ‘fearless frankness, her exuberant spirits’ (176), are attributed to her ‘southern’ blood. It is not Christal’s race or illegitimacy that explains her flawed character, but her ‘haughty nature inherited from both father and mother’ (276). Her physical attack on Olive is provoked by two separate blows to her pride – her jealousy over Lyle’s love for Olive, and her discovery that she is not the legitimate daughter of nobility, as she had been led to believe. Craik emphasises the similarity between Christal and her father. Her sneering reference to Olive’s deformity, in her suggestion that only bewitchment could explain Lyle’s preference, echoes Angus’s humiliation of Olive: ‘Lifting her graceful, majestic height, she looked contemptuously on poor shrinking Olive, ay, as her father – the father of both – had done before’ (285). In her sister’s furious look, Olive sees ‘that of her own father [...] as she had seen him the night he had called her by that opprobrious word which had planted the sense of personal humiliation in her heart for life’ (284). Both Olive and her sister have thus suffered in different ways from the shame ‘planted’ within them by their father.

Craik guides the reader’s response to Christal through Olive’s. Her ‘shiver of instinctive repugnance’ (277) on learning that Christal is her half-sister, is not provoked by Christal herself, but by the knowledge of their father’s adultery, and is quickly replaced by a sense of pity and of ‘kindred blood’(277). Her wish to ‘soothe

¹ Kaplan, Introduction to *Olive*, xxiii.

² Sturrock, ‘Catholic anti-heroines’, p.93.

and win over' her sister's 'obdurate heart', even after she has been physically attacked by her, confirms that Christal's fury is justifiable, since, if made public, the 'bitter shame' of her parentage (294) would make her a social outcast. Her attempted suicide is not prompted by remorse for her violence towards Olive, but by her sense of humiliation at being 'nameless' (296). In Harold's report of the scene in which Christal is about to throw herself from the Pont Neully, the chaste Christal has so fully identified herself with the fallen woman that Harold mistakes her for such a 'poor wretch', the sight of whom elicits 'that pang, half shame, half pity which must smite an honest man to think how vile and cruel are some among his brethren' (298). There is a sense of sanctimonious prudishness in Harold's averted gaze, and in his earlier disapproval of Christal's being able to talk of her 'mother's shame [...] without one natural blush' (296). In Harold's interpretation of the distressed figure as the personification of 'Misery', and in the pictorial nature of the scene, Craik alludes to the popular use of the figure of the suicidal fallen woman in paintings of the period.¹

Christal's wish to retreat to a convent reveals her Catholicism, which she has until then kept secret, believing it to be another source of shame. Sturrock suggests that the novel associates Christal's 'religious choic[e]' with the lack of the self-control and self-denial' characterising Olive. This, she argues, is deliberately 'anti-Catholic',² with Christal's Catholicism presented 'as an additional, a final, marginalisation':

¹ For example, *Found Drowned* (1848-50), by G. F. Watts; *The River* (1849-50), by Hablot K Browne; *The Poor Girl Homeless, Friendless, Deserted, Destitute, and Gin-Mad Commits Self-Murder*, illustration from *The Drunkard's Children: a life ruined by alcoholism* (1848), by George Cruikshank. See Barbara T. Gates, *Victorian Suicides: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

² Sturrock, p.90.

Her religion [...] underlines her alien, unBritish, quality – it is the religion of her Caribbean mother and not the Scottish father she shares with Olive. Like her uncontrollable passions, her religion is associated with racial difference.¹

It is unlikely that Craik intended to align Catholicism with race, since the convent Christal enters is in Scotland. It is true that the novel conveys ‘mild contempt’² for the futility of convent life, but Catholicism is presented as a form of unnatural repression, the antithesis of ‘uncontrollable passion’. It is not the latter trait that suggests Christal’s Catholicism, but the self-loathing caused by her feeling of original sin. Kaplan suggests that Christal has been coerced into entering a convent,³ and Losano also believes that ‘Christal, to overcome her innate rage, must eventually take the veil to remove herself from society’.⁴ This view is negated by Olive’s reluctance to comply with Christal’s own wish to be ‘buried out of sight for evermore’ (329), and by the ‘rigid’ prevention of her taking vows. (326) Olive is determined to persuade her to live, instead, a ‘useful life, spent, not in barren solitude, but in the fruitful garden of God’s world’ (329). Although, in ‘On Sisterhoods’, Craik considers Anglican convents suitable for women unable to function independently, Olive’s negative view echoes the essay’s disapproval of the seclusion of Catholic orders.⁵ Olive’s open acknowledgement of her sister, and her insistence that she should not be marginalised, make clear that neither Christal’s race nor her illegitimacy is shameful.

Celia’s death conforms to the usual fate of the fictional fallen woman. ‘What happens to fallen heroines once their creators give voice to their experiences?’ Deborah Anna

¹ Sturrock, p.93.

² Sturrock, p.94.

³ Kaplan, *Olive*, Introduction, p.23.

⁴ Losano, p.186.

⁵ Craik, ‘On Sisterhoods’, p.148.

Logan asks, listing several examples of those who ‘suffer premature deaths’, including Gaskell’s Ruth, Esther in *Mary Barton*, and Eliot’s Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*:

Not one of these characters can be said to transcend the circumstances of her oppression, much less to become a self-actualised individual. What was true of eighteenth-century writers on the fallen-woman theme remains true a century later: “no author has yet been so bold as to permit a lady to live and marry, and be a woman after this strain”.¹

In her portrayal of Lydia in *A Life for a Life*, however, Craik provides a far more optimistic and radical solution. She is ‘bold’ enough, not only to permit her to live and marry, but also to work in a position of influence teaching other women. As discussed previously, her story – the commonplace tale of the naïve, pretty maidservant seduced by the sophisticated ‘gentleman’ – is transformed into a powerful excoriation of the hypocrisy of the double standard, epitomised by Francis Charteris’s blasé faithlessness, and Reverend Johnston’s unforgiving self-righteousness. In parallel with the revelations of Max Urquhart’s past, Lydia’s fall is used as an illustration of the desirability of forgiveness and rehabilitation based on Christian principles, reinforced by the inclusion of relevant New Testament texts unequivocally supporting the author’s view. Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, published in 1859, the same year as *A Life for a Life*, is, as Chandler observes, far more conservative in its treatment of the figure:

The fallen woman was something of a mid-century fetish and one expects to find her outcast body as a model for the new Christianity with its social emphasis. Few, however, rewrote domesticity and indeed the social body more generally around the impure woman, let alone the convicted murderer. George Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, for instance, *A Life’s* rival in lending library popularity in 1859, expels Hetty Sorrel

¹ Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women’s Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), pp. 25-26. Quotation from Jane Flanders, ‘The Fallen woman in Fiction’, in *Feminist Visions: Toward a Transformation of the Liberal Arts Curriculum*, ed. Diane L. Fowlkes and Charlotte S McClure (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984), pp. 97-109 (p.106).

from the social body. But for Craik, atonement demands the 'living sacrifice', and thus the reincorporation of the transgressive body.¹

Robert A. Colby does not include *A Life for a Life* in his study of Craik's and Eliot's treatment of the fallen woman, but instead makes a comparison between *Adam Bede* and *A Woman's Thoughts*, suggesting that 'there is evidence that George Eliot may have drawn upon the earlier established writer for part of the plot of her first novel'.² Craik's chapter on 'Lost Women' includes a short narrative, which is, as Colby notes, essentially a résumé of the story of Hetty Sorrel, the 'illiterate village lass, who thinks it so grand to be made a lady of – so much better to be a rich man's mistress, than a working man's ill-used wife or rather slave' (*AWT*, 293). The narrative continues with the girl's concealed pregnancy, infanticide and imprisonment. The relevant passages, Colby suggests, 'read so much like the outline of Hetty's tragedy (including the cause of her temptation, the motive for her crime, the ministrations offered by Dinah Morris, and her eventual reprieve), [...] that it is difficult to believe that Eliot did not make use of them'. Despite acknowledging that *A Woman's Thoughts*, 'far from echoing moral commonplaces, was intended to shock sheltered maidens and their mothers out of complacency' and 'displays a liberality of attitude' with its 'special plea for enlightened treatment [...] of "fallen" women', Colby concludes his essay by labelling it 'a tissue of platitudes'.³

The character of Lydia can also be seen as a partial development of the story within *A Woman's Thoughts*, and is used as a means of illustrating its message more fully.

¹ Chandler, p.197.

² Robert A. Colby, 'Miss Evans, Miss Mulock, and Hetty Sorrel', *English Language Notes*, 2 (1965), 206-21 (p.207).

³ Colby, pp.210; 207;211.

Lydia is only fourteen when she becomes a servant in the Johnston household, but her mature beauty attracts Francis's attention, her head is 'turned' by his admiration, and, by the age of nineteen, she has become his mistress and mother of his child. Dora, believing that closer guidance may have made her servant less naïve and vulnerable, and thus feeling partly responsible for her fall, gives her the 'individual', rather than institutional, 'help' advocated in *A Woman's Thoughts* (AWT, 309), and, with Max's support, facilitates her training as a teacher of female prisoners. In Max's report on Lydia's successful fulfilment of the role, which remarks on the prison governor's judging her 'quite fitted for the situation', Craik deliberately uses language at odds with the usual representation of the 'ruined' woman: "It is good to see her sweet, grave looks, her decent dress and mien, and her inexpressible humility and gentleness toward everybody" (329). The emphasis on Lydia's suitability as a teacher contrasts with a contemporary review of Gaskell's *Ruth*, which, as Jill L. Matus notes, expressed disapproval of a 'spotted woman' working as a governess.¹ Perhaps, as Lydia is working with prisoners, reviewers may have considered the danger of such contamination less important. Lydia is not over-sentimentalised, however. Craik intends the reader to understand that she comprehends the consequences of her actions. She is not the victim of a single seduction but a 'kept woman', aware of Francis's engagement to her former mistress.

Reverend Johnston's wish to drive Lydia and her child from the parish, in order to excise their 'corrupting' influence, would have condemned Lydia to starvation or a life of prostitution. Lydia's physical weakness indicates to Dora that she has 'preferred to

¹ Jill L. Matus, *Unstable Bodies: Victorian representations of sexuality and maternity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 113-130 (p.126).

starve', and her devotion to her child is another mark of her innate virtue. As Logan points out, with reference to Gaskell and Barrett Browning, 'fallen women acquire moral stature by their refusal to descend into prostitution and especially by their devotion to their children; neither infanticide nor abandonment is a consideration for them'.¹ Through Dora's intervention, in defiance of her father's reprimand that 'delicacy' should 'teach [her] better' than even to discuss the matter, (320) the novel challenges false notions of impropriety which discourage women from confronting the consequences of the double standard and from helping its victims, described in *A Woman's Thoughts* as the 'lost sisterhood' (299).

Although Francis's disgrace in the eyes of society is that of his unpaid debts, for which he is imprisoned, the novel emphasises that his punishment and his subsequent poverty and loss of status are to be understood as retribution for his sexual immorality – he and Lydia must both undergo equal penance in order to reinforce the principle of a single moral standard. His marriage to a former servant allows Craik to comment on the relationship between the double standard and class. It was considered acceptable for a man to have an illicit relationship with a woman of a lower class since she was of less 'value'. As Logan argues:

Despite public outcry against them, prostitutes were clearly integral to the Victorian social structure. Some clergymen even argued that prostitution was necessary.[...] The results of this dynamic are most commonly dramatized by middle and upper-class males' seduction of working-class girls, whom they subsequently abandon in poverty and disgrace [...]. In this way [...] the purity of respectable women and the sanctity of the middle-class nuclear family are preserved, the sacrifice of lower-class girls and women being a small price to pay for ensuring the dominant culture's perpetuation.²

¹ Logan, p.31.

² Logan, pp. 18-19.

Francis's marriage is not a sign of ignominy, but of equality between himself and Lydia, who is, in fact, 'a better wife than he deserves' (356). Elizabeth Langland suggests that the popular eighteenth-century courtship plot of the young servant-girl marrying her master, introduced by Samuel Richardson, 'disappears from the novel' in the nineteenth century: 'the classes do not intermarry in nineteenth-century fiction'.¹ Craik's novels prove the exception. Inter-class marriage features not only in *A Life for a Life*, but in *Parson Garland's Daughter* (1867), another story of a young servant seduced by a man from a higher class, and in which their marriage is deemed appropriate and eventually successful. Similarly, in *A Low Marriage* (1856), the squire's son makes a happy marriage with a 'common village girl'.²

Craik's portrayal of Lady Caroline Brithwood in *John Halifax*, indicates that the consequences of transgression could be as devastating for a woman of a high social class as they were for a maidservant. Although Caroline is used to represent the licentiousness of the aristocracy, she is also, unlike her male counterparts, a figure of pathos, her kindness towards Ursula and to her servants, evidence of a good nature warped by a marriage in which she suffers the 'brutality' and 'tyranny which the law sanctions' (284). Her adulterous affair with the callous Vermilye, who, she wrongly believes, is the 'only living soul that loves me' (287), is conveyed as being understandable, though not excusable. Mascarenhas considers her 'an escape artist [who] escapes from her father [...], husband [...], then her lover', then, 'in an act of charity [...] or violence, or both' is 'ke[pt] [...] quiet' by John, 'until she dies'.³

¹ Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels*, pp.1-2.

² Craik, 'A Low Marriage', *National Magazine* (November, 1856), collected in *Nothing New: tales* (1857).

³ Mascarenhas, p.265.

Caroline is not, however, restricted by John, whose warning about Vermilye's character she ignores, and whose family rescue and care for her when she is made helpless by insanity. She is the victim of social mores abhorrent to John, unable to free herself from the restraint and hypocrisy of patriarchy. While Vermilye, having abandoned her, can go on to make a highly respectable marriage to a 'youthful and beautiful' bride (454), his former lover can never escape the stigma of her divorce. In two earlier novels, as discussed below, insanity is used as a metaphor for deluded passion, but Caroline's madness is primarily symbolic of her own moral decay and that of the aristocracy. Her humiliation on the streets of Norton Bury, as she makes a spectacle of herself rouged and dressed in the flimsy finery of her youth, evokes the parading of the French nobility during the reign of terror, and is emblematic of the public shame suffered by the errant woman of her class.

The state of fallenness, Logan suggests, could be applied to any woman 'not manifesting the marriage-and-motherhood domestic ideal'.¹ Two of Craik's early novels contain heroines who exemplify this – though not technically fallen, they are consumed by destructive passion. Katharine Ogilvie (*The Ogilvies*, 1849) and Rachel Armstrong (*The Head of the Family*, 1852) are akin to later sensation heroines in their defiance of the conventions of Victorian womanhood, and in their desire to exact revenge on the male sex. Winifred Hughes writes that sensation novels were 'unheard-of before 1860', but Craik's two novels contain between them many of the genre's characteristics – bigamy, false identity, illicit passion, and insanity.² Both Katharine and Rachel are complex and equivocal heroines – intelligent, idealistic, virtuous, but

¹ Logan, p.16.

² Winifred Hughes, 'The Sensation Novel', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 260-278 (p.260).

also deluded, unstable and dangerous, their limited experience making them vulnerable to male seduction. Both become infatuated with an older, sophisticated man unworthy of their idolisation, because they are ‘utterly ignorant of the realities of life’ (*The Ogilvies*, 6), have ‘no one to direct [them] – not one living soul’ (18), have developed an over-idealised vision of masculinity through reading romantic literature, and have no other outlet for their ‘enthusiasm, passion and tenderness’ (3). Both women strive to improve themselves to make themselves more desirable to the men they ‘worship’, and from whom, they believe, they can ‘learn wisdom, excellence, truth’ (28). Katharine ‘practised every graceful accomplishment that might make her more winning in his sight [...]. She gloried in her resistless charms, her talents, and her beauty, since they were all for *him!*’ (173), and Rachel, who considers Geoffrey Ulverston “‘like a god compared with me’”, declares that “‘all things I ever knew he taught me, or I learned them for his sake’” (*The Head of the Family*, 56). That both women are far superior to the men they idolise makes their motives for self-improvement degrading and indicative of lack of self-esteem, yet, it is implied, this is how all women are conditioned to think.

Katharine’s misinterpretation of Paul Lynedon’s affectionate manner towards her as love, can be explained by her youthful naivety, but, in an authorial aside, Craik castigates the ‘selfish vanity’ of men who carelessly mislead women, a ‘sin’ second only to physical seduction: ‘yet man does both towards woman, and goes smiling back into the world, which smiles at him again!’ Such disillusionment can make of women ‘either a noble martyr-heroine, or [...] fallen angel’ (*The Ogilvies*, 225). Katharine becomes the latter. Realising she has been misled, her desire to wreak revenge not just on Paul, but on the male sex in general – ‘to drive men mad with her beauty’ (236) –

suggests an awareness that she is a victim of patriarchal conditioning, and a recognition of the very limited ways in which its power could be subverted. Katharine chooses one such way, in acting as a *femme fatale*. The description of her as a ‘bewitching’ (298) mythical temptress, by whom men are ‘content to be driven in chains, like wild tigers harnessed to the car of some Amazonian queen’ (303), supports Jennifer Hedgecock’s observation that ‘elements of mythical and historical women influence traits of the mid-century *femme fatale*’, who is ‘part of [an] evolving assertiveness on the part of women’:

By characterising the *femme fatale* as a specific danger to men, sensation novels of the 1860s implicitly suggest the degree to which an independent woman is viewed as a threat to the fabric of Victorian culture.¹

Katharine’s dominance over her amiable but dull husband Hugh can be read as such a threat, subverting the conventional model of feminine behaviour. Though considered ‘a good match’ (172) by family and society, the marriage, which she had earlier rejected, is a calculated, cynical transaction, allowing her to ‘inflict’ the ‘tortures of love’ that she herself has suffered (235) and to establish herself in society, thus ensuring that Paul hears of her ‘beauty’ and ‘talent’ and regrets his choice (225). When, on the eve of her wedding, she insists they will live in London against Hugh’s own inclination, Katharine is not the conventional blushing, tremulous bride, eager to please her husband, but a hard and domineering woman who ‘rules him with a rod of iron’ (236). It is in the description of this unsatisfactory marriage that the novel is perhaps most radical. Its misery – ‘the daily burden of a loveless, unequal yoke – the petty jars’ (305) – is, as Foster comments, described with ‘chilling perceptiveness’.² Katharine’s cousin Isabella’s wedding elicits another cynical authorial comment - it

¹ Jennifer Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: the danger and the sexual threat* (New York: Cambria, 2008), p. 5; p.3.

² Foster, p.54.

was ‘as outwardly gay, and inwardly gloomy as most weddings are’ (179). The ‘mocking semblance of a happy home’ where, after Paul reappears, an illicit relationship develops, is typical of the sensation novel’s exposure of the sham of respectable domesticity, as is the portrayal of a loveless marriage as a ‘fearful precipice’ (305), dangerous because love may be sought elsewhere. Although Katharine does not commit adultery, believing it would ‘destroy her soul’, her conscience tells her that ‘even an erring marriage vow becomes sacred for ever; and that to break it, though only in thought, is a sin’ (321). Craik is thus careful to avoid using unhappiness as an excuse for adultery, a common feature of sensation novels, and one of which she disapproved:

Novelists seize upon it as a dramatic position, and paint it in such glowing, tender and pathetic colours, that absorbed in the pity of the thing, we quite forget its sin.¹

Noting the significance of a quotation from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ‘voicing the spirit of rebellion’ at the start of the chapter ‘which describes [Katharine’s] vengeful resolve to defy normal womanliness’,² Foster considers that ‘Katharine’s passionate wilfulness is injuriousness to herself and others, yet it leads her to self-knowledge’.³ However, although Katharine feels powerful, ‘victoriou[s]’, and ‘exult[ant]’, (321) in fulfilling her desire to ‘to make [Paul] feel what she had herself felt – to drive him mad for her sake’ (306), her sense of ‘triumph’ (320) is illusory because she is still being controlled by her feelings for him, and her now-requited love is self-destructive, a ‘delicious poison’ (321). After Hugh’s death, Katharine suffers remorse for her cruelty, but her marriage to Paul indicates her continuing misplaced adulation. She is

¹ Craik, ‘On Novels and Novel Makers’, *Good Words*, (May, 1881); collected in *Plain Speaking* (1882) p.179

² Foster, p.61, referring to Chapter XXX, p.223.

³ Foster, p.61

allowed only a few hours of married (but unconsummated) happiness before she dies from heart disease, a somatic representation of her emotional pain and damaging love. The name acquired on this marriage, and carved on her gravestone – Katharine Lynedon – is so close to that of the heroine of *Wuthering Heights*, that it suggests Craik was deliberately inviting a comparison. The idea of an elemental passion between twin souls is deflated, however, since the reader has already been told that Paul's infatuation had been intensified by Katharine's unavailability. He does not haunt the graveside but immediately goes abroad, to seek, it is hinted, 'reckless pleasure' (431). Although Katharine's death can be read as a punishment for having come near to adultery and for her cruelty to Hugh, it is more likely that Craik intended it as a fitting end to a wasted life, in which deluded passion for an unworthy man has become its 'very essence' (239).

Katharine's passion is described as a kind of insanity – “it drove me mad” (407). The analogy is made more strongly in the character of Rachel Armstrong whose doomed relationship with Ulverston propels her into psychosis. Showalter's view that madness was considered a largely 'female malady' in the Victorian period is not, however, supported in Craik's novels.¹ The religious fanaticism of Rachel's cousin, the Presbyterian preacher John Forsyth, is also portrayed as madness provoked by an equally 'frantic passion' (52), and, in *A Brave Lady* Edward Scanlan descends into a 'lunacy' symbolic of his moral weakness. Rachel's distress is more justifiable than Katharine's. Her secret marriage to Ulverston, and his subsequent desertion, leaves her in an indeterminate 'state of suspense' (74). The reader is encouraged to believe

¹ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (New York, Pantheon, 1985).

that the marriage is not legal, and that her fixated longing for her supposed husband's return is a symptom of the 'extraordinary mental delusions' (65) of a weak woman who has been seduced and abandoned. Her mental state, characterised by withdrawal and silence, can be read as a symbol of women's enforced passivity and lack of voice, and her obsessive listening for Ulverston's return from the outside world, from within her walled retreat, as an exaggeration of traditional wifely behaviour. When questioned about her marital status, her brief, fierce outburst of 'uncontrollable passion' (22) suggests suppressed anger, interpretable perhaps, like Bertha Mason's madness, as a metaphor for female rebellion.¹ Rachel is treated far more sympathetically than Bertha, however. Ninian Graeme provides the moral compass of the novel, and, although he believes Rachel fallen and delusional, he treats her with respect and admiration, as 'a woman of cultivated mind, and as true a *lady* as any I know' (40). Like Katharine, Rachel's idealistic notions of romance are based on literature. She identifies herself with Shakespearean and other heroines of drama and myth, including Clytie the water nymph, whose 'adoration' of the Sun when at last reciprocated, brought 'content [...] even if his brightness had scorched it to death' (56). The portrayal of Rachel's self-abasing veneration of her 'master' (44) was, Alfred Habegger suggests, a significant influence on Emily Dickinson. She was 'deeply impressed' by the novel which 'had given form' to her fear of male sexual dominance and being 'yielded up' by self-destructive desire. The novel 'brought Emily's predicament to life in the richly imagined Rachel Armstrong', and the notion of the heroine whose 'tragic victimhood is also her glory' is used in some of Dickinson's poems.²

¹ See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth century imagination* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1978).

² Alfred Habegger, *My Wars are Laid Away in Books: the Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Modern Library (2001), pp.414-5 (p.414); pp. 277-8 (p.277)).

For much of the novel, Rachel herself believes she is fallen, after receiving a dismissive letter from Ulverston telling her the marriage was not legal. The stigma of shame is conveyed in Ninian's view of the letter as a 'death-warrant – nay, the doom of worse than death' (171). Paradoxically, however, it is the acceptance of this 'death' that brings Rachel back to life, rousing her from her apathy, and provoking a desire for revenge on all men. Her transformation into a famous actress, a woman of 'power and grandeur' (77), so different from her former pitiful persona, can be seen as a triumphant emergence from insanity, but the roles which make her famous, for example Bianca in Milman's *Fazio*¹ are those which mirror her own experience, and this continual enactment of her betrayal can be read as an obsessive compulsion, an inability to free herself from Ulverston's control. As Habegger observes, Rachel 'makes herself into a great actress precisely by remaining painfully faithful to the "master" who has trifled with her'.² Her role as an actress does allow Rachel self-expression, however. As Kerry Powell writes,

a life in the theatre offered women a voice – the ability to speak compellingly while others, including men, sat in enforced silence, waiting in suspense for the next word. Actresses could be intoxicated by their control over audiences, in particular over men, who in most other situations reserved power for themselves and compelled women to silence.³

Craik conveys this sense of 'control' in Rachel's performances, where she holds the emotions of the audience 'in her hand'. The public nature of her role compromises her respectability, however. Ninian is at first shocked to discover Rachel is the feted 'Mrs. Armadale' and 'wished she had become a poverty-stricken drudge [...], anything but

¹ Henry Hart Milman, *Fazio* (Oxford: Samuel Collingwood, 1815).

² Habegger, p.415.

³ Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 3-63 (p.3).

an actress' (336). His dismay reflects the contemporary view that 'actresses, virtually by definition, lived and worked beyond the boundaries of propriety':

Victorians were deeply suspicious of women whose livelihood depended on skills of deception and dissembling, and the circumstances of actresses' work belied any pretences to sexual naivety.¹

Rachel's appearance, like that of a pre-Raphaelite artist's model, encourages the 'association between actress and prostitute',² not only because of the model's equally dubious status, but through the frequent representation of the fallen woman in pre-Raphaelite art. She is a 'stunner', (334) with 'marvellous eyes shining out from under her heavy hair – that would have driven a painter wild with its rich red tint' (52). However, although Craik comments on the precariousness of Rachel's reputation, through the attention she attracts from disreputable men, her heroine remains virtuous. Her cynicism and experience make her, in fact, *less* vulnerable because she is immune to charm and flattery. Her cold dismissal of the 'offer' of becoming the mistress of a married man is a scathing comment on the male perception of the female performer:

"You adore me", said Rachel, with the most freezing indifferent politeness. "So many have told me, so did my lover in the play last night. You seem to be imitating him now [...]. [O]blige me by seeing in me only the actress, and not again interfere with the private life or private feelings of the woman." (356)

The passage supports Powell's view that the actress was perceived as 'a renegade female, one fundamentally different from normative wives and mothers'.³

¹ Tracey C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 3-23 (p.3); pp. 78-85.

² Davis, p.19.

³ Powell, p.3.

Foster suggests that Craik exhibits ‘a characteristically Victorian suspicion of actresses’, and ‘solves the problem by finally removing her heroine to a lunatic asylum, after a mental breakdown’.¹ As the novel and a later essay, ‘Merely Players’ (1886), make clear, however, Craik believed that the ‘truly great actor’ – and she includes several women in this category – ‘is [...] among the best benefactors of society’.² Ninian’s initial disapproval is quickly replaced by a sense of Rachel’s inspiring power ‘over the highest moral consciousness and most refined emotions of the soul’ (336). Rachel’s ‘chosen career’, Foster believes, is ‘the embodiment of her defiantly imaginative spirit’ with ‘Craik admir[ing] (even if she also fears) her passionate individuality which is so much more striking than the angelic meekness of [...] Hope’.³ It is not Rachel’s success as an actress Craik ‘fears’ – on the contrary, the novel celebrates her talent – but the *lack* of individuality and self-worth that inspires and eventually destroys it. Rachel’s second decline into a more ‘gentle’ (488) but permanent insanity is not a way for Craik to ‘solve the problem’ of this career, but is an indication that Rachel has never recovered from her initial delusion that Ulverston was worth ‘the love which had been the sole passion, aim, and ruin of her life – its beginning and its end’ (491). Ulverston’s acknowledgement on his deathbed, that Rachel is his true wife, turns her once more into the passive wraith waiting for his return. Her life is ‘ruined’, not through loss of chastity, but by a demeaning self-sacrifice, a quality that was anathema to Craik, as is clear from the many times she criticised the supposed virtue throughout her career. The response to women exhibiting this trait, she wrote, should not be ‘What a martyr!’ but ‘What a fool!’ (‘Concerning Men’, 25).

¹ Foster, p.64.

² Craik, ‘Merely Players’, *Nineteenth Century* (September, 1886), collected in *Concerning Men*, pp. 162-182.

³ Foster, p.64.

When Rachel's marriage is eventually proved legal, it is the innocent and demure Hope Ansted, portrayed throughout the novel as Rachel's opposite, who suddenly takes on the role of fallen woman, since she is bigamously married to Ulverston and is the mother of his illegitimate child. The novel thus challenges the notion of fallenness as an absolute, and questions whether it depends solely on the lack of a marriage certificate. Does the reader's perception of the moral character of both women instantly change simply because of the discovery of a piece of paper? Hope has effectively been sold to pay off her father's debts and save his reputation, and the novel emphasises that the marriage would still have been morally false even if technically legal. Hope's shock at discovering the truth is followed by relief that her child is illegitimate and thus legally free from its father's control. This echoes Craik's radical view in *A Woman's Thoughts* that the illegitimate children of immoral men should thank their mothers for allowing them to grow up without a father. Such a mother 'might give a son as much pride in her, and in the nameless parentage which he owes her, as in any long lawful line. [...] Even a daughter might live to say [...], "it has been better for me, at least, than if you had married my father"' (AWT, 311).

In her portrayals of 'lost women' Craik challenges the Victorian fixation with chastity as a woman's defining virtue and demands that the quality be deemed equally important in men. It is not the kept mistress or the unmarried mother who is irredeemably ruined, but the apparently respectable woman who marries for wealth and position, and allows an immoral man to become the father of her children.

Many a well-reputed British lady is as much a “lost” woman as any poor seduced creature whose child is born in a workhouse, or strangled at a ditch-side. (*AWT*, 288)

Thus, it is Letty Vanderdecken, in *The Woman’s Kingdom*, and Bella Jardine, in *Young Mrs. Jardine*, not Celia or Lydia, who are, in Craik’s eyes, the truly fallen.

Conclusion

Craik's judgement on the relative morality of the fallen woman and the 'well-reputed' wife is typical of the way in which she unrelentingly lifted the veneer of Victorian righteousness to expose the hypocrisy beneath. Her re-envisioning of a society in which men and women were measured (but not irredeemably condemned) by a single moral standard, in which both were educated to become self-reliant, employable individuals, were able to achieve professional success regardless of class or wealth, and, if choosing to marry, did so with the expectation of an equal partnership based on 'a unity of interests' (*For Better for Worse*, 29) – in other words, to suggest that the requirements for virtue and fulfilment were essentially the same for both sexes – is striking at a time when 'both character and sexuality were seen in more sharply gendered terms than ever before or since'.¹ In repeatedly blurring these arbitrary boundaries, Craik's work suggests a reconfiguration that would allow women to break free from the assumption that they were to be 'wives or nothing', (*AWT*, 344) would consequently lighten the 'continual burden' of financial responsibility for men, (*About Money*, 7) and, rather than discouraging marriage, would have an entirely positive impact on an institution damaged by the privileging of patriarchy.

There is scarcely a topic of importance upon which Craik did not challenge the mainstream, conservative viewpoint – each considered with her characteristic clear-sighted, highly principled, yet unbigoted scrutiny, Whether writing about war, penal reform, race, disability, religion, marriage, parenting, or gender and social inequality, her distinctive voice, inspired by a desire to 'make the world a little more level' (*Little*

¹ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p.46

Lame Prince, 61), is the expression of a woman's thoughts resonating over a period of more than forty years, and still relevant today.

It is difficult to reconcile the exponent of such progressive and forthright opinions with the image constructed by feminist critics, of a novelist who 'celebrated the domestic, the bourgeois, and the conventional',¹ a misreading repeated in recent evaluations in which Craik is again described as 'bourgeois', 'partisan' and 'naïve'.² It is regrettable that such misrepresentations serve to make Craik appear uninteresting to the modern reader, when her cogent writing on such a broad range of issues – not only weighty subjects, but on other, less contentious, aspects of contemporary life and culture – makes her a valuable and prolific resource not only for research into mid-Victorian literature, but for more general studies of the period. That Craik utilised both periodical and novel to explicate, reiterate and bring to life her ideas, gives an added dimension to her work, allowing a deeper insight into the motivation behind it, and revealing her skill in exploiting the power of print across genres. Although this thesis has focused on Craik's novels and essays, it should be remembered that Craik was also a prolific poet, travel writer, and author of stories for children. Her contribution to these fields is worthy of greater attention.

George Eliot's condescending dismissal of Craik as belonging to 'an entirely different order of writers' from herself, 'read only by novel-readers pure and simple, never by people of high culture',³ has been quoted in many of the studies of Craik's work, but

¹ Showalter, p.5

² Lowe, p.179; p.182. See page 169 for full quotation.

³ See p. 33.

never challenged. The sense of an empathetic relationship with both readers and fictional characters perceptible in Craik's writing, is indeed very different from the tone of detachment and social and intellectual superiority in Eliot's narrative voice. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, Craik's demystifying of the domestic, and perceptive and well-informed interest in issues beyond its sphere, has little in common with the 'lady novelists' from whose 'silliness' Eliot was at such pains to distance herself.¹

An obituary in *The Academy* (October 1887), describing Craik's novels as being 'more widely read than are the productions of any other writers after Dickens',² confirms that her strategy to attract a broad readership was successful, but, as suggested above, her popularity should not be misinterpreted as signifying a lack of intellectual depth. Her writing, though clear and accessible, has an elegance and eloquence that must surely have appealed to the more highbrow reader. As Lynn M. Alexander points out, 'the respect with which she was held in her lifetime is indicated by the membership of the committee [...] formed to place a memorial for her at Tewkesbury Abbey, including Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning, T. H. Huxley, Sir John Everett Millais, Mrs. Oliphant, and Lord Tennyson'.³

It is, however, the sense of shared experience with her readers, the 'vivid pictures' of everyday life (*War-sparkles*, 100), the insight into the concerns and aspirations, pretences and prejudices of ordinary people, that gives Craik's work such a unique

¹ Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review*, October 1856.

² Quoted in introduction to *John Halifax, Gentleman*, p.24.

³ Lynn Alexander, introduction to *John Halifax*, p.23.

quality of authenticity, conveying the sense of travelling through the Victorian world, in a second-class railway compartment, with a wise, well-informed and good-humoured companion.

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