

**Life Writing in the Midlands Dissenting Circle of**

**Elizabeth Heyrick (1769-1831)**

**and**

**Susanna Watts (1768-1842):**

**‘We preserve the best part of departed friends’**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of**

**Master of Philosophy**

**University of Leicester**

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**February 2018**

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**Abstract**

Close friends Elizabeth Heyrick (1769-1831) and Susanna Watts (1768-1842) were active members of a dissenting network that spread across the midlands during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. As political activists their writings represented a powerful voice in the campaign to abolish slavery, providing a rallying point for the direction of women’s anti-slavery networks. Their writings encompassed a range of genres, from poetry and religious texts through to political pamphlets and works against animal cruelty. The dissenting families and communities they were part of held strong life writing traditions, recording their histories across generations, and as both public and private figures, Heyrick and Watts were the subjects of various contemporary accounts. In this thesis I situate Elizabeth Heyrick and Susanna Watts firmly within their social, cultural, religious and geographical milieu, looking not so much at how they fashioned themselves in their writings, as the processes by which their identities were crafted and created for posterity by their families, friends and admirers. The starting point of the research is a collection held in the Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, which comprises an eclectic and remarkable selection of documents, from published material to manuscript memoirs. By examining the collection itself, how it came to be preserved and the cultures and traditions that led to its creation, we are able to uncover the processes by which Heyrick and Watts’ lives were shaped by their community; both how they were remembered and how they were forgotten. In these records, Heyrick as rebellious daughter looms just as large as the famous abolitionist campaigner of public record. In the life writing practices of this dissenting circle, we find not only a portrait of life within the community at this period, but a model of the complex ways in which diverse forms of life writing can work together to craft a form of communal identity.

## **Acknowledgements**

The research for this thesis was conducted as part of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award, held jointly between the Schools of English and History at the University of Leicester, and the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

I am deeply grateful to my primary supervisor, Dr Felicity James, for her unwavering support, insightful guidance and continued faith in me, which went far above and beyond anything I could have expected. It has been a great privilege, and wonderful experience, to work with her throughout this project. Without her kind help this work would not have been possible. Many thanks are also due to my secondary supervisor Professor Roey Sweet in the School of History, to whom I am extremely grateful for all her astute advice and generous assistance. I would also like to thank Dr Julian North in the School of English, and Jess Jenkins, archivist at the Leicester Record Office, and all the staff there, for all their invaluable help. I have been very fortunate to have had so many remarkable people involved in this research, and my work has greatly benefitted as a result.

To my dear friends Freya Brooks and Sarah Green, who have been a contemporary reflection of the networks of intellectual engagement, encouragement and supportive friendship I studied, I am especially grateful.

Finally, to my parents Sally Shuttleworth and John Christie, who have given to me incredible levels of love and support throughout, I give my sincere thanks and love.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Interwoven Lives .....	6
Heyrick and Watts: Abolitionists.....	17
Critical Literature .....	35
<b>The Domestic Politics of Life Writing: the Construction and Preservation of Identities</b> .....	<b>46</b>
From Manuscript to Print.....	53
Sketching Characters: Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton, Familial Narrators .....	60
John Coltman: ‘A Book-Worm and Philosopher, rather more than a man of business’.....	69
Elizabeth Coltman: A Model Heroine.....	79
Oakwood Hall: ‘The novel of which thy mother is the heroine’ .....	81
Elizabeth Heyrick: The ‘talented and lofty-spirited daughter’ .....	91
Narratives of Devotional Lives: Susanna and Elizabeth.....	108
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>125</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>128</b>

## Introduction

To the traveller who may wish to visit whatever is deemed most worthy of notice in the town of Leicester, the following sketch is devoted. And as the highly cultivated state of topographical knowledge renders superficial remark unpardonable in local description, we shall endeavour to produce, at the various objects of our visit, such information and reflections as a conductor, not wholly uninformed, may be expected to offer to the curious and intelligent, while he guides him through a large, commercial and, we trust, a respectable town.

Susanna Watts, *A Walk through Leicester* (1804)<sup>1</sup>

When uncovering the lives of historical figures it is unusual to be given a first-hand tour of their surrounding world, but this is exactly what is provided by Susanna Watts, author of Leicester's first guide book, published in 1804. The reader is led on an imagined tour of the streets of the progressive provincial town, pausing for illustrations of both its expansion and industrial activity, and the centuries of history and civilisation that render it 'respectable' to the 'curious and intelligent'. The tour mingles the past and present, pastoral scenes and industrial advances, to create not just a guide to the physical environs of Leicester, but a detailed image of its history, development and character. Uncovered Roman mosaics, the inn in which King Richard III was said to have spent the night before his final battle, and the bridge over which his disgraced body was returned to the town, all feature to position Leicester within a wider narrative of national identity. A new-built gaol and ancient almshouses, with their respective inhabitants, highlight modern penal structures and established charitable traditions. What are noticeably missing from the guidebook are the

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<sup>1</sup> Susanna Watts, *A Walk Through Leicester; Being a Guide to Strangers, Containing a Description of the Town and its Environs, With Remarks Upon its History and Antiquities* (Leicester: T.Combe, 1804), pp. 1-2.

contemporary inhabitants of the town; the disembodied voice of the narrator leads the visitor down empty streets. These uninhabited streets are an apt parallel for the situation the scholar is often faced with when working with historical subjects, particularly if they are female, and residing outside the metropolis.

In the case of Susanna Watts, we have been left with the results of her work, her published books and papers, and some records of its historical impact, but very little detail on the author herself. This is not an uncommon situation with regard to female provincial authors, but the two figures who form the starting point of this research led historically significant and fascinating lives which, until fairly recently, had been all but forgotten. Elizabeth Heyrick (1769-1831) and Susanna Watts (1768-1842) were anti-slavery activists, animal rights campaigners, early instigators of conscious consumerism, authors, artists and teachers, whose work left a mark not only on their local Leicester community, but in the international campaigns against slavery. Despite their remarkable lives and achievements, the details of their stories are difficult to uncover from published records: there are no authoritative Lives and Letters, and only occasional glimpses in the records and writings of their more famous peers. In this thesis I aim to create not a record of their lives as such, but rather an analysis of the processes by which their lives were constructed within their own community, whose writings shaped the historical afterlives of Watts and Heyrick.

The starting point of this research is a collection held in the Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, which comprises an eclectic and remarkable selection of documents. It ranges from Watts and Heyrick's published works, including their anti-slavery journal, *The Humming Bird*, and a large collection of letters and a manuscript memoir from Heyrick's birth family, the Coltmans, through to Watts' own wonderful scrapbook, a very personal document, filled with pictures and poems. Aside from their published works, it is from this collection that most of our knowledge of the two women is derived. By examining the collection itself, how it came to be preserved and the cultures and

traditions that led to its preservation, we are able to uncover the processes by which Heyrick and Watts' lives were shaped by their community; both how they were remembered and how they were forgotten. The history thus uncovered will be a very different one from that which would be produced if using only their publications, and records of how their actions and writings impacted on public campaigns. Instead, this thesis will focus on an exploration of the life writing practices of Heyrick and Watts' immediate circle, looking at the individuals who wrote about and preserved details of their lives. It will explore the collective identities of the communities of which they were a part, and examine how both public and private perceptions shaped the crafting of the details of Heyrick and Watts' lives. In these records, for example, Heyrick as rebellious daughter looms just as large as the famous abolitionist campaigner of public record. The relationship between author and subject within these circles, their intentions in writing, and whether for personal record or for print, all play a role in shaping the ways in which their subjects are presented. The thesis will also consider the influence of wider trends in life writing at the time, and the degree to which they were reflected in the forms of biographical records devoted to Heyrick and Watts.

By moving outwards from individuals to their communities we gain significant understanding of the circumstances and culture that both nurtured and indeed hindered their development. Heyrick in particular had a troubled relationship with her family at times, and by adopting this form of microhistory it is possible to track the points of tension, and conflict on both sides, as she moves into an adulthood of impassioned political campaigning. The focus of the thesis is thus less on the self-fashioning of an individual, than that of a community. One can track both pride and bafflement in responses to her political work, which emerges both in what her relatives and friends chose to record for posterity, and what they chose to ignore, or regarded as unimportant. Histories of political movements, or even grassroots campaigns, understandably tend to focus on the movements themselves, and their achievements, rather than on the individuals taking part within them. By drawing back to explore the local roots, and the complex generational, religious and gender dynamics which influenced Heyrick

and Watts in their campaigns, we build a stronger image of the communities themselves, and their culture, values and history, from which such political actions arose.

Although Watts was from an Anglican background, both women moved within the dissenting circles of their provincial, manufacturing town. By examining the private life writing practices of these circles, we can see how far this community interacted with wider literary and life writing practices. To what degree did they adhere to conventions of spiritual autobiography and biography, or shape them to their own cultures and requirements? Analysis of these life writing practices also gives us insight into how the writers sought to form and preserve an historical identity for their community. By identifying these practices and how they affected the biographical afterlives of their subjects, we gain a greater understanding of the difficulties posed in recovering an individual's history and personal life and qualities from the historical record. Such work also illuminates how identities are posthumously constructed, their forms determining how far, and in what modes, lives are incorporated into the historical canon.

Although the Leicester archive collection on which I am drawing is very extensive, it is also very partial and patchy. What survives of an individual's life is often due to chance, but also to conscious decision making, particularly in the case where some fame and notoriety has been attained. The decisions that were made as to what to preserve of Heyrick and Watts' writings and letters were as much a part of curating and preserving the circle's own identity for posterity as the original acts of biographical writing. Whilst both Heyrick and Watts were prolific authors, the vast majority of holdings of their writings, with the exception of a few letters and Watts' scrapbook, are editions of their publically published texts. They undoubtedly accumulated large amounts of manuscript material throughout their active literary lives, including life writing in the form of a journal that Heyrick is confirmed to have kept by her brother Samuel Coltman,

who quotes extracts from it in his own family memoirs, but none of these have been preserved.<sup>2</sup> The ‘mass of unpublished manuscript, chiefly consisting of essays, sermons, prayers, etc’ said to have been left by Heyrick at the time of her death do not seem to have been kept, with letters suggesting they may have been burned by her sister Mary Anne Coltman.<sup>3</sup> Whilst this was common practice at the time, people often accumulated huge collections of letters and personal writings it was impractical for relatives to keep, the immediate destruction of all this material suggests that at the time of her death, Heyrick’s family did not immediately perceive her as a public figure whose manuscript work should be preserved for posterity. Or alternatively, they felt that her image would be best preserved by their own hands. The similar lack of manuscript material for Watts, with the exception of her scrapbook, may also be due to her family circumstances and relations, or rather, her lack of them. Watts had no immediate family to keep her writings as a memory of the voice of a relative, and if any were kept by friends, they have since been lost.

What does remain is a collection that, at first glance, seems of no great interest for those wishing to record the shaping of more public histories and the people who made them. But this is because its preservation was not a deliberate contribution to the public record, but rather an act of private and personal memorial by members of a family and community. A large bulk of the collection comprises letters of the Coltman family, spanning many years and generations, and the manuscript memoirs they inspired Samuel Coltman to write in his old age. His memoir of his family history, *Time’s Stepping Stones* is one of the key documents in the archive and in this thesis, offering as it does a highly personal response to his family’s history, and to the life of his sister, Elizabeth. In tracing the lives of Watts and Heyrick, we are almost entirely reliant on the biographies

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Coltman, *Time’s Stepping Stones – Or Some Memorials of Four Generations of a Family – by an Octogenarian Member of the Same*, 1852, Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, MS. Misc. 1153., p. 147. There are two copies of this work, a handwritten manuscript (15D57/448-450) and a later typescript (MS. Misc. 1153). All references refer to the typescript.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Hutton Beale, *Catherine Hutton and Her Friends* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1895), p. 215.

and letters held in the archive, along with a few brief accounts published posthumously in the nineteenth century. Although their biographies are typically written individually, their close friendship and extensive shared endeavours meant their lives were closely interwoven, frequently appearing in the written narratives of one another's lives. For this reason the following account of their lives treats them both together, to more fully illustrate the world and works that they shared. In the next sections, I will give brief accounts of their lives, followed by a more detailed look at their abolitionist and other campaigning work in the context of the wider abolitionist movement, and will conclude with a review of the critical literature, and the scholarship on their lives so far.

### **Interwoven Lives**

Born only a year apart, Susanna Watts and Elizabeth Heyrick (née Coltman) were friends from an early age, despite their differences in social and religious backgrounds. Watts was born into country gentry, an Anglican family living on the outskirts of Leicester, whilst Heyrick was part of a dissenting, manufacturing family in the heart of the town. Their lives demonstrate the relative permeability of local social circles in Leicester, whilst also offering striking illustrations of the instabilities of social and financial position for many middle-class families at this time. Both women experienced radical reversals of family fortunes, and in their early adult life they both needed to work to support themselves and members of their families. Their years of writing and campaigning were thus set against this backdrop of shifting social and economic status, and also religious allegiances, as Heyrick was to become a committed Quaker, whilst Watts in her later years started to attend a Baptist church. Although Heyrick is now the better known of the two, due to her abolitionist pamphlets, both women were celebrated at the time for their wide range of philanthropic and campaigning activities, and Watts for her literary and poetic writings. Although they tended to work together, but write separately (whilst referencing each other's work), their pioneering work on *The Humming Bird* (1824-25), the first anti-slavery journal, and also the first journal to be entirely written and edited by women, was a triumph of

collaborative writing, establishing a carefully-crafted communal identity. Together, and with the wider networks to which they belonged, they helped bring about major change in the voice and aims of the abolitionist movement. In what follows, I sketch out the details of their lives that can be gleaned from surviving records, before turning to consider how those lives themselves were crafted by their community.<sup>4</sup>

Born in Danetts Hall in 1768, Susanna Watts began her life in outwardly comfortable and wealthy surroundings. Her father, John Watts, was from an established county family who had resided in the hall, then on the outskirts of the town, for several generations. Little is known about her mother Joan, other than that she was a country girl, and was referred to rather unflatteringly in later biographies of Watts as lacking the education and refinement of character possessed by her daughter.<sup>5</sup> The couple had had two daughters prior to the birth of Susanna, but they both died in childhood, leaving Susanna as their only surviving child. Following the death of Watts' father in 1769, when she was aged just fifteen months, Watts and her mother were reduced to relative poverty, suggesting the family may have been in financial difficulty for some time. Little is known about this early period of Watts' life, with accounts differing as to where mother and daughter resided, and what income was available to them. What is clear, however, is that the family Hall had to be sold, and the death of her uncle, William Watts, when she was aged fifteen left them without guidance and support, and in very straitened circumstances. Despite these circumstances, Watts achieved a high level of education, which is clearly evidenced in her

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<sup>4</sup> These sources include, but are not limited to: Samuel Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones – Or Some Memorials of Four Generations of a Family – by an Octogenarian Member of the Same*, 1852, Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, MS. Misc. 1153 (hereafter Leics. RO.); Catherine Hutton, 'Hasty Sketch of the Coltman Family', 1802, Leics. RO., MS. 15D57/387; Catherine Hutton, 'A Sketch of a Family of Originals, by an Original', *Ainsworth's Magazine*, 5 (1844), pp. 56-64; Clara Parkes, 'Susanna Watts', biographical sketch dated Feb. 2, 1865. MS attached to Watts' Scrapbook, Leics. RO., DE 8170; Anon., *A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mrs Elizabeth Heyrick* (Leicester: Crossley and Clarke, 1862); Anon., 'A Few Recollections of the Late Mrs Susanna Watts', *The Fragment Gatherer* (Leicester, 1804); Anon., *A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mrs Elizabeth Heyrick* (Leicester: Crossley and Clarke, 1862) and Catherine Hutton Beale, *Catherine Hutton and Her Friends* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1895).

<sup>5</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 141.

subsequent writings which deploy an extensive range of literary, historical, and classical references. It was her linguistic abilities, however, for which she was most renowned: she acquired sufficient fluency in French and Italian to enable her to publish well regarded poetic translations. Quite how she achieved this education is unclear, although it appears most likely that she was predominantly self-taught, borrowing books from friends, including, as Heyrick's brother records, from the Coltman family, where she was a firm favourite.<sup>6</sup>

Elizabeth Coltman/Heyrick, by contrast, was born into a highly educated dissenting and manufacturing family. Her father, John Coltman, had been a pupil of the Unitarian John Aikin at Kibworth School and received a classical education. He was a scholarly figure and as David Wykes has suggested, 'a reluctant business man'.<sup>7</sup> Although he introduced major technological changes into his hosiery business, he was only moderately successful, and at one point was defrauded by a partner, losing most of his money. He was a member of Leicester literary and radical circles, and one of the founders of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, together with the radical publisher Richard Phillips, the proprietor of the *Leicester Herald* (1792-) who had been imprisoned for selling Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*.<sup>8</sup> During his time in the Leicester prison, Phillips continued to publish the *Herald*, with backing from Joseph Priestley, and when he subsequently moved to London and set up his periodical the *Monthly Magazine* in 1796, it was edited by John Coltman's old teacher, John Aikin.<sup>9</sup> The Coltmans were very much part of this dissenting radical culture, and Samuel

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> David L. Wykes, 'The Reluctant Business Man: John Coltman of St Nicholas Street, Leicester (1727-1808)', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 69 (1995), pp.71-85. See also Felicity James and Ian Inkster, *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Felicity James, 'Introduction', pp. 1-27, and David L. Wykes, 'The Revd John Aikin senior: Kibworth School and Warrington Academy', pp. 28-51.

<sup>8</sup> A. Temple Patterson, *Radical Leicester: A History of Leicester, 1780-1850* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1954), pp. 67-68.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Seccombe, 'Phillips, Sir Richard (1767-1840), author and publisher', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-22167>.

Coltman records in his family memoir his father's pride in the fact that Priestley had visited them.<sup>10</sup> Originally Presbyterian, and a member of the socially and economically influential Great Meeting in Leicester which was to switch its allegiances to Unitarianism, it is not clear, as Wykes points out, whether John ever subscribed to Unitarian beliefs himself.<sup>11</sup>

Elizabeth's mother, Elizabeth Cartwright, was from a family which could claim the eminent writer and publisher Robert Dodsley as a relative, and in her youth she had visited him in London, meeting many of the great literary names of the day. She became firm friends and regular correspondent with Dodsley and the Revd Joseph Spence, and it is suggested she also contributed to periodicals herself before her marriage.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that Watts' first publication, *Chinese Maxims* (1784), published when she was just sixteen, was a 'translation' into heroic verse of Dodsley's *The Oeconomy of Human Life*.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Watts, Elizabeth Heyrick was thus brought up in a household oriented to scholarly pursuits, and political and social debate. While her brothers were sent away to school, she seems to have been educated locally, apart from a six month period at a Quaker school in Warwickshire. Since the school was for boys, she was educated alongside the daughters of the household, rather than attending the school itself.<sup>14</sup> This experience no doubt prepared her for her religious transition later in life. Heyrick had a sister Mary Ann who was also very close to Watts and formed part of the collective who created *The Humming Bird*. Biographical accounts tend to stress Watts' constant kindness, and gentle nature, whilst Heyrick is depicted as difficult and self-willed, and surviving letters suggest that her mother was at pains to try and direct her character into more

<sup>10</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> Wykes, 'The Reluctant Business Man', p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> Beale, *Catherine Hutton and her Friends*, pp. 4-39. Beale prints a poem that was published in the *Lady's Magazine* which she states is the only one of her contributions to the periodicals of the day which had been preserved.

<sup>13</sup> Susanna Watts, *Chinese Maxims: Translated from the Economy of Human Life into Heroic Verse* (Leicester: John Gregory, 1784).

<sup>14</sup> Shirley Aucott, *Elizabeth Heyrick 1769 to 1831: The Leicester Quaker Who Demanded the Immediate Emancipation of Slaves in the British Colonies* (Leicester: Gartree Press, 2007), pp. 3-4.

agreeable paths. Although she showed artistic promise, her father opposed the idea of further training, and her mother began to prepare her instead for the arts and labours of domestic care in the expectation she would marry.

As Heyrick was being guided away from professional endeavours and towards the domestic, Watts was forced to move in the opposite direction. At 15, after the death of her uncle, Watts turned to writing and translation to help support herself and her mother, publishing *Chinese Maxims* just a year later. One of her next ambitious projects was a translation of the Italian poet Tasso, but unfortunately for Watts, another translation of Tasso was published just as hers was being finalised. Although it was never published, it exists in manuscript form, transcribed into the initial pages of Watts' scrapbook, now held at the Leicester Record Office. Despite this setback, the manuscript was clearly passed around in literary circles, garnering respect for Watts' work so that in 1804 she was included as an accomplished writer in Mary Pilkington's *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters* on the strength of this unpublished work.<sup>15</sup>

Literature was a core component of Susanna Watts' life, being the means by which she supported herself financially, whilst also allowing her to engage with, and contribute to, philanthropic and political movements. Watts was both a professional and a private writer; she spent much of her life writing to earn a living, often focusing on producing translations or writing poetry that could be published in magazines. She was also well known, however, within immediate circles for lively and entertaining letters and her scrapbook contains various private poetic musings on subjects that either amused or engaged her. Unfortunately, a lot of the translations and poetry that she contributed to periodicals such as *The Spectator* are now lost to us, since they were published anonymously and there are no surviving records of her contributions. We know that she spent much of her life writing, and was able to support herself financially

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Pilkington, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters, who have Distinguished Themselves by Their Talents and Virtues in Every Age and Nation: Containing the Most Extensive Collection of Illustrious Examples of Feminine Excellence Ever Published, in which the Virtuous and the Vicious are Painted in Their True Colours* (London: Albion Press, 1804), p. 335.

in this way (although an application to the Royal Literary Fund on her behalf in 1807, made by the radical publisher Richard Phillips and also, possibly, by either Heyrick's mother or the Leicester author Elizabeth Coltman, suggests that, as with so many writers, it was a perilous business).<sup>16</sup> Later in life she recorded humorously in her scrapbook on 11 February 1834, 'By fagging, and scribbling whole summers and winters/ I wasted much money, alas! On the Printers'.<sup>17</sup> The majority of what remains to us is in the form of books, a less ephemeral form of literature than periodical publications, which were published both anonymously and under her own name. These books included translations of stories and maxims from other cultures; poetry; and various religious writings including poetry and hymns. There was also potentially a novel, as there is a reference in a letter by Maria Edgeworth where she remarks of Watts that 'This poor girl sold a novel in four volumes for ten guineas', suggesting that Watts was both exploited, and not worldly wise.<sup>18</sup> In later years there were also poems and writings on slavery that appeared in *The Humming Bird* and texts related to animal cruelty, the two most significant of which were *The Insects in Council* (1828) and a book for children entitled *The Animals' Friend* (c.1831), a collection of poetry and prose designed to inculcate kindness in children towards animals.<sup>19</sup> The former is a long poem, in fable form, in which the various insects of the world gather together to complain about the cruelty inflicted upon them by collectors. Explicitly addressed to entomologists, this text, like *The Animals' Friend*, was

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<sup>16</sup> Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy (eds), 'Susanna Watts', entry within *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online, 2006), <http://orlando.cambridge.org/>. Watts was awarded £20 as a result of the application. The source states the name on the entry appears to be 'Miss E. Coltman'. Whilst this may have been Heyrick's mother Mrs Elizabeth Coltman, there was also a Miss Elizabeth Coltman, a Leicester author who was friends with both Watts and Heyrick, who could have been the other sponsor for this application.

<sup>17</sup> Susanna Watts, *Scrapbook* (Leics RO., Rare Books, L.A. Watts), p. 166.

<sup>18</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 188.

<sup>19</sup> Susanna Watts, *The Animals' Friend: A Collection of Observations and Facts Tending to Restrain Cruelty and to Inculcate Kindness towards Animals; in Prose and Verse, Original and Selected, with Engravings* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, c.1831) and *The Insects in Council, Addressed to Entomologists, With Other Poems* (London: J. Hatchard & Son; Simpkin & Marshall; and Renshaw & Kirkman, 1835).

designed to persuade its readers to treat the animal, or in this case insect world, with greater sympathy and compassion.

As historical and contemporary accounts of Susanna Watts' have tended to focus on her work on anti- slavery, her writings on animals have been folded into this narrative and seen merely as an extension of a caring nature, concerned to alleviate distress wherever she found it. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that many years of Watts' life were devoted to the campaign against slavery, examination of her works, from her scrapbook and letters through to her extant published pieces, indicates that care for animals, rather than being a small facet of her numerous areas of philanthropy, was an abiding and central concern.

While Watts was launching her professional writing career, Elizabeth Heyrick followed a more conventional path, initially. At 19 she fell in love and married John Heyrick, a solicitor in Leicester, and from an eminent local family. He also had literary and scholarly leanings, and in his only volume of verse, *First Flights* (1797), he dedicated a poem to 'Miss Susanna Watts, the elegant translator of Tasso', suggesting that a close friendship with Watts was maintained by the couple.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately for Heyrick, her husband decided after a short spell of married life to take a commission in the army, and her life for the next few years was spent rather unhappily in various army barracks in England and Ireland. Although the marriage had clearly been turbulent, she was devastated when he died suddenly in 1797, and entered a period of deep grief, accompanied by increasing religious devotion. At this period she met the Quaker minister Priscilla Gurney, and eventually decided, much to her family's consternation, to become a Quaker. Her subsequent visit to York where she observed the school run by the Tukes, another Quaker family, may also have inspired her to become a teacher. Again, against vehement opposition from her family, she decided to set up a school in the marital home, Bow Bridge House, she had built with her husband outside Leicester.

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<sup>20</sup> John Heyrick, *First Flights* (London: Printed by T. Gillet for C. Dilly, 1797), p. 12.

Heyrick now commenced a period of intensive philanthropy in the local community, in which she was later joined by Watts, building the foundations for their later anti-slavery work. She began to visit prisons (an activity which she seems to have commenced well before Elizabeth Fry), paying gaol fees for those who could not afford to pay themselves, and passionately advocating for more humane treatment of prisoners.<sup>21</sup> Aware of the injustice and inhumanity of the British legal system, she was not afraid to challenge its processes, and to draw attention to its manifest failings. Her first known published pamphlets, in 1809, were on bull baiting, which she wrote after having witnessed a bull baiting at Bonsall, Derbyshire, and interceding to save the bull from being tormented.<sup>22</sup> Bull baiting was a popular yearly entertainment in the village and her efforts were not well received, being seen as interference with the sports and enjoyments of the labouring classes. Heyrick clearly saw the prevention of cruelty as a far greater consideration than the unpopularity of her views, or established social traditions. That she brought pamphlets to publication and distributed them both to the villagers and to the wider public shows she did not have any reservations about placing her views before the public when they might assist in bringing about social change, and improvement.

The subject of her next pamphlets was even closer to home, and even more likely to draw disapproval from her immediate circle, as Heyrick began to write on the distress of the labouring poor employed in manufacturing industries, such as the hosiery industry in which her parents and brothers were prominent manufacturers. In these pamphlets, Heyrick moved from mainly moral and compassionate arguments to ones of serious economic consideration, addressing not just the difficult circumstances of the labourers, but the economic reasons

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<sup>21</sup> Beale, *Catherine Hutton and Her Friends*, p. 203. Beale states Heyrick began her work in prisons 'long before' Elizabeth Fry, whose work commenced in 1816. As Heyrick's prison visiting appears to have begun relatively soon after she returned to her parents' home, following the death of her husband in 1797, she may well pre-date Fry.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick, *A Christmas Box for the Advocates of Bull-Baiting* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1809) and *Bull Baiting: A Village Dialogue Between Tom Brown and John Simms* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1809).

behind them.<sup>23</sup> She was outspoken on the harm capitalist systems that severely devalued labour caused in society, detirminedly advocating for reasonable levels of pay on the basis that a more balanced distribution and freer circulation of capital would be beneficial for all, both economically and socially. Although this line of argument was deeply unpopular with her family and their fellow manufacturers at the time, following her death Heyrick's brother John Coltman, who together with Samuel had taken over the family firm, received a letter of condolence from a friend, James Smith, who described how Heyrick's views had influenced his own:

Time and reflection on the passing events only serve to convince me more and more of the correctness of her views on Political economy viz that the circulation of Capital the most beneficial in its consequences for the whole community, embracing all ranks of society, is through the instrumentality of labour – and that the modern grinding system is a truly un Christian practice in violation of all laws human and divine.<sup>24</sup>

Heyrick clearly had a keen understanding of economic systems as well as moral ones. Her arguments were also always tied to action: she did not aim merely to persuade readers of the moral correctness of her views in the abstract, but offered practical suggestions as to how moral beliefs could be directly applied to existing social and economic structures. In subsequent pamphlets she called for changes in new vagrancy laws, and in an extension of her concern for animal welfare, for improved conditions in Smithfield market.<sup>25</sup> This concern for strategies of

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<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick, *Exposition of one Principal Cause of the National Distress, particularly in Manufacturing Districts, with some Suggestions for its Removal* (London: Darton, Harvey and Darton, 1817) and *Enquiry Into the Consequences of the Present Depreciated Value of Human Labour, In Letters to Thomas Fowell Buxton Esq.M.P., Author of An Enquiry Into Our Present System of Prison Discipline* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1819). This latter work is more aptly described as a book as it was 116 pages long.

<sup>24</sup> James Smith, Letter to John Coltman; The Coltman Family Papers, Leics. RO, 15D57/218.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick, *Cursory Remarks on the Evil Tendency of Unrestrained Cruelty; Particularly on That Practised in Smithfield Market* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1823) and *Protest Against the Spirit and Practise of Modern Legislation, as Exhibited in the New Vagrant Act* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1824). For an excellent discussion of these pamphlets see Kenneth Corfield, 'Elizabeth

practical action was to play a large part in the success of her most famous anti-slavery pamphlet, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition* (1824), since it suggested clear methods of action by which moral principles could be enacted through economic pressure and mass activism in the form of widespread boycotts of slave grown produce.

It is unclear at what point Watts joined Heyrick in her local philanthropic work. Until 1807 Watts had the sole care of her ailing mother who, surviving documents suggest, must have been suffering from dementia for some years. On her death she, like Heyrick at the time of her husband's death, experienced a period of extreme mental anguish, from which she gradually emerged. By the time Heyrick published *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition*, she and Watts had evidently been engaged in the anti-slavery cause for some time, as well as other philanthropic work. Watts' own philanthropy, no doubt inspired by her experience with her mother, included support for the elderly and the insane: she founded a Society for the Relief of Indigent Old Age in Leicester in 1828, and towards the close of her life she was campaigning in support of a local lunatic asylum. It is important, however, not to see Heyrick and Watts as operating independently of wider networks. We know that from 1800 they were members of a form of blue-stocking reading circle, and their efforts in philanthropy build strongly on established eighteenth-century modes of female philanthropy which relied upon shared values and labour, and established social networks through which to promote their causes.<sup>26</sup>

Whilst Watts and Heyrick were certainly extremely close friends, they were joined in many of their works by numerous other women of the town, with whom they had very close connections. Mary Ann Coltman, Heyrick's sister, was

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Heyrick, Radical Quaker', in Gail Malmgreen (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 52-61.

<sup>26</sup> See F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), for a discussion of the development of women's philanthropy during this period.

also a very close friend of Watts, as evidenced by affectionate letters which passed between them, and Mary Ann is most likely the third editor of *The Humming Bird*. Elizabeth Coltman, a local author whose writings have often been confused with those of Heyrick, although she does not appear to have been directly related to this branch of the Coltman family, was both a member of their women's literary circle, and joint anti-slavery campaigner, taking part in door to door canvassing for the boycott of slave grown sugar. Shirley Aucott has traced and documented Watts' friendship with Eleanor Frewen Turner, which also saw shared philanthropic endeavours in their efforts to raise funds for the 'Distressed Irish' through the Leicester Ladies' Committee in 1822. In 1830 they answered an appeal from Maria Edgeworth, in what was clearly an ill-thought out enterprise, as a letter from Watts to Edgeworth makes clear, to sell straw bonnets in aid of distressed Irish women.<sup>27</sup> Heyrick for her part was a very active member of the Society of Friends, becoming treasurer of the Leicester women's branch, and representing them nationally at meetings, experience that would have been invaluable when she became treasurer for the Leicester branch of the Female Anti-Slavery Society, and representative for them at the central Birmingham meetings.

Although the Coltman family appear to have all been strong supporters of the abolitionist cause, it is important to note that it was largely through social, rather than familial, circles that both Heyrick and Watts found outlets and encouragement for their intellectual, religious and charitable works. Their reading circle, explorations of religious faith and activism were all enabled through largely female networks of sociability, and often misunderstood or discouraged by their families. This demonstrates the importance of examining not only their upbringing, education and familial influences, but the communities that comprised their adult modes of sociability, in tracing the circumstances and cultures that allowed their work to flourish.

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<sup>27</sup> See Shirley Aucott, *Susanna Watts (1768-1842): Author of Leicester's First Guide, Abolitionist and Bluestocking* (Leicester: Shirley Aucott, 2004), pp. 23-24. The letter to Edgeworth is in Watts' Scrapbook, p.391.

## Heyrick and Watts: Abolitionists

From 1824 onwards, Susanna Watts and Elizabeth Heyrick, canvassed door to door in their Leicester community, persuading households to boycott slave grown sugar in protest against the ongoing slavery upheld by the British Empire. Playing on women's perceived social role as luxury consumers and domestic stockists, Watts and Heyrick used this female responsibility and control over domestic consumption to exert pressure for political change by attempting to make immoral commerce unprofitable. This was far from their only contribution to the campaign to end slavery. Together with Heyrick's sister, Mary Ann Coltman, they founded in December 1824 *The Humming Bird*, the first anti-slavery periodical and one that reached a wide national audience, not to mention being the only publication of its kind written and edited by women. 1824 also saw what was perhaps Heyrick's most significant contribution to the abolitionist movement with the publication of her pamphlet, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition*. It was one of the first and certainly most forceful texts to argue against the contemporary trend of advocating a gradual abolition of slavery as more politically and economically practical. Setting aside the sentimentalism which had characterised much of the earlier rhetoric and campaigning, Heyrick grounds her arguments in fierce rationality.

Slavery is acknowledged and described as morally abhorrent, but the primary focus of the pamphlet's opening argument is the hypocrisy of those in Britain who declaim against other countries' participation in the slave trade whilst profiting from their own colonial slaves. Heyrick portrays any British criticism of slavery as 'pathetic declamations' with no 'rational hope' of success or influence whilst there is 'so little consistency in [Britain's] conduct'.<sup>28</sup> She argues that only the complete abolition of slavery within all British territories will allow

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<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition; or, an Enquiry into the Shortest, Safest and most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West Indian Slavery* (London: J. Hatchard, and Leicester: Thomas Combe, 1824). The pamphlet went through many reprintings, both in Britain and in America, where it was taken up vigorously as a key document in the abolitionist cause. Reprintings included, for example, the Philadelphia Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society in 1836.

British arguments against the slave trade to be heard with ‘*the all-commanding eloquence of sincerity and truth*’. Only then will ‘our persuasions ... be backed by the *irresistible argument of consistent example*.’<sup>29</sup>

Despite this emphasis on the necessity for moral action and truth-based argument, Heyrick’s pamphlet contains very little, if any, mention of religion as a guide for morality and action. Rather, rationality is appealed to as a God-given but individually diverse, attribute by which judgements should be made. The social responsibility of individual, reasoned morality is a powerful component of her pamphlet, allowing her to address both a nationwide and highly individual audience simultaneously. Her solution to the on-going slavery in British colonies is to advocate a nationwide boycott of all goods produced by slave labour in order to make its practise unprofitable, sugar being the most significant, and most commonly used, of these products. After attacking the hypocrisy of a nation that condemns participation in the African slave trade whilst keeping slaves of their own, Heyrick then lays out the moral implications for each person within that nation:

‘But let us, *individually*, bring this great question home to our own bosoms. We that hear, and read, and approve, and applaud the powerful appeals...are we *ourselves* sincere, or hypocritical? Are we the true friends of justice, or do we only cant about it? -- To which party do we really belong? – to the friends of emancipation, or of perpetual slavery?’<sup>30</sup>

The inclusive ‘we’, directed to an audience already persuaded of the immorality of slavery, allows Heyrick’s encouragement to introspection to appeal individualistically without being alienatingly accusatory, as it encompasses both the author and reader. Such introspection, Heyrick suggests, is not abstract, but refers to the active choice of ‘ABSTINENCE FROM THE USE OF WEST INDIAN PRODUCTIONS’:

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, pp.4-5.

WE furnish the stimulant to all this injustice, rapacity, and cruelty, -- BY PURCHASING ITS PRODUCE. Heretofore, it may have been thoughtlessly and unconsciously, -- but now this palliative is removed; -- the veil of ignorance is rent aside; -- the whole nation must now divide itself into the *active supporters* and the *active opposers* of slavery; -- there is no longer any ground for a neutral party to stand upon.<sup>31</sup>

As any ignorance of the way in which the productions of slavery contribute to the continuance of its practise has been 'rent aside', Heyrick demands that Britain, as a nation but, more importantly, as individuals, accept the social responsibility of acting upon this knowledge as a demonstration of their moral identity. As in her earlier endorsement of truth and sincerity, Heyrick represents a moral viewpoint as valid only if supported by the personal actions of the individual voicing it. The pamphlet was reprinted numerous times within its first year of publication, including in America, and was read out in parliament to be debated, as 'the work of some gentleman' due to its forceful tone.<sup>32</sup> Watts and Heyrick's advocacy of community canvassing to boycott slave grown goods, and determined immediatist stance, were to have a lasting and dramatic effect on the landscape of the British anti-slavery movement.

After the Slave Trade Act of 1807 banned Britain's continued involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, British abolitionist campaigners had been cautiously optimistic that this would lead to an eventual eradication of slavery in the British colonies. However, as time passed, it became increasingly clear that the practise remained undiminished, and in 1823 William Wilberforce had founded the London Society for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery to continue the campaign. As a network of similar societies began to form across Britain, they were joined from 1825 by a parallel network of specifically female anti-slavery societies, a collective Heyrick and Watts were involved with from the outset. Rapidly adopting Heyrick and Watts' methods of door to door canvassing, and

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Anon., *A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mrs Elizabeth Heyrick*, p.10.

many electing to support the call for immediate abolition, these societies focussed on the wide dissemination of evidence of the horrors of slavery, with particular emphasis on fundraising to help the plight of enslaved women and children.<sup>33</sup>

However, the two parties did not have an altogether harmonious relationship. William Wilberforce expressed concern at the level and forms of involvement women were taking in the movement. To him,

All private exertions for such an object become their character, but for ladies to meet, to publish, to go from house to house stirring up petitions, - these appear to me proceedings unsuited to the female character as delineated in Scripture. And though we should limit the interference of our ladies to the cause of justice and humanity, I fear its tendency would be to mix them in all the multiform warfare of political life.<sup>34</sup>

Susanna Watts objected to such comments, and replied in a poem:

‘On a Gentleman saying that,  
Some ladies, who were zealous in the  
Anti-Slavery Cause, were brazen faced.  
Thanks for your thought – it seems to say,  
When ladies walk in Duty’s way,  
They should wear arms of proof;  
To blunt the shafts of manly wit –  
To ward off censure’s galling  
And keep reproach aloof:-  
And when a righteous cause demands  
The labour of their hearts and hands,  
Right onward they must pass,

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<sup>33</sup> For an excellent analysis of the female anti-slavery societies, see Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce by His Sons; Volume 5* (London: John Murray, 1839), pp.264-5. Letter to Thomas Babington, Jan. 31, 1826.

Cas'd in strong armour, for the field –  
 With casque and corselet, spear and shield,  
 Invulnerable brass.<sup>35</sup>

Deftly and wittily, she turns the tired cliché of 'brazen-faced' into an image of women clad in righteous armour, invulnerable to the petty 'shafts of manly wit' as they labour for the cause. Her poem raises the question as to why, as the leading light of the abolitionist community, Wilberforce found women's contribution to the cause so objectionable.

Wilberforce's disapproval, and Watts' defence of female campaigning, gave expression to underlying social and cultural tensions with regard to women's place in public and political spheres that was brought into sharp relief by the rapid expansion of British women's involvement in the campaign for abolition. Wilberforce's Evangelical Anglican Clapham Sect, which counted among its members conservative female writers such as Hannah More, had been for some decades crafting a moral and social identity for women, a precursor to the 'domestic angels' of the Victorian era, which emphasised women's place within the familial home as an essential component of an upright Christian nation. In her 1799 text, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, Hannah More outlined a domestic ideal of Christian womanhood:

Whatever inferiority may be attached to woman from the slighter frame of her body, the more circumscribed powers of her mind, from a less systematic education, and from the subordinate station she is called to fill in life; there is one great and leading circumstance which raises her importance, and even establishes her equality. *Christianity* has exalted woman to true and undisputed dignity...<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Susanna Watts, *Scrapbook*, p. 303.

<sup>36</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, With a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of Rank and Fortune* (London: T. Cadell Junior and W. Davies, 1799), p.31.

Such 'exaltation', however, depended on women conforming to their prescribed domestic role. Upheld by female Evangelical activists as the moral gatekeepers of the nation, a woman safely ensconced within the domestic sphere, and so uncorrupted by the numerous vices found in the public domain, was able to act as an inspirational Christian influence upon her family, to temper their interactions with public and political life. The gender politics of the anti-slavery movements were thus highly charged, as dissenting women in particular argued public charitable activism within the community was firmly within their Christian remit.

As the second wave of anti-slavery campaigns began to roll out across Britain, many women felt the cause fell well within their jurisdiction of moral improvement for the nation through Christian empathy and assistance for the oppressed. Male leaders of the movement, however, disagreed. A hotly debated political issue that held significant consequences for the commercial wealth and success of the nation, the question of slavery could not be publically engaged with by women without an inappropriate level of involvement within the political sphere. Although women were permitted to subscribe to male anti-slavery societies as financial donors, they were not accepted as members or given any positions of influence within the campaign.

Barred from direct involvement with the official face of abolition, women across Britain began to seek alternative methods to contribute to the cause, and in doing so, co-opted the concept of the spiritually and morally superior nature of femininity to justify their place within a public and political campaign, rather than discourage it. In 1826 the first report of the Birmingham Female anti-slavery society, the first of its kind to be founded, opened with an explanation of its members' motivation. They 'particularly felt for the degraded condition of their own sex', and inspired by this empathy,

determined to endeavour to awaken (at least in the bosom of English women) a deep and lasting compassion, not only for the bodily sufferings of female Slaves, but for their *moral degradation*.... Such Slavery as that

which now exists in our Colonies, should have the prayers of all Christians, and the best exertions of every Briton, united against it, that "they who name the name of Christ may depart from this iniquity".<sup>37</sup>

As the collective published voices of women's anti-slavery societies began to appear as the movement spread across Britain, religious morality was at the forefront of their rhetoric, portraying slavery as an essentially moral issue and mortal sin. Whilst many male anti-slavery societies drew on religious morality in their arguments, it was most often tempered by an awareness of economic and political practicalities, leading to campaigns for gradual abolition. Female societies, however, were, like Heyrick, far more disposed to view the matter as one of such moral gravity that religious faith could not permit a policy of gradual abolition.

The reports of female anti-slavery societies, aside from focussing on religious morality, also emphasised women's greater capacity for religious compassion, particularly for the plight of enslaved women and children. This combined propensity for deeply moralised religious faith, and heightened empathy to the suffering of the slaves acted as a collective persona that justified the voice of women in this public campaign. Critics such as Clare Midgley and Alison Twells have examined this phenomenon, discussing the ways in which it was simultaneously an extension of women's existing philanthropic religious practises, and an implicit criticism of the worldly immorality of male campaigners' desire for gradual abolition.<sup>38</sup> In response to Heyrick's *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition* pamphlet, members of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society justified their decision to adopt her stance for immediate abolition by presenting it as a matter of divine command:

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<sup>37</sup> *The First Report of the Female Society, for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their Respective Neighbourhoods, for the Relief of British Negro Slaves* (Birmingham: Richard Peart, 1826) p.3.

<sup>38</sup> See Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, and Alison Twells "'We Ought to Obey God Rather Than Man': Women, Anti-Slavery and Nonconformist Religious Culture", in Elizabeth Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey (eds), *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.66-87.

We ought to obey God rather than Man. Confidence here is not at variance with humanity. On principles like these, the simple need not fear to confront the sage; nor a female society to take their stand against the united wisdom of this world.<sup>39</sup>

If female societies were implicitly critical of a gradual abolitionist stance, Heyrick was explicitly so. In her 1828 pamphlet, *Apology for Ladies' Anti-Slavery Associations*, which was not an apology at all, but a strident attack on both the government's and male abolitionists' actions, she attributed the campaign's failure to end slavery to male anti-slavery campaigners' continued support of gradual abolition:

they have aimed at *gradual emancipation*, because no other was thought practicable. But the fallacy of this aim seems now to have been abundantly proved, in the wide door it has opened for the endless contentions of opposing interest...in the time and opportunity it has afforded the colonists for systematic opposition and determined resistance...Its fallacy has been abundantly proved by the heart sickening delays and bitter disappointments to which it has subjected the abolitionists; - above all in the long interval it has afforded for the decline of public sympathy.<sup>40</sup>

This difference between the implicit criticism voiced by the collective, and the explicit criticism articulated by Heyrick, is an illustration of the way in which, in the formation of the movement's collective persona, the voices of women such as Heyrick and Watts who did not easily conform to the necessary demonstrations of sentimental female piety, were edited so as to uphold the network's desired identity. This is not to say, however, that they were in any way silenced within this movement, or their contributions to it diminished. Rather, the success of their ideas and ideals across this community of female campaigners, despite the considerable differences in the manner and tone of their re-presentation, reveals

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<sup>39</sup> *Report of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Sheffield: J. Blackwell, 1827), p.10.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick, *Apology for Ladies' Anti-Slavery Associations* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1828), p.4.

a national culture in which idealised models of gender identity could act as a tool by which women could create for themselves a powerful collective voice within the public sphere.

The difference found between the early abolitionist literature of Watts and Heyrick and the later collective output of the national women's anti-slavery movement, naturally owes a great deal to their unique voices. However, an important consideration in examining the creation and development of this nationwide collective of female activists is the religious and cultural identities of its founding members. Mapping the initial members of the female abolitionist groups reveals a predominant common background in the dissenting religious networks of the midlands to which, as we have seen, Heyrick and Watts belonged. The founding secretaries of the Birmingham society included Mrs Mary Samuel Lloyd II, wife of Samuel Lloyd II, of the Lloyds Quaker banking dynasty, already well established as both bankers and charitable activists by 1825. Mary herself was born to Quaker parents, her mother was in fact a Quaker minister, a position Mary was to take up later in life. The primary founder of the Birmingham Society was her close friend, Lucy Townsend, wife of the evangelical curate of Bromwich, Charles Townsend – himself an anti-slavery campaigner.<sup>41</sup>

The relationship between these two women bears a striking relationship to the friendship between Heyrick and Watts, whose shared dedication to abolition led to the foundation of *The Humming Bird*, just as Townsend and Lloyd's led to the foundation of the women's Anti-Slavery society. There are similar ties to dissenting networks, and a close relationship between their respective families. An examination of the early member lists of the founding Birmingham women's society, for example, reveals many of the women were from well-known families within the city's dissenting community, including powerful dissenting dynasties such as the Lloyds (of Lloyds bank), a Miss Cadbury, daughter of Richard Cadbury, founder of the confectionary firm, and Sarah Wedgwood, daughter of

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<sup>41</sup> Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 43-47.

Josiah, whose pottery firm produced the famous cameo image of the kneeling slave, as part of the anti-slavery campaigns.<sup>42</sup>

In the events leading up to the foundation of the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Societies, Heyrick's pamphlet, *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition*, and the creation of *The Humming Bird* played a key role. The periodical was first published in December 1824, following the success of the pamphlet, and in April 1825, the first meeting of the Birmingham Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society was held. As one of the first, if not *the* first, published works by a collective of women for the abolition of slavery, *The Humming Bird* provided an essential step in the progress of this movement, acting as a precursor to a network of nationwide publishing from the numerous women's societies across Britain. It also, however, offers insight into the interests and motivations of the individual women behind this publication, and the ways in which they developed an ethos from their respective religious and philosophical standpoints to shape into a persuasive, collective public voice.

Although *The Humming Bird* shares many components of its content, rhetoric and moral standpoint with its later sister publications, its editorial tone was in fact highly unusual for abolitionist literature of the time. Anti-abolitionist critiques of the canting nature of anti-slavery publications were not always entirely unjustified; much of the writing in this area was repetitive, derivative, dry and dour. Given the nature of their subject matter, a serious tone was largely to be expected. However, although many of *The Humming Bird's* articles are grave and severe, the first issue's opening address to the reader, whilst emphasising the gravity of its cause, is also surprisingly light and playful. The editors' introduction of themselves is as follows:

We, being an ancient Sister hood, chuse to follow old ways; and so singular are we in this respect, that we have never been known to adopt

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<sup>42</sup> *The First Report of the Female Society, for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and Their Respective Neighbourhoods, For the Relief of British Negro Slaves* (Birmingham: Richard Peart, 1826), p. 20.

any new mode, either in our dress, habits or sentiments, though the date of our birth is Anno Mundi, one. Since that period we have been united so that 'No man may put us asunder', or, by any power or art whatsoever, interrupt our triple union; but whether we are *Fates, Furies, or Graces*, you shall know presently—<sup>43</sup>

Teasingly suggesting themselves to be both deeply unfashionable and unswayed by the opinions of men, the acknowledgement within their address of their unconventional publishing collective pre-empts criticism with humour, implying it is not a matter worth any serious discussion. The same technique is used to diffuse any potential attack on their qualifications for engaging with such a public and political concern. The address informs the reader that,

It was, as you well know, the custom of the good old times, when Writers were modest ..., to prefix to a book a very supplicating, gentle and explanatory address to the Courteous Reader.

Wishing to follow this custom, the editors promise,

While we wish to explain who and what we are without disguise, we presume not to boast of ourselves, but to mention the gifts bestowed upon us; and these are really very extraordinary ones. <sup>44</sup>

The mentioned gifts transpire to be 'the very spear by a touch of which the Seraph Ithuriel discovered Satan', 'the clue of Ariadne' and 'the very same piece of tapestry which, by the magic art of the Fairy Pari Banou, was bestowed on Prince Houssain.' The identities of the editors are revealed to be none other than 'Truth', 'Common Sense' and 'Philanthropy', respectively.<sup>45</sup> In announcing their desire to be supplicatory and unboastful, then elevating themselves to the height of

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<sup>43</sup> *The Humming Bird; or, Morsels of Information, on the Subject of Slavery, with various Miscellaneous Articles* (Leicester: A. Cockshaw: 1825), p. 3. The periodical was also sold by J. Hatchard in London and J. Robertson in Edinburgh. The periodical ran from December 1824 through 1825, and to an impressive 380 pages in all.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-4, 8.

personified virtues equipped with tools from classical and religious tales, the editors again deflect potential criticism of their credentials for involvement in this public debate with pre-emptive witticisms.

Although the primary focus of the periodical is on the anti-slavery cause, a great deal of the content is concerned with other areas, such as literature, history and natural history, from articles on Shakespeare's grave and the poetry of George Herbert, through to various articles on animals. The aim was clearly to make it a journal which could have widespread appeal, as they explained;

the subject of Slavery leads through a dark defile, where appalling objects of terror often deepen the general gloom, those friends who may favor us with a few flowers to strew in the road, the roses of poetry, or the plants of science, will advance the cause, by engaging the regard of those eyes which would otherwise be averted from the gloomy prospect.<sup>46</sup>

Many of the contributions were edited extracts from more extensive abolitionist literature, collated and edited down to be suitable for publication in a small periodical with a few added thoughts of their own. This was in keeping with the original publicised intention of the work, which was 'to collect a few leaves from the more weighty documents now publishing upon the subject, and to give them, in a small shape, " lighter wings to fly."<sup>47</sup> Alongside these, however, were pieces entirely of the editors' own authorship, including edited versions of Heyrick's lengthier abolitionist pamphlets, poetry by Watts, and extensive translations from literary works in other languages.

As editors, they drew heavily on contemporary evidence as to the conditions of slavery as well as classical, historical, scriptural and philosophical texts to construct arguments that were not only rationally, but intellectually supported by recognised sources. They also rejected the trend for employing excessive sentimentality in the depiction of slavery, rather than factual evidence:

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p.194.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5

we have only to remark that it is our duty to give a faithful picture of slavery, and if that picture be hideous, we cannot soften it. We must not temporize with our own principles. With the delicate sensibility of modern refinement, we have nothing to do; and if the susceptible be disgusted by the revolting object of a flayed negro woman devoured by maggots, let them remember that the delicious sweets, which, at every repast, pass their lips, are the cause, the single cause of these agonising tortures.<sup>48</sup>

Whilst effective, this was far from the usual tone for female writers of the time, and it is not overly difficult to understand why, when the Ladies' Anti-Slavery societies subsequently drew on the work of Heyrick and Watts, they tended to carefully select their extracts, so that the dominant appeal was to divine authority rather than the more challenging ground of moral rationality.

In April 1825 the first meeting of the Birmingham Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society was held, and in May, the sixth issue of *The Humming Bird* announced both its formation, and the imminent creation of a Leicester branch:

It gives us cordial pleasure to learn that there is formed a "Ladies' Society for the relief of Negro Slaves," at West Bromwich, near Birmingham; the Secretaries are Mrs. Townsend and Mrs. Samuel Lloyd, jun. Its object is to diffuse the knowledge of the horrors and iniquity of the Slave system, and, through the Missionaries, to send help to the aged, sick, blind, and maimed Slaves, who have no owners; particularly the females; and also to support Negro Schools. We rejoice also to state, that a Society of Ladies is about to be established in the same cause in this town. Has misery ever appealed to the female heart in vain?<sup>49</sup>

The close association between Heyrick and Watts and the Birmingham Society can be gleaned from the patterns of mutual citation in their publications. The

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.56.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.194.

first report for the Birmingham Society, published in 1826, concluded with an extract from one of Heyrick's less well known pamphlets, *Letters on the Prompt Extinction of British Colonial Slavery*, with an introduction that lauded her contribution to the movement:

The Committee cannot more properly close this Report than in the language, slightly varied, of a female writer who is one of the most powerful, and consistent, advocates of our enslaved fellow-subjects, the Author of 'Letters on the Prompt Extinction of British Colonial Slavery, with Thoughts on Compensation'.<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, the presented extract, which was not from her most famous and influential work, places an unusual level of emphasis on divine authority in comparison to her other writings. It does not explicitly mention immediate abolition as a practical, political suggestion, nor does it refer to abstention from slave grown produce. Whether the extract was selected by Heyrick herself or the society committee, it is evidently intended to support their collective image as that of acting on divine authority:

"Let this people go,"—is the authoritative language of the great Parent of the Universe, to all who have ears to hear the voice of reason, of conscience, of revelation;—to all who keep aloof from the confused Babel of sordid interest and political expediency. "Let this people go,"—is as clearly the Divine command respecting these poor despised outcasts, these oppressed strangers, as it was respecting the oppressed Israelites. In their case it is true, the command was express and audible,—enforced by great signs and wonders—and its resistance attended by immediate and supernatural punishments. But in the case of the poor Negro, the command is not less intelligible in a Christian's ear, because conveyed by the spirit, instead of the Divine injunction.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *The First Report of the Female Society, for Birmingham*, p.12.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p.12.

This adherence to religious rhetoric was for many of the movement's members an accurate representation of their motivation and beliefs lying behind their involvement in this cause. However, it was also used to reframe the views and actions of this collective movement that might otherwise be construed as politically radical by a disapproving public. Heyrick and Watts' pioneering work in organising community boycotts of slave grown produce, and disseminating evidence of slaves' abject mistreatment in *The Humming Bird*, was adopted and continued throughout the growing network of female anti-slavery societies, but under the guise of standard female charitable activism.

In the seventh issue of *The Humming Bird*, in June 1825, the editors detailed the success of their canvassing door to door to persuade residents to abstain from slave-grown produce:

As an encouragement to the hopeless, we have a strong fact to produce, which will shew what may be done, from what has been done. In the town of Leicester, by the zeal and activity of a very few individuals alone, nearly one fourth of the population, viz. 1500 families have been so impressed by the subject, as to engage themselves to abstain from the use of West-Indian sugar.<sup>52</sup>

This report was then matched by the second report for the Birmingham society in 1826-7, which noted that:

The influence of females in the minor departments (as they are usually deemed), of household affairs is generally such that it rests with them to determine whether the luxuries indulged in, and the conveniences enjoyed, shall come to them from the employer of free men, or from the oppressors of British Slaves. When the preference is given to the latter, we see, therefore, with whom the responsibility must mainly rest. Pleasing accounts have been received from the Visitors who recommend Free

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<sup>52</sup> *The Humming Bird*, p.201.

Labour Produce in the districts they have undertaken for this purpose. More than half the town of Birmingham has been visited, house by house; and efforts have been made in many places in the neighbourhood to awaken the attention of the inhabitants to the same important subject.<sup>53</sup>

That more than half the town of Birmingham was visited implies a considerable undertaking, but the report makes very little of it, choosing not to draw too much attention to one of the most controversial aspects of the campaign.

A great deal of the Anti-Slavery Society members' time was devoted to sewing work bags, a common practise in ladies charitable societies, that were to be sold to raise funds to help the situation of female slaves. Each member of the society was also provided with copies of the *Jamaica Gazette*, featuring advertisements for available slaves in which they were identified by the marks left by brutal treatment, undeniable evidence of the conditions of colonial slavery. These extracts were hidden within the interior of the work bags, to be found after purchase and so disseminate this evidence to a wide and potentially unsuspecting audience.<sup>54</sup> Door to door canvassing became one of the primary activities of many of the societies, as they were set up around the country, but it was carefully framed as 'visiting', a far more sociable and acceptable activity for women.

The reports of the central Birmingham society, which Heyrick, and later Watts, attended as the district treasurers and representatives for the Leicester branch, provide a wealth of material on the inspiration, ideals, expansion and actions of this founding female abolitionist society, and the many others it inspired. That there was a pre-existing inclination towards the cause prior to the society's foundation may be seen in the rapid expansion of the movement across numerous British towns, with pre-established networks of women forming the initial members of their respective branches. Although the records of the Leicester society have now been lost, the fifth report of the Birmingham society

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<sup>53</sup> *The Second Report of the Female Society, for the Relief of British Negro Slaves* (Birmingham: B. Hudson, 1826), p.14.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p.10.

helpfully lists 56 members of the Leicester branch. The list includes Watts' friend, Miss Frewen; her servant, Mary Brown; Mrs Kershan of Danetts (Watts' childhood home); Elizabeth Coltman (Heyrick's namesake); Mary Ann Coltman (Heyrick's sister); Mrs Albert Cockshaw, the wife of the printer of *The Humming Bird* and many of Heyrick's other works, and, as a donor, Heyrick's brother Samuel Coltman.<sup>55</sup> The list is wonderfully revealing, showing how their work and writing evolved from within their community, in a network of friends and family.

*The Humming Bird*, as an individual case study, provides a fascinating insight into an individual group of women's engagement with the cause of abolition in the public sphere. These women were, however, a small if unique section of a nationwide movement. Examined alongside the materials produced by the female abolitionist groups with which Watts and Heyrick were involved, *The Humming Bird* becomes an interesting component of the multitude of tactics employed by women in the drive to abolish slavery. By tracing the actions of the members of this movement, it is possible to uncover the networks and communities that created and shaped this widespread social campaign of female activism.

In the Birmingham society reports, Heyrick and Watts are two of only a handful of members to have pieces published, suggesting a high degree of influence within the movement. The fourth report was headed by a poem by Susanna Watts. Addressed to 'British Ladies', it encouraged their sympathy as women and mothers with female slaves whose children were taken from them to be sold:

THE SLAVE'S ADDRESS TO BRITISH LADIES.

Natives of a land of glory,

Daughters of the good and brave,

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<sup>55</sup> *Fifth Report of the Female Society for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their Respective Neighbourhoods, for the Relief of British Negro Slaves* (Birmingham: B. Hudson, 1830). p.59.

Hear the injured Negro's story,  
 Hear, and help the kneeling Slave.  
 Think, how nought but death can sever  
 Your lov'd children from your hold,  
 Still alive—but lost for ever  
 Ours are parted, bought and sold !  
 Seize, then, ev'ry favouring season  
 Scorning censure or applause;  
 JUSTICE, TRUTH, RELIGION, REASON,  
 Are your LEADERS in our cause!  
 Follow !—faithful, firm, confiding,  
 Spread our wrongs from shore to shore;  
 Mercy's God your efforts guiding,  
 Slavery shall be known no more.<sup>56</sup>

The poem's combination of the radical and rebellious with a popularized ideal of Christian femininity shows not only the ways in which women adapted their available avenues of expression to suit their own ends, but the development of a society between eras. Watts and Heyrick were, in many ways, the voice of provincial dissenting communities of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, defying social marginalisation to argue for rational morality. In the adoption of their ideas and ideals, the nation-wide network of women's anti-slavery societies demonstrated the success with which their arguments had been made. In the creation of a

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<sup>56</sup> *The Fourth Report of the Female Society for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their Respective Neighbourhoods, for the Relief of British Negro Slaves* (Birmingham: Richard Peart, 1828), p.1.

collective persona that appealed to developing ideas of female spirituality, the women of the abolitionist movement looked to keep pace with a society increasingly concerned with Christian morality as a means of convincing the nation of the justness of their cause.

In 1830, the London Society for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery agreed to drop the 'gradual' from its title, following considerable pressure from female societies, who threatened to withdraw all funding were they to continue with a policy of gradual emancipation. On 18<sup>th</sup> October 1831, Elizabeth Heyrick died, two years before the Abolition of Slavery act came into place. Susanna Watts survived until 1842, continuing her acts of philanthropy until her final days. Their legacy in Britain, with the passing of the 1833 act, is clear. Heyrick's work, however, was also to have a decisive influence in the anti-slavery campaigns in America, and was widely credited with having introduced the campaign for immediate abolition of slavery. As the leading American abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, declared to an assembled audience in Glasgow whilst he was visiting Britain: 'Who first gave to the world the doctrine of immediate emancipation? It was a woman of England – Elizabeth Heyrick.'<sup>57</sup>

## Critical Literature

The critical literature on Heyrick is far more extensive than on Watts, who is generally discussed largely in connection with Heyrick, although Moira Ferguson, in her work, *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen, 1780-1900* includes a chapter each on Heyrick and Watts and their writings on animal welfare.<sup>58</sup> Local historian Shirley Aucott has done invaluable work in producing individual biographies of each of the women, drawing on archival sources and bringing together an array of life writing texts, letters, press reports and other sources to produce informative

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<sup>57</sup> Beale, *Catherine Hutton and Her Friends*, p. 210.

<sup>58</sup> Moira Ferguson, *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen, 1780-1900* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

summaries of their lives.<sup>59</sup> The first detailed examination of Elizabeth Heyrick's life and work was that of Kenneth Corfield, in Gail Malmgreen's important collection, *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (1986), which opened up major questions for the writing of women's history as to the role of women's 'spiritual impulses and religious vocations' and how they might 'persist in a more or less hostile environment as sources of strength, self-definition, and accomplishment'.<sup>60</sup> Malmgreen's collection thus set the context for a new agenda, overturning tendencies in previous feminist scholarship either to dismiss or ignore women's religious beliefs and practices, or to portray them as primarily constraining.<sup>61</sup> In 'Elizabeth Heyrick: Radical Quaker', Corfield placed her firmly within the Leicester dissenting community, looking at her anti-slavery campaigns, but also other pamphlets and writings, including her support for the striking framework-knitters in 1825, which set Heyrick in direct opposition to her brother, who was a leading member of what she termed the 'hostile combination' of local employers.<sup>62</sup> He does, however, argue that 'the evidence suggests that female abolitionists had little influence in persuading men to shift their ground and press for immediate emancipation'.<sup>63</sup> As further scholarship is published, and sources discovered, this verdict is being revised.<sup>64</sup> Certainly, as Corfield himself notes, with regard to the American campaigns, there was a clear sense of indebtedness to Heyrick. When *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* was republished in Boston in 1838 it carried a preface which credited the pamphlet with changing the 'gradualist' views of Wilberforce and his fellow abolitionists: 'This pamphlet changed their views; they now attacked slavery as a sin to be

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<sup>59</sup> Shirley Aucott, *Susanna Watts, 1768-1842*; Shirley Aucott, *Elizabeth Heyrick, 1769-1831*.

<sup>60</sup> Gail Malmgreen, 'Introduction', in G. Malmgreen (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women*, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's superb account of middle-class life within Birmingham, for example, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), tended to focus more on the social than spiritual side of the evangelical and dissenting communities it explored, and to see religion as largely reinforcing the emergence of 'separate spheres'.

<sup>62</sup> Kenneth Corfield, 'Elizabeth Heyrick: Radical Quaker', in Malmgreen, (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women*, p. 55.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp 55-64, and *Women Against Slavery*.

forsaken *immediately*, and the result is known.’<sup>65</sup> While this is clearly a huge over-simplification, it is nonetheless testimony to Heyrick’s enduring legacy that her role was being constructed in this way.

Corfield is careful not to overstate the role of radicalism in Heyrick’s life, suggesting that it did not extend to the position of women in society.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, the next significant treatment of Heyrick’s work, Moira Ferguson’s *Subject to Others* (1992) tends in the opposite direction, overstating the links with the subsequent ‘fight for white British women’s rights’.<sup>67</sup> Ferguson’s text, which carries Susanna Watts’ poem, ‘The Slave’s Address’ as one of its epigraphs, sets Heyrick’s activism within the broader context of British women’s campaigns against slavery. It identifies the crucial shift in rhetoric and purpose which occurs with Heyrick’s work, from a largely ‘civilizing mission’ to that of a ‘pro-emancipation mission’.<sup>68</sup> Ferguson’s book is part of a wave of work which has emerged over the last two to three decades on slavery and abolition that has helped to restore to prominence the importance of women’s roles within these movements, thus rescuing, ironically, the voices of those campaigning for the oppressed and marginalised who have themselves until recently been marginalised in academic scholarship. Key texts in this process of re-evaluation are Clare Midgley’s, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (1992); *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (2007), and more recently her essay ‘The Dissenting Voice of Elizabeth Heyrick’ in the excellent collection by Clap and Jeffrey, *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery*

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<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition: or, and Enquiry into the Shortest, Safest, and Most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West Indian Slavery* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838). The pamphlet was published without an identified author on the title page, but the preface identifies it as by ‘Elizabeth Heyrick of Leicester, England’. Jennifer Rycenga has looked at Heyrick’s influence in America in ‘A Greater Awakening: Women’s Intellect as a Factor in Early Abolitionist Movements, 1824-1834’, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 21, no. 2 (2005), 31-59, pp. 37-43.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Corfield, ‘Elizabeth Heyrick’, p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 258.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257. Ferguson credits Heyrick with having published in her own voice (p. 264, p. 304), but it is important to note that *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* was published anonymously. Although the authorship did become known, even the 1838 Boston edition, as noted above, was still published without a name on the title page.

in *Britain and America, 1790-1865*.<sup>69</sup> It is a sign of the increasing awareness of the significance of Heyrick's contributions to the anti-slavery movement that, in addition to Midgley, there are two other essays in the collection, by Alison Twells and Carol Lasser, which also focus on Heyrick.<sup>70</sup> Midgley's essay is the most detailed account to date of both Heyrick's political campaigning and the role of her religious beliefs, and her conversion to Quakerism, in helping her both to develop and sustain her work. Unlike most of the other briefer treatments (with the exception of Corfield, and Aucott), it also draws on the manuscript archive at the Leicester Record Office, thus enabling her to establish a fuller, and more complex picture, than that which can be gleaned from Heyrick's published work alone. She highlights for example, Heyrick's visit to York in 1802, the year she was received into the Society of Friends, and her growing friendship with the family of William Tuke, who had founded the York Retreat, the asylum which pioneered the methods of moral management for the insane, doing away with forcible constraint, and attempting to cure patients through gentle and humane treatment. Tuke also ran three Quaker schools, and Heyrick worked alongside Tuke's wife and daughters in training to be a teacher herself, but no doubt taking inspiration from their vigorous lives as itinerant preachers. By placing Heyrick within this wider, activist religious network, Midgley shows how Heyrick acquired both the 'intellectual and spiritual and resources' to take her own subsequent principled stand in the anti-slavery debates.<sup>71</sup>

In her recent book, *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy* (2016), Julie Holcomb has placed Heyrick in the wider context of the boycotting of the products of slave labour, tracking the

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<sup>69</sup> Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*; 'The Dissenting Voice of Elizabeth Heyrick: An Exploration of the Links between Gender, Religious Dissent, and Anti-Slavery Radicalism', in Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey (eds), *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery*, pp. 1-29.

<sup>70</sup> Alison Twells, 'We ought to Obey God rather than Man' and Carol Lasser, 'Immediatism, Dissent and Gender: Women and the Sentimentalization of Transatlantic Anti-Slavery' in Clapp and Jeffrey, *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery*. Twells explores Heyrick's profound influence on the Sheffield Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, whilst Lasser emphasises the impact of Heyrick on the American abolitionist movement, and also the influence of Adam Smith on the form of her economic arguments.

<sup>71</sup> Clare Midgley, 'Dissenting Voice', p. 21.

influence of the late eighteenth movements for abstention from sugar, and more directly the impact of the slave rebellions in Barbados (1816) and Demerara (1823). She emphasises just how much more radical the women's anti-slavery movements were in Britain than their male counterparts, due in part to Heyrick's insistence on both abstention and immediatism, and her appeal both to heart and head: 'Heyrick made slavery and slave-labor goods a matter for woman's heart and for her pocket book. As a result, she invested women with the ability to manipulate the market, viewing abstention as a morally directed economic strategy that had a direct impact on slavery'.<sup>72</sup>

Holcomb's work is part of a rich seam of recent scholarship on the boycott movements, both those of the 1790s, and the revival by Heyrick in the 1820s. Davies, for example, has looked at Anna Barbauld's 'Epistle to William Wilberforce' and the close intersection of femininity and the commercial sphere, whilst Mimi Sheller, in 'Bleeding Humanity and Gendered Embodiments: from Antislavery Sugar Boycotts to Ethical Consumers' has explored both the contemporary resonances of the nineteenth-century boycotts, and also the associations between the blood of slaves, sugar, and the female body.<sup>73</sup> Moving beyond the historical details of the campaigns, such works, with their close attention to the language and imagery involved, help us to understand the highly charged symbolism of the campaigns, and the often unspoken associations with the female body. Holcomb prints an image of the front cover of Heyrick's *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* pamphlet, with its picture of a black slave, not

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<sup>72</sup> Julie Holcomb, *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2016), p. 106.

<sup>73</sup> Kate Davies, 'A Moral Purchase: Femininity, Commerce and Abolition', in Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clóna Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (eds), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 133-162; Mimi Sheller, 'Bleeding Humanity and Gendered Embodiments: from Antislavery sugar Boycotts to Ethical Consumers', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 2:2 (2011), 171-192. See also, Charlotte Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender and British Slavery, 1713-1833* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Timothy Morton, 'Blood Sugar', in T. Fulford and P. J. Kitson (eds), *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 87-106.

kneeling and submissive, supplicating for freedom as in Wedgwood's famous iconography, but rather standing erect, with chains cast off, gazing directly at the reader.<sup>74</sup> It is a clear illustration of the new, more egalitarian politics introduced by Heyrick; even the previous slogan, 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?' has been transformed into the assertive: 'I am a Man, Your Brother'.

One of the difficulties posed in Heyrick scholarship is that, as Timothy Whelan has recently pointed out in his *Nonconformist Women Writers* series, various works attributed to Heyrick are not actually by her, but by Elizabeth Coltman (1761-1838), a distant relative, and friend of Heyrick and Watts, who was also resident in Leicester. The works concerned are three texts for children: *Plain Tales, Chiefly Intended for the Use of Charity Schools* (1799); *Instructive Hints, in Easy Lessons, for Children* (1806); and *Familiar letters Addressed to Children and Young Persons of the Middle Ranks* (1811); and also *The Warning. Recommended to the Serious Attention of all Christians, and Lovers of their Country* (c.1805-6), a political tract, penned during the Napoleonic wars calling for 'national repentance and a return to morality and godliness.'<sup>75</sup> Whelan's evidence is compelling, and it points to the difficulties of tracking down the publications of more obscure female writers when publishing often occurred anonymously. Although Heyrick was Elizabeth Coltman before her marriage, as Whelan points out, she would have been unlikely to have used this form of name after marriage. Heyrick's higher fame, combined with knowledge of her maiden name, could have been a cause of the initial misattributions. Whelan's findings mean that authoritative accounts of Heyrick's writings, such as those offered by the *ODNB*

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<sup>74</sup> Holcomb, *Moral Commerce*, pp.91-92. Holcomb states that the image is from the first English edition, but it comes from a 'New Edition', as it states on the title page, which is not published by the original publishers of the 1824 edition (J. Hatchard, London, and Thomas Combe, Leicester) but rather printed by B. Clay (Devonshire Street, Bishopsgate, London), and sold by F. Westley, and S. Burton in London and 'By all Booksellers and Newsmen'. The latter claim is no doubt aspirational, but it gives some sense of the popularity of the pamphlet. Corfield, for example, notes that 2000 copies were purchased and distributed by the Sheffield Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, 'Elizabeth Heyrick', p.44.

<sup>75</sup> See Timothy Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers, 1720-1840. Volume 7* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), pp. 16-17; 31-32. See also his very helpful website, 'Nonconformist Women Writers, 1650-1850', <https://sites.google.com/a/georgiasouthern.edu/nonconformist-women-writers-1650-1850/home>.

and the *Orlando Project* need to be revised.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, critical accounts of her work which draw on some of this material also require some revision. Thus Kenneth Corfield, for example, uses a quotation from *Familiar Letters* as evidence for his argument that Heyrick had conservative views on the position of women.<sup>77</sup> Midgley also draws on this same passage, but tries to argue for a more nuanced interpretation of Heyrick's understanding of the roles of the sexes. Removing this work from the acknowledged list of Heyrick's writings allows a more radical persona to emerge.<sup>78</sup>

Another problem in Heyrick scholarship is related to *The Humming Bird*. Despite the collaborative voice, and clear evidence that Watts and Heyrick acted as authors and editors, most probably with Heyrick's sister Mary Ann Coltman, the periodical is often attributed solely to Watts. Thus the *ODNB* entry for Watts speaks of it solely as her anti-slavery periodical, a mistake then replicated in Moira Ferguson's *Animal Advocacy* which discusses *The Humming Bird* as a work produced just by Watts.<sup>79</sup>

In her article, 'The most Public Sphere of All: the Family', Sylvana Tomaselli has pointed to the dangers of equating the private with the domestic sphere: 'To think of the family as an exclusively private domain has very wide-ranging philosophical and political implications'.<sup>80</sup> Her argument is part of a new wave of work which is challenging previous scholarship which assumed rather unproblematic divisions between the largely masculine public sphere, and the domestic sphere to which women were largely confined. Instead, scholars are tracking more complex models of interplay, where the political enters the familial

<sup>76</sup> The *ODNB* entry for Heyrick by Isobel Grundy cites both *The Warning* and *Familiar Letters* as works by Heyrick. The *Orlando Project* assigns all four works to Heyrick: Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy (eds), 'Elizabeth Heyrick' entry within *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online, 2006), <http://orlando.cambridge.org>.

<sup>77</sup> Kenneth Corfield, 'Elizabeth Heyrick', p. 60.

<sup>78</sup> Midgley, 'The Dissenting Voice', p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> See Ferguson, *Animal Advocacy*, p. 55.

<sup>80</sup> Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The most Public Sphere of All: the Family', in Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (eds), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 239-56, p. 239.

sphere, and family politics are played out in the public domain. Such analysis is accompanied by an understanding that, as Amy Culley notes in *British Women's Life Writing, 1760-1840*, life writing as a genre is particularly well suited to offering us 'new perspectives on women's personal and familial relationships, religious, social, political and national affiliations, intertextual networks and literary collaborations'.<sup>81</sup> Following Felicity Nussbaum's seminal work, *The Autobiographical Subject*, which revealed the ways in which women could work within expected generic codes, whilst also finding ways to subvert them, there has developed extensive work both on autobiographical writing, and its relations to various biographical forms.<sup>82</sup> As Betty Schellenberg has noted, Margaret Ezell's work, *Writing Women's Literary History* (1993), highlighted the ways in which an emphasis on print had tended to obscure the various ways in which women had participated in literary culture.<sup>83</sup> Since then there has been extensive work on the development of networks, both of women only, and cross gender, within specific social and religious circles, and the understanding of what texts might be relevant has expanded to include manuscript and printed texts in a wide variety of forms.<sup>84</sup> Amy Culley in her analysis of the life writing of Mary Berry and Joanna

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<sup>81</sup> Amy Culley, *British Women's Life Writing, 1760-1840* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.3.

<sup>82</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). See particularly Ch. 2 'The Politics of Subjectivity' and Ch. 7 "'Of Woman's Seed': Women's Spiritual Autobiographies'.

<sup>83</sup> Betty A. Schellenberg, 'Bluestocking Women and the Negotiation of Oral, Manuscript, and Print Cultures', in Jacqueline M. Labbe (ed.), *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750-1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker, (eds), *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Betty A Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Sylvia Harcstarck Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (eds), *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Felicity James and Ian Inkster (eds), *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and Daniel Cook and Amy Culley, *Women's Life Writing, 1760-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Baillie, for example, has looked at ‘biographical prefaces, obituaries, and collective biographies’ in order to understand their critical legacies.<sup>85</sup>

This research is also building on theoretical work on autobiography, and the recognition that autobiography was not a solitary outpouring of an individual self, but rather an intertextual production which was part of a wider communal process of self-making and identity construction.<sup>86</sup> As Felicity James and Julian North suggest, we should try to ‘understand life writing as a dynamic expression of relationship within social networks of writers and readers, rather than as the consecration of individual identity’.<sup>87</sup> The dissenting communities have attracted particular attention due to their particular traditions of communal life writing. Daniel White, for example, has argued with reference to Anna Barbauld and the Aikin family circle that the ‘Dissenting public sphere, throughout which the Aikin family network extended, to a significant degree shaped the new aesthetic, political and religious features of early Romantic culture.’<sup>88</sup> The particular forms of sociability and communicative interaction within the dissenting community helped shape a public sphere and forms of writing more generally, well beyond the immediate boundaries of these religious circles. Kathryn Gleadle has also shown the impact of Unitarian culture on women’s political activism, both in late enlightenment period, and into the Victorian era.<sup>89</sup> It should not be assumed,

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<sup>85</sup> Amy Culley, ‘Ageing, Authorship, and Female Networks in the Life Writing of Mary Berry (1763-1852) and Joanna Baillie (1762-1851)’, in Andrew O. Winckles and Angela Rehbein (eds), *Women’s Literary Networks and Romanticism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 75.

<sup>86</sup> For foundational texts in rethinking autobiography, see Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), and Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). Amy Culley offers an excellent overview of the development of work on life writing in the eighteenth century in ‘Women’s life Writing in the Long 18<sup>th</sup> Century: A Critical Survey’, *Literature Compass* 12:1 (2015), 1-11.

<sup>87</sup> Felicity James and Julian North, ‘Writing Lives Together: Romantic and Victorian Auto/biography’, *Life Writing*, 14, No. 2. (2017), pp. 133-138, p.134.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 86.

<sup>89</sup> Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movement, 1831-51* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995); ‘British Women and Radical Politics in the Late Nonconformist Enlightenment, c. 1780-1830’ in Amanda Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001);

however, that such communities were necessarily harmonious. Elizabeth Heyrick, for example, caused great consternation amidst her dissenting family circle when she decided to join the Quakers. As Felicity James has shown, the groupings of Rational Dissent could be ‘disparate, questioning and quarrelsome’, but it was precisely through these disputes, and their attempts to work through them that one can track the shaping of community memories and identities.<sup>90</sup>

In her recent work on ‘Collaborative Life Writing as Ideology’, Linda Peterson explored the working practices of collaborative writing in the Howitt family, linking it to the forms of ‘collective biography’ or exemplary lives of women produced in the nineteenth century which have been analysed by Alison Booth.<sup>91</sup> She suggests that ‘collaborative life writing demands that its subjects share ideology in order to share narrative. When ideological positions converge, collaborative writing becomes possible. When they diverge, the collaborative narrative breaks down, reaches an impasse, or disperses into individual stories’.<sup>92</sup> Her statement helps to unravel the distinction between collaborative writing, and communal or collective writing, since in the texts that I will be examining, they were not written jointly, with a common end, but rather composed individually, but from within a specific community. They are all attempts to memorialise, but by writers trying to come to terms with lives which strayed outside expected patterns and ideologies. They are also of varied status; some, written after the deaths of Heyrick and Watts, do tend towards offering their lives as moral exemplars, but for relatives or close friends drawing on personal interactions and memories, the impulses and responses are more mixed. In *The Autobiographical*

*Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>90</sup> Felicity James, ‘Writing the Live of Dissent: Life Writing, Religion and Community from Edmund Calamy to Elizabeth Gaskell’, *Life Writing*, 14, No. 2. (2017), pp. 185-197, p. 185.

<sup>91</sup> Alison Booth, *How to Make it as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004). Booth’s focus is on the Victorian period, but as Culley points out, there are significant examples at the beginning of the century, with Mary Hays’ six volume *Female Biography* (1803), and Matilda Bentham’s *A Biographical Dictionary of Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country* (1804), Culley, ‘Women’s Life Writing’, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Linda H. Peterson, ‘Collaborative Life Writing as Ideology: The Auto/biographies of Mary Howitt and her Family’, *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 26:1-2 (2003), pp. 176-195, p. 178.

*Subject*, Felicity Nussbaum outlined how the Quaker journal ‘moves towards a collaborative conception of an individual identity, and the paradox of rapt attention to subjectivity combined with self-abnegation is reconciled in a practice of the soul’s regulation’.<sup>93</sup> Such a balance was by no means easily maintained, however, and created tensions for both the subject and their community. In an important recent essay on problems of female agency in Quakerism, Phyllis Mack has shown how a secular liberal model of female agency is of limited use when trying to think about religious women, and, with reference to eighteenth-century female Quakers, ‘how complicated the experience of agency was for religious women who were also activists’. She tracks, however, the shift in agency in the early nineteenth century when women’s inward turning energies were shifted outwards, and ‘the ecstatic prophecy of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was transmuted into the aggressive altruism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century’.<sup>94</sup> The forceful movement for the abolition of slavery, justified not only by spiritual mission but by appeals to individual reason, was one of the immediate results of this new outward turn. Heyrick and Watts were both examples of this new form of female public activism, with all the tensions it created, both for the individuals themselves and for their families and communities. In the following sections I explore how their families and friends sought to make sense of their lives, in individual acts of writing which nonetheless contributed to the growth of a community’s structures of identity.

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<sup>93</sup> Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, p. 159.

<sup>94</sup> Phyllis Mack, ‘Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism’, in Knott and Taylor, *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, pp. 455,454.

## The Domestic Politics of Life Writing:

### The Construction and Preservation of Identities

Three pages into a letter intended for her close friend, Susanna Watts, Elizabeth Heyrick paused in her discussion of religious feeling to note, with some consternation, ‘But I perceive I have got to the bottom of my paper without having said a word on the subjects on which it was my intention to write to you’. She duly continued, in increasingly cramped handwriting, onto the folded outer leaves of her letter, ending it with an apology as her sister, Mary Ann Coltman had, ‘desired I would reserve a corner of my letter for her to fill up, but you see I have monopolised it all’.<sup>95</sup> This letter, written in 1808, is the last surviving record of direct communication between the two women, whose lives, work and community were so entwined. Despite being the sole remainder of any direct correspondence between them, Heyrick’s enthusiasm and compassion for her friend, alongside the topics she writes on, gives us a sense of the depth of their friendship and involvement in one another’s lives. Heyrick devotes much of the letter to an exploration of their shared religious faith in an attempt to console Watts during a period of deep unhappiness, before filling the remaining space with accounts of shared friends, family, cats, and the progress of their joint teaching ventures. It is one of the very few remaining sources for both women that provides an insight, not into their more public and political writings, but their day to day lives and modes of intimate correspondence.

Although Heyrick and Watts left extensive bodies of work, including life writing in the form of letters, poems and in Watts’ case, a detailed scrapbook, much of the information regarding the narrative and details of their lives must be drawn from accounts written by members of their contemporary community, who viewed Watts and Heyrick as sufficiently noteworthy to deserve biographical recognition. They were the subjects of both collective biographies of familial and

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<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick to Susanna Watts, 21 March 1808; Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, MS. 15D57/81. Hereafter Leics. RO.

social circles, and of individual works, all of which were written by people connected to them by either social or familial ties. As the primary sources for collected information on their lives and work, these portrayals of Heyrick and Watts have served as a lens through which they have been viewed and interpreted throughout their literary and historical afterlives. These works were also, however, the primary representation of the historical identity of the dissenting community of which Heyrick, Watts and their biographers were a part. This dual construction of individual and communal life writing necessarily affected the ways in which life writers presented Watts and Heyrick, seeing them both as individuals and as representative components of their shared community.

The distortive effects of biography on its subjects' literary and historical afterlives has been acknowledged and explored by both Melanie Bigold and Jennie Batchelor with reference to women authors in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, both noting its potential to influence the critical reception of its subjects' lives and work by later audiences.<sup>96</sup> The shifting images of Watts and Heyrick as their lives were written into the ongoing narratives of their families and communities show the degree to which their biographical identity became dependent upon not only the biographer's relationship to and perception of them as individuals, but their status as representatives of their circles and communities within these biographies. Their lives and writings were edited and incorporated into a wider community tradition of dissenting dynastic life writing, preserving the wider history and culture of which their lives were a part.

The town of Leicester, its environments, industries, people and history were all to play a formative part in the lives and works of Watts and Heyrick,

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<sup>96</sup> Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jennie Batchelor, 'Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith: Biography, Autobiography and the Writing of Women's Literary History', in Daniel Cook and Amy Culley (eds), *Women's Life Writing, 1700–1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 181–96.

inspiring their philanthropy, poetry and prose. In their works, both literary and charitable, we see their connection and contributions to the town's society, culture and history as an integral part of their lives. Less immediately evident, but very much present within their writings, are elements of their identities within their local circles of family and friends which reveal the influences the social, religious and intellectual practices of these communities had upon their world views and employments. It is essential to explore these immediate interpersonal connections, and the cultures and traditions that surrounded them, in order to build an in-depth image of the world these women inhabited.

In tracing the identities of these women, their families and friends through the life writing generated by their community, it is possible to construct not only a narrative of their lives, but also a fuller understanding of the literary and social cultures in which their immediate circles participated. The social context of their positions and identities both within their own community and within wider contemporary social ideas of class, gender, religion and morality inform and influence biographical accounts of their lives to a significant extent, as do contemporary views and practises of life writing as a genre. In order to understand the ways in which the biographical identities of Heyrick and Watts were shaped by the life-writing traditions within their circle, it is necessary to trace the origins, aims and application of these practises through their social, historical and literary contexts.

Biographical accounts of Susanna Watts and Elizabeth Heyrick span a period of almost a century, from a 'Hasty Sketch' written in 1802 of the Coltman family by their cousin, Catherine Hutton, to 1895, when Hutton's descendant Catherine Hutton Beale produced a lengthy book drawing on letters and biographical accounts of Hutton, the Coltmans and their close friend Susanna Watts. In looking at these texts we can see the ways in which individual and community interests, as well as generic conventions, play a role in constructing these figures for posterity. Tracing a chronology of the contemporary and posthumous works of life writing surrounding the lives of Watts and Heyrick allows us to track the development of their biographical identities through a series of life texts from

within and outside their communities. The key biographical texts I will be addressing in this chapter are:

- 1802 - 'Hasty Sketch of the Coltman Family' by Catherine Hutton, a distant relative and family friend of the Coltmans.<sup>97</sup> This is a short, handwritten manuscript detailing Hutton's impressions of the characters of the Coltman family. It begins with brief and predominantly positive descriptions of Heyrick's parents and siblings, before moving to an extensive character discussion and partial biography of Heyrick which comprises over half the work. In this, Hutton is openly critical of Heyrick's 'impulsive' nature and marriage, her conversion to Quakerism and her plans to open a school.
- 1804 - *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters* by Mrs Pilkington.<sup>98</sup> This text is a large and varied collection of biographies of both 'the virtuous and the vicious' women from history and contemporary society. Mrs Pilkington had no connection with Watts and had not read any of her work, but featured a brief account of Watts' literary accomplishments, and particularly her translation of Tasso, on the strength of others' good opinions of the work.
- 1819 - *Oakwood Hall*, by Catherine Hutton. Unusually, this is a novel, but one in which Hutton explicitly took the early life of Heyrick's mother, Elizabeth Coltman, as the basis of the plot.<sup>99</sup> The novel extols her virtues, and depicts her various suitors, and courtship with John Coltman. It was the third of Hutton's novels, and includes autobiographical elements,

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<sup>97</sup> Catherine Hutton, 'Hasty Sketch of the Coltman Family', 1802, Leics. RO, MS. 15D57/387.

<sup>98</sup> Mrs [Mary] Pilkington, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters, who have Distinguished Themselves by Their Talents and Virtues in Every Age and Nation: Containing the Most Extensive Collection of Illustrious Examples of Feminine Excellence Ever Published, in which the Virtuous and the Vicious are Painted in their True Colors* (London: Albion Press, 1804), p. 335.

<sup>99</sup> Catherine Hutton, *Oakwood Hall, a Novel; including a description of the Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland and part of South Wales*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1819). Hutton wrote to Heyrick's sister, Mary Ann Coltman, in 1818 announcing that 'I have disposed of the novel of which thy mother is the heroine' (see Catherine Hutton Beale, 1895, below), p. 168.

based on her travels in the Lake District and Wales, which sit oddly within the overall structure of the novel, making it part romantic novel, and part travelogue.

- 1842 – ‘A Few Recollections of the Late Mrs Susanna Watts’, an article published in the Leicester-printed Baptist periodical *The Fragment Gatherer*, written by an anonymous friend of Watts.<sup>100</sup> The periodical was sold in aid of the Baptist mission and its intended readership appears to have been a relatively local religious community, of which Watts was a part. The account is written anonymously by an author who states they are from within Watts’ close circle of friends, and details her domestic circumstances, focussing primarily on her religious development and identity.
- 1842 – *Hymns and Poems of the Late Mrs Susanna Watts with a Few Recollections of her Life*.<sup>101</sup> A published compilation of Watts’ poetry, primarily but not entirely religious, and her hymns. The earlier anonymous biography from *The Fragment Gatherer* is included as an epilogue.
- 1844 - ‘A Sketch of a Family of Originals, by an Original’ by Catherine Hutton, an article published in *Ainsworth’s Magazine*.<sup>102</sup> An account of the lives and characters of the Coltman family, but with altered names. Although it was published as authored by ‘an Original’, at the end of the sketch Hutton inscribed her own name: ‘Catherine Hutton, October 25<sup>th</sup>, in the 88<sup>th</sup> year of her age’. She was to die two years later. Hutton’s impressions of Heyrick (who had herself died thirteen years previously), are detailed at length in an anecdotal biography. It is markedly different in

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<sup>100</sup> Anon., ‘A Few Recollections of the Late Mrs Susanna Watts’, *The Fragment Gatherer* (Leicester, 1804).

<sup>101</sup> Susanna Watts, *Hymns and Poems of the Late Mrs Susanna Watts with a Few Recollections of Her Life* (Leicester: J. Waddington, 1842).

<sup>102</sup> Catherine Hutton, ‘A Sketch of a Family of Originals. By an Original, their Friend’, *Ainsworth’s Magazine*, 5 (1844), pp. 56-63.

tone from Hutton's earlier biography of Heyrick, describing her as a 'heroine' and praising her character and accomplishments, but still with some rather barbed remarks.

- 1852 - *Time's Stepping Stones – Or Some Memorials of Four Generations of a Family – by an Octogenarian Member of the Same* by Samuel Coltman, younger brother of Elizabeth Heyrick.<sup>103</sup> A handwritten and unpublished personal memorial account of the Coltman family, including large sections of family letters and diary extracts. Although he intended the account to include all of Heyrick's life and work, Samuel died before it was completed, subsequently it only reaches her early adulthood. Susanna Watts is featured as a close family friend, with details of her family history, character and accomplishments. In this text, Coltman makes several references to Hutton's earlier life writing accounts of the family.
- 1862 – *A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mrs Elizabeth Heyrick*, written anonymously.<sup>104</sup> A moderately detailed published biography, which focusses primarily on Heyrick's public works. The author does not claim any personal connection to Heyrick, although the work was published in Leicester and so is likely to have come from someone connected to the circles in which Heyrick had moved.
- 1865- A short manuscript biography by Clara Parkes of Susanna Watts, attached to Watts' Scrapbook, which is held in the Leicester Record Office.<sup>105</sup> Parkes records that the Scrapbook was given by Watts to her dear friend Mary Ann Coltman (Heyrick's younger sister), who in turn bequeathed it to Parkes, her great-great niece.

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<sup>103</sup> Samuel Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones – Or Some Memorials of Four Generations of a Family – by an Octogenarian Member of the Same*, (Leicester: 1852), Leics. RO., MS. Misc. 1153.

<sup>104</sup> Anon., *A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mrs Elizabeth Heyrick*, (Leicester: Crossley and Clarke, 1862).

<sup>105</sup> 'Susanna Watts', biographical sketch dated Feb. 2, 1865. MS attached to Watts' Scrapbook, Leics. RO, DE 8170.

- 1895 – *Catherine Hutton and Her Friends – Edited by her Cousin* by Catherine Hutton Beale.<sup>106</sup> This work is the second biography and set of collected letters published by Beale on her relative Catherine Hutton. Its expressed purpose was to illustrate the relationship Hutton had with the Coltman family, who had been brought to Beale's attention through their significant presence in Hutton's correspondence. The text offers a biographical account of the Coltman family as well as transcriptions of much of their correspondence, including that not related directly to Hutton herself. Heyrick has a separate, more detailed biography within the text that details some of her public works and writings. Watts is discussed as part of the Coltman family circle due to their close friendship; several letters of hers are included along with a brief biography and family history.

Whilst somewhat intermittent, this chronology shows a communal pattern of life writing perpetuated by members of Heyrick and Watts' intimate domestic circles and their descendants, which continued for almost a century. These writings from authors with direct familial or social connections to their subjects are joined by occasional works of life writing from authors outside of these communities. This suggests that although Heyrick and Watts' literary and historical afterlives were primarily promoted from within their own networks, their public identities were sufficiently noteworthy to be seen as worthy of perpetuation by authors outside of these circles. Alongside their personal works and writings, these biographical texts play a significant role in constructing our knowledge and understanding of the lives of Heyrick and Watts, providing details of their intimate personal connections, domestic circumstances and of the way they were perceived by life writers across a period of almost a century.

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<sup>106</sup> Catherine Hutton Beale, *Catherine Hutton and Her Friends* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1895).

## From Manuscript to Print

In 1891 Catherine Hutton Beale published an edited collection of correspondence surrounding the life of her cousin, the Birmingham author Catherine Hutton, who had lived in the city from 1756 to 1846. The collection was taken from a 'great mass of correspondence' left by Hutton that her cousin now deemed to be of interest to the public as a record of earlier times, highlighting the 'graphic accounts of places, modes of travelling, manners and customs, dress, and character' that the letters contained.<sup>107</sup> Four years later, Beale published a further volume of her cousin's letters that centred on a different theme of historical interest: the people who formed Catherine Hutton's extensive list of correspondents. Living in Birmingham in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hutton was a member of the network of dissenting communities that spread across the midlands during this period. This vibrant society contained numerous well-known writers, scientists and political radicals, so it was somewhat surprising that Beale chose to focus the collection on a relatively unknown family from Leicester: the Coltmans. In the foreword of this new work, entitled *Catherine Hutton and her Friends*, Beale explained that:

While editing *The Reminiscences of a Gentlewoman of the Last Century : Letters of Catherine Hutton*, I felt a great desire to know more of the Coltman family, as several of the members are mentioned in those letters, and much interest in them was thereby created, but all my inquiries for information were at first fruitless. I have since learnt that the branch of the Coltman family which Miss Hutton knew is extinct.

Quite by accident Mr. Thomas Worthington Clarke saw a review of Miss Hutton's letters in the Times, and he at once communicated with me, through Messrs. Cornish Brothers, the publishers, and told me that Miss

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<sup>107</sup> Catherine Hutton Beale (ed.), *The Reminiscences of a Gentlewoman of the Last Century: Letters of Catherine Hutton* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1891), p. i.

Hutton had been the friend of his great-grandmother, also of his great-aunt, Miss Mary Ann Coltman. This gentleman has kindly placed at my disposal the whole of the manuscript memoirs of the Coltman family of Leicester, with much of their correspondence, which includes a large number of Miss Hutton's letters, as well as letters of Spence, Dodsley, and others.<sup>108</sup>

In bringing to light these buried memoirs, Beale continued the tradition of communal manuscript preservation and life writing that had been an integral part of the familial network Catherine Hutton shared with the Coltmans, as a distant cousin and close friend. The great-grandmother and great-aunt referred to by Thomas Worthington Clarke, were Elizabeth and Mary Ann Coltman – the mother and sister of Elizabeth Heyrick and beloved friends of Catherine Hutton. This collection, still largely intact, is now held by The Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, and comprises several hundred documents dating from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Its preservation through several generations of the family across two centuries, before its eventual assimilation into an archive of public and social records, speaks of the strength of tradition and dedication this inter-generational community held towards the conservation and perpetuation of their shared history.

In her 1895 collection, Beale featured not only Catherine Hutton's close friends, but those among their circle she deemed to be of particular historic interest in providing an image of the society her book aimed to recreate. Particularly featured were Elizabeth Heyrick and Susanna Watts, who had become so close to the Coltman family across the years of her friendship with Heyrick that she was referred to as 'Sister Susan' in their letters. Beale provided each woman with a detailed biography, drawn from the 'manuscript memoirs' and correspondence provided by Worthington Clarke.

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<sup>108</sup> Catherine Hutton Beale, *Catherine Hutton and Her Friends* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1895), p. v.

Amongst this substantial collection of life writing were two explicitly biographical works, which appear to have provided a large portion of the content of Beale's accounts. The first was an extensive, handwritten family memoir, written by Elizabeth Heyrick's brother Samuel Coltman in 1852, named *Time's Stepping Stones – Or Some Memorials of Four Generations of a Family – by an Octogenarian Member of the Same*. It is a remarkable piece of life writing that documents not only the lives and times of four generations of the Coltman family, but also their wide reaching connections across dissenting communities in Leicester and the Midlands.

The second document is another handwritten account of the family, written half a century earlier in 1802. Much shorter than *Time's Stepping Stones*, it is titled 'A Hasty Sketch of the Coltman Family', and is authored by Catherine Hutton. It is created as a character sketch, rather than a history, and focusses on Hutton's impressions of the individual characters of the Coltman family. In drawing upon these two preserved forms of manuscript life writing, along with the substantial manuscript correspondence collections left by both Catherine Hutton and the Coltman family, Beale's published works are a testimony to the symbiotic relationship of manuscript and print cultures in this community's life writing practices.

Life writing was a prominent part of the literary landscape across the period in which Watts and Heyrick's community wrote, from the mid-eighteenth and far into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although earlier critical studies focussed on a relatively circumscribed concept and canon of auto- and biographical writing during this period, work in more recent decades has significantly expanded its scope and understanding of the diversity and importance of life writing as an area of literary, social and historical study. Evolving from the term auto/biography, originally employed by Liz Stanley to describe the necessary 'drift' between biographic and autobiographic writing in the relationship between author and

subject,<sup>109</sup> studies of life writing now acknowledge the vast diversity of its potential forms and often collaborative nature of its creation. As Margaret Ezell argued in *Writing Women's Literary History*, a focus on print culture had obscured the work and lives of many female writers, but the recent attention to multiple forms of authorship, and collaborative productions, has brought women's writing lives more into prominence.<sup>110</sup> Works such as Felicity Nussbaum's *Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth Century England* have drawn attention to the importance of women's life writing practices in constructing an accurate view of a period's culture and ideology of gender, leading to several valuable collections of critical essays that explore different facets of this area, including *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England* and *Women's Life Writing 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship*.<sup>111</sup> Mark Salber Phillips has provided a useful overview of the development, social and literary perceptions and place of more traditional, publicly distributed biographical writings across this period in his work *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820*, which, combined with studies of other forms of memoir writing and manuscript culture during this time, gives a necessary backdrop to the life-writing practises of this more intimate circle.<sup>112</sup>

Although at first glance the life writing generated by the tight-knit circle of family and friends surrounding Heyrick and Watts appears deeply insular, focussing on the immediate members of their familial and social circles to the exclusion of wider society, their works engaged with a nationwide culture and with emerging patterns of biographical writing. As Phillips observes, the genres

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<sup>109</sup> Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

<sup>110</sup> Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993).

<sup>111</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989); Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle (eds), *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Daniel Cook and Amy Culley, eds, *Women's Life Writing, 1700-1850*. Other excellent collections include Jacqueline Labbe (ed.), *The History of Women's Writing, 1750-1830, Volume 5* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), and Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>112</sup> Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

of historical and biographical literature became increasingly blurred throughout the eighteenth century due to a burgeoning interest in modes of sociability and sensibility as essential aspects of a society's character. The history of great men, their public life and actions were imbued with the 'dignity of history', but private lives were increasingly viewed not only as areas of human interest, but as a window into both the 'manners and customs' of their contemporary historical period and an area of behaviour and personal morality applicable to the experiences of subsequent readers.<sup>113</sup>

The great events and statesmen of ages past retained their status as an informative area of interest and education for the male members of the upper classes destined to oversee the governance of their own society, and life writers rarely challenged the genre's perceived eminence as respectable literature. It was, however, acknowledged to lack appeal for a wider audience, providing them with limited information or instruction to which a more general public could relate. Histories that contained biographical elements of their subjects' private lives, or biographies solely composed of the intimate and private life of their subject, held a popular position between the elevated discipline of history and lower forms of fictional literature. As 'true' accounts, works of life writing escaped the element of moral questionability associated with purely fictional portrayals of behaviour and society, providing their audiences with demonstrations of the 'more silent virtues', exercised in private life but nevertheless essential to a moral and civilised society. There were, however, questions raised over the decency of exposing all aspects of an individual's life to public view, breaking the boundaries between public and private spheres. The 'manners and customs' displayed in the private sphere as well as the 'passions' and sensibilities of its inhabitants were seen to offer a 'gateway to a deeper sense of social life' of a given period, providing

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

readers with insight into the personal feelings and experiences which lay behind the external public events of the time.<sup>114</sup>

Biographies of both private and public lives were joined by autobiographical memoirs which crossed a range of social boundaries. Politicians, and public and literary figures across the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries all presented the reading public with tailored versions of their societal and domestic lives, reminiscences and philosophies, shaping their personal and literary identities. The memoirs of great men were joined by those of less reputable members of society; courtesans, rakes and other 'reformed sinners' provided more titillating accounts of their lives and escapades under the guise of moral improvement through their bad examples.<sup>115</sup> Alongside those of courtesans, memoirs and biographies of women of the middle and upper classes found their way into the public sphere in the form of spiritual texts and conversion narratives, travel writing and collected lives of exemplary women. As well as giving a level of control over the presentation of an individual's public image, biography and autobiography could be used in attempts to shape views of political, social, religious and literary movements, idealising or demonising members of the communities that supported them. Nussbaum has discussed the significant role these forms of life writing played in both allowing women (along with other marginalised social groups) to contribute to the formation of a society's culture and history, and offering an opportunity to subvert and redirect dominant cultural narratives and ideologies.<sup>116</sup> The thriving manuscript culture of the eighteenth century, which continued well into the early decades of the nineteenth century, remained a strong alternative to print culture in the creation and circulation of life writing texts. Correspondence, and collaborative and communal forms of life writing, particularly those authored by women,

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. 140.

<sup>115</sup> See Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, pp.178-200.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*. See also Knott and Taylor, *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, particularly 'Section 7. Feminism and Enlightened Religious Discourses', pp.410-518.

flourished in communities of literary circulation and in the memorialisation of social and familial groups.<sup>117</sup>

The life writing works created by Watts and Heyrick's circle that adhere to more traditional views of auto/biographic writing take part in both print and manuscript cultures and fall broadly into two motivational themes, which are often combined within individual works. They are comprised of accounts written of the private lives and characters of individuals with the intention of showing the 'silent virtues' present in their private thoughts and actions which could act as a moral inspiration for a wider public, and works with a collective focus that reconstructed the domestic structures and customs of its subjects as a portrait of the 'manners and customs' of their particular time and place in British society. The combined intention of these concurrent themes acts as a preservation and perpetuation of the ideological, historical and cultural identity of a specific community that forms the texts' unstated subject.

Life writing was an essential part of a middle-class dissenting culture that valued a form of educated morality encouraged through biographical accounts of model lives, which were seen to act as tools for moral improvement, venerating exemplary members of religious and cultural traditions to create and perpetuate a continuous cultural history of moral and religious practice. Although the public identity of nonconformist communities and their individual members often acted as an inspiration for these accounts, they were written within a framework of national literary and social structures, offering an insight into the way in which dissenting circles engaged with, and participated in, these conventions.

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<sup>117</sup> See, for example, Betty A. Schellenberg, 'Bluestocking Women and the Negotiation of Oral, Manuscript, and Print Cultures' in Labbe, (ed.) *History of British Women's Writing*, pp. 63-83, in which she tracks the supportive networks amongst the Bluestockings in bringing women's works and lives to publication and public notice.

## **Sketching Characters: Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton, Familial Narrators**

John and Elizabeth Coltman, the parents of Elizabeth Heyrick, provide a valuable case study of the ways in which wider cultural ideologies of identity, family, class and morality, as practised within the nonconformist communities of the midlands, affected the way individuals were perceived and represented through the life writing of their immediate circles. Both John and Elizabeth feature in several works of life writing created by members of their family and close friends and often act as the centering point of a familial narrative. The couple were seen in many respects to embody elements of excellence in mind and character that were valued by their contemporaries, and their presentation within collaboratively formed life writing accounts provides a useful demonstration of the communal ideologies surrounding their circle.

In her article, 'Collaborative Life Writing as Ideology: The Auto/biographies of Mary Howitt and her Family', Linda Peterson suggests that the collaborative writings of families such as the Howitts (whose practises bear many similarities to those of the Coltman's), 'suggests an equally strong, if less well known, nineteenth-century tradition of autobiography that emerged from family practice, communal consciousness, and shared beliefs.'<sup>118</sup> This tradition of communal life writing followed a similar narration of exemplary lives found in biographies focussed upon an individual subject, but instead followed a domestic familial collective as a single biographic identity. This narrative of a family as a single unit of biography was held in place by their shared ideology, and acted to demonstrate its individual members' conformity and contributions to their shared narrative and beliefs. The stability of this mode of collective biography was reliant upon a cohesive familial unit; otherwise the linear narrative could

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<sup>118</sup> Linda H. Peterson, 'Collaborative Life Writing as Ideology: The Auto/biographies of Mary Howitt and her Family', *Prose Studies*, 26 (2003), 176–93, p. 177.

diverge into separate life stories as individual members failed to act within its established ideological framework.

To construct an understanding of the cultural ideologies of the Coltman circle, and how they came to be represented in their collaborative works of life writing, this study will draw on several key pieces of biographic writing and examine the cultural contexts in which they were created. These works depict the family's lives and characters in texts written and circulated within domestic circles, and those written and published for a wider public. It will be focussed chiefly on the two authors that produced the most substantial works of biography about the Coltmans: Samuel Coltman, their second son, and Catherine Hutton, a close family friend and distant relative of Elizabeth Coltman.

Samuel Coltman (1772-1857) does not appear to have engaged in any significant literary endeavours prior to his foray into life writing, which he did not begin until he was 80 years of age in 1852, suggesting that his primary interest in this work lay in compiling and preserving the history of his family, rather than creating artistic or marketable literature. His account, *Time's Stepping Stones, or Some Memorials of Four Generations of a Family – by an Octogenarian Member of the Same*, was never completed or published, but is nevertheless a remarkable piece of life writing. In it, he attempts to cover the lives of four generations of his family (he unfortunately did not reach the generation that followed his), combining his own memories and those told to him by other family members with extensive collections of domestic writings, such as letters and diaries, that circulated within the family in order to preserve their thoughts and words. It is a large, handwritten manuscript spanning three volumes, largely dictated to (and quite possibly shaped by) his third wife, Anne Byerly, the great-niece of Josiah Wedgwood. There are also some later additions (and erasures) from Coltman's sister, Mary Ann, and other, unknown relatives who held the work at a later date, making it a highly collaborative text.

Although Samuel provides a great deal of contextual detail, personal memories and family anecdotes to provide shape and coherence to the text, in

many parts the bulk of its chapters are comprised of an edited selection of letters, diaries and other personal works. Informal forms of manuscript life writing are collected and curated to form a cohesive familial narrative. The writings of his departed family seem particularly evocative to Samuel, who explains that in the construction of this account, 'I have found amusing occupation in looking over, and selecting letters from a correspondence of some three score years, by which I have seemed to live those years again in lively recollections'.<sup>119</sup> For Samuel, the written words and memories of his family act as 'time's stepping stones', creating a bridge to the past that allows its emotional re-experience. Whilst there are elements of history and interesting factual notes, this is for the most part a deeply personal work, told through Samuel's emotional view of his family from within their domestic spaces and personal communications. It aims to demonstrate the 'silent virtues' found in the Coltmans' domestic sphere, with some forays into the 'manners and customs' of earlier times, but this view of the past, and construction of the family's identity, is entirely mediated by Samuel's relationship to, and identity with, the family circle he creates at a distance of several decades. The text is highly conscious of its auto/biographical nature, Samuel's own identity as family biographer acting as a demonstration of their cultural values.

Although *Time's Stepping Stones* was never completed, from Samuel Coltman's presentation of the memoir it appears to have been eventually intended for public distribution. In its opening pages, Samuel explores his motivation in creating this account:

Some of these letters I have thought might be deemed worthy of perusal by the Publick ... we are told we must work while it is day, and if able only to rescue a bright thought or useful reflection from oblivion, we preserve the best part of departed friends – a process similar to that of winnowing the chaff from the wheat.

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<sup>119</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 1.

As we have claims on posterity for inventions or discoveries that may benefit them, so we owe a debt of gratitude to our predecessors for benefits conferred upon us – witness the blood of the Martyrs, the Patriots of old – and no less the improvements in the arts and sciences, which the discoveries of the last half century occasioned. Withdraw these valuable discoveries and we fall back into a state of barbarism.<sup>120</sup>

In preserving the ‘bright thoughts’ of his family, Samuel places them within an ongoing narrative of civilisation and social improvement, the ‘stepping stones’ each generation represents acting as a pathway to a morally, intellectually and scientifically improved nation. His account of their lives, thoughts and reflections acts simultaneously as a grateful acknowledgement of his ancestors’ contributions to civilising culture, and as a ‘benefit conferred’ upon future generations, providing them with the moral inspiration of exemplary past lives.

The manuscript also acted to record and preserve a family history as a representation of an ongoing narrative of dissenting culture; writing from within a marginalised social group to a wider public audience offered the opportunity to redefine its social identity. Living within a nonconformist community with ties to radical politics, Samuel would have been well aware of both the restricted social position of dissenting groups in the more general public, and their likely portrayal in contemporary literature (indeed, family friend Catherine Hutton’s novel, *Oakwood Hall* contains an entire chapter devoted to a dialogue between characters expressing their violent hatred of Methodists).<sup>121</sup> In presenting his family as exemplary figures in their morality, piety and intellect, Samuel was creating an alternative narrative and identity for his family and community from within, commemorating and perpetuating nonconformist culture.

Samuel determinedly positions his family within both the wider historical heritage of the area, claiming the central parlour of the Coltmans’ home to be

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> Catherine Hutton, *Oakwood Hall*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1819), I, Letter VI, pp.53-63.

made from stones taken from the ruins of Lady Jane Grey's house in the nearby Bradgate Park, and within a radical dissenting tradition.<sup>122</sup> From Samuel's memoir, it appears the Coltmans took great pride in their friendship with the radical dissenting preacher and scientist Dr Joseph Priestley - a man whose dissenting beliefs saw his home and laboratory burned by a furious mob in the Birmingham Riots of 1791. Samuel offers several anecdotes, drawn from personal memories, of conversations held with Priestley in the Coltmans' parlour:

I well remember when a boy listening to a conversation in our 'great parlour' between Dr Priestley and my venerated father; in which the Doctor expressed an opinion, that were he to compare the age of the world with the age of man, he should compute it to be in about its 13th year. Priestley himself, however he may be condemned as a controversialist, may by his researches be said to have materially advanced the progress of the world in other respects.<sup>123</sup>

John Coltman is placed in conversation with one of the leading minds of the Enlightenment, a guest in his family home who has 'materially advanced the progress of the world', linking the Coltmans to a world of radicalism and progression.

This enthusiasm in displaying the family's allegiance to a figure who, in his time, was surrounded by religious and political controversies is perhaps indicative of the improved position of dissenters in English society in the intervening years. The Coltman parlour, from the perspective of 1852, is both a symbol of stability and an embodied narrative of history in which the family claim a place for themselves; the bricks from the house of Lady Jane Grey are a respectable link to national history, and the figure of Dr Priestley, safely ensconced in this respectable room, a notable but now unthreatening link to dissenting traditions of radicalism.

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<sup>122</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p.2.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid*, p.2.

Samuel also takes pains to emphasise his mother's illustrious connections: in her youth she met the eminent London publisher and writer Robert Dodsley (a distant relation), and subsequently stayed with him in London, encountering, as Samuel proudly boasts, 'Burke, Sheridan, Garrick, Johnson and his shadow Boswell'.<sup>124</sup> In addition to her friendship with Dodsley she also became firm friends with authors Joseph Spence and William Shenstone, and corresponded with all three at length. These relationships are explored in some detail, with numerous letters from them transcribed into the text, as Samuel builds his picture of his mother's literary tastes and accomplishments.

Although not stated in his initial explanation of his purpose in writing *Time's Stepping Stones*, Samuel later asserts that his narrative of his parents' lives will only continue,

till such time as they must give place in turn to their daughter Mrs Heyrick, to commemorate whose virtues was my first intention in these pages – as the only member of their family who has in a manner belonged to the Public.<sup>125</sup>

As a very large part of the text is given over to the lives of John and Elizabeth Coltman, it appears that Samuel's original conception of the memoirs may have evolved to a more communal narrative. However, it is interesting to note that his original intentions, as stated here, were focussed on Heyrick as an individual figure belonging to the public, rather than on creating a domestic familial memoir. It was very common practise for relatives of public figures to provide accounts of their lives, often providing an image of their private and domestic identity unseen in their public actions. That Samuel chose to shift the focus of his memoirs from Heyrick's 'virtues' to a full account of their family speaks of the interest he had, and felt was due to, his family as an important part of the culture and communities they represented.

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p.47.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p.93.

Samuel Coltman was not alone in his interest in the lives of the Coltman family. He notes in *Time's Stepping Stones* that:

A description of our family has indeed already been published (under feigned names) by no less a person than the celebrated Mrs Catherine Hutton, daughter to the well-known Antiquary William Hutton of Birmingham. That lady, who was in some way related to my Mother has also published a novel of which she (my Mother) was the heroine, and my father the hero. It must be confessed, this lady has availed herself of the privilege of a novelist to embody in her hero and heroine those impossible perfections of which novelists of the old school were only too fond. Yet there is much truth in both the story she tells and in her figurative eulogium of the characters of my parents.<sup>126</sup>

The first published account referred to by Samuel is Catherine Hutton's 'A Sketch of a Family of Originals, by an Original' which appeared in *Ainsworth's Magazine* in 1844.<sup>127</sup> This was preceded by the privately circulated handwritten manuscript titled 'Hasty Sketch of the Coltman Family', written in 1802. The novel of which Elizabeth Coltman was the heroine was entitled *Oakwood Hall* and was initially serialised, before being published in three volumes in 1819. Altogether, these texts represent a continuing interest and focus on the lives of the Coltman family that continued for decades and inspired repeated life writing accounts. Their shifts between manuscript and print cultures, memoir and fictional biography highlights the diverse forms of expression life writing could take within this community, leading to multiple expressions of a single, but fluid, subject.

As a distant cousin, close family friend to the Coltmans and published author with a keen interest in biography, Catherine Hutton (1756-1846) was well placed to provide an account of members of the Coltman family. She was a varied and moderately prolific author, and had previously edited the autobiography of

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

<sup>127</sup> Catherine Hutton, 'A Sketch of a Family of Originals. By an Original, their Friend', *Ainsworth's Magazine*, 5 (Jan. 1844), pp. 56-63.

her father, Willian Hutton (1723-1815), a bookseller, paper manufacturer and historian, and leading figure in Birmingham's dissenting community.<sup>128</sup> He was also the author of the first history of Birmingham.<sup>129</sup> Catherine, who was to live all her life in Birmingham, had been brought up in these circles, and been a member of Joseph Priestley's congregation. She subsequently developed strong ties with figures in literary London as her writing career developed.<sup>130</sup> Introduced at the age of 9 to her 26 year old cousin, Elizabeth Cartwright (the future Mrs Coltman and mother of Elizabeth Heyrick), Hutton was smitten, finding her a 'model of earthly perfection.'<sup>131</sup> This intense admiration continued throughout their long acquaintance, becoming the focal point of Hutton's writings on the Coltman family. She not only wrote extensive biographical accounts of Mrs Coltman, but, as Samuel Coltman noted, turned the circumstances of her youth and courtship with her husband into a novel. In thus setting Elizabeth Cartwright/Coltman on a par with 19<sup>th</sup> century fictional heroines, it is perhaps understandable that Hutton's perception and presentation of her family was heavily influenced by the great affection she held for her. Samuel Coltman commented that Hutton's pen was 'guided it must be confessed with the partiality of something more than friendship, tho' less than relationship', thus claiming for himself and his memoir a less partial, but also more intimate depiction of his family.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *The Life of William Hutton, F.A. S. S. Including a particular account of The Riots at Birmingham in 1791. To which is subjoined The History of his Family, written by himself, and published by his daughter, Catherine Hutton* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy; Birmingham: Beilby and Knotts, 1816). The title itself is a wonderful blending of the political and the personal, with the foregrounding of family and the collaborative nature of the venture, with Catherine sharing title billing with her father. Both the town and country residences of the family had been attacked during the so-called 'Priestley riots'. Unusually, the autobiography starts in early infancy, suggesting that William, like many members of late-Enlightenment cultural circles, had a strong interest in the impact of early life on subsequent development.

<sup>129</sup> William Hutton, *An History of Birmingham* (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1783).

<sup>130</sup> Catherine Hutton published three novels, and various other works, including up to 60 articles in periodicals. For further details on her life see Rosemary Mitchell, 'Hutton, Catherine' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/14299>; Bridget Hill, 'Catherine Hutton (1756-1846): a Forgotten Letter-Writer', *Women's Writing*, 1 (1994), pp. 35-50.

<sup>131</sup> Catherine Hutton, 'Hasty Sketch of the Coltman Family', 1802, Leics. RO, MS. 15D57/387.

<sup>132</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 86.

Both Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton frame their life-writing works in a language of artistic craft. Biography is acknowledged and portrayed as a creative act on the part of its author, their works are not offered as purely factual records, but ‘sketches’ that are drawn from the empirical and emotional experiences of the authors. Samuel’s statement that ‘At the age of eighty I venture to attempt a few sketches of what may seem to be original characters’<sup>133</sup> somewhat mitigates any question of his accuracy as a narrator, removed half a century or more from the events he describes. His accounts are ‘sketches’ and ‘rough forms’, acknowledging the impossibility of truly capturing the identity of another individual. Hutton uses very much the same language: both of her non-fiction accounts are ‘sketches’, formed from her personal ‘impressions’ of their ‘character’. Her novel *Oakwood Hall* blurs the concept of ‘character’, with the perceived identifying characteristics of the Coltmans in factually-based biography being transmuted into representative fictional characters.

The authors’ own views of, and relationships with, their subjects become the guiding form of the narrative they create, making their works acts of collective biography as they draw upon communal recollections of the Coltman family that have, in turn, formed their own perceptions. Much of what they relate is qualified as having been told to them by other members of their family and circle, when the events of their subjects’ lives occurred beyond their own experience, thus transferring oral traditions of family history into literary forms. Together, these accounts enable us to recreate the complex network of personal relations, social views and literary practises that were to shape the biographical identities of the Coltman family.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

## **John Coltman: ‘A Book-Worm and Philosopher... rather more than a man of business’**

Samuel Coltman’s *Time’s Stepping Stones* provides a view from within the domestic family sphere of John as a figurehead, father and provider – but with the hindsight of having viewed his life, work and legacy across a period of decades. As a record not only of the family, but of the times, ways and places in which they lived, Samuel situates his father within the traditions and cultures of his town and community, as viewed from the vantage point of several decades.

John Coltman (1727-1808) emerges as a complex figure within middle-class and dissenting culture in his relation to his family, business, religion and scholarly pursuits. David Wykes’ constructive account of the life, work and social identity of John Coltman in his article, ‘The reluctant businessman: John Coltman of St Nicholas Street, Leicester, 1727-1808’ provides an important overview of his professional and personal character as seen through the available sources. Through his exploration of Coltman’s identity as a businessman, Wykes notes an interesting discrepancy between Coltman’s presentation in familial life writing, and his professional identity within the town:

Coltman is considered to have been one of the most active and enterprising businessmen in Leicester during the late eighteenth century. Yet on closer examination he remains a paradox, possessing none of the drive and ambition usually associated with a successful businessman.<sup>134</sup>

In order to explore this paradoxical characterisation it is necessary to account for the views and motivations of the life writers, Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton, who, far from glorifying his business success, actively constructed this image of John Coltman as a ‘reluctant businessman’.

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<sup>134</sup> David L. Wykes, ‘The Reluctant Businessman: John Coltman of St Nicholas Street, Leicester, 1727-1808’, *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 69 (1995), 71-85, p 73.

Born in Leicester as the oldest son of Joseph Coltman, a woolcomber, Coltman found his home life uncomfortable following his father's remarriage, which brought several additional siblings and step-siblings into an overcrowded home. At the age of 16 he was sent to be educated at Kibworth School, allowing him to access an unusually high level of education for a Leicester manufacturer's son. Whilst there, he studied under the distinguished dissenting minister, Rev. John Aikin (the father of Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Dr John Aikin), forming a close personal attachment to his tutor who helped foster Coltman's love of classical study.<sup>135</sup> In Samuel's view,

I think the happiest period of my Father's life must have been the years he spent at the Kibworth Academy. Here he laid the foundation of those studious habits for which he was always remarkable – even when pursuing the uncongenial occupations of trade for which he was far less fitted by nature and inclination than for study.<sup>136</sup>

The 'uncongenial occupations of trade' came first in the form of his role as a travelling agent for his uncle Rowland Page, a wealthy London-based distiller who had intentions of making Coltman his heir, on the condition he marry the sister-in-law of his business partner. It was whilst travelling on business for his uncle that Coltman first met Elizabeth Cartwright, his future wife. Their courtship was prolonged and complex (and is detailed at length in Samuel and Hutton's accounts), and cost Coltman the financial support of his uncle for refusing to consent to an arranged marriage with the aforesaid sister-in-law.

Although the nature of their financial resources is unclear, John and Elizabeth Coltman married and were able to establish themselves in Leicester as hosiery manufacturers, Elizabeth often taking an active part in their business during its early days. John Coltman was, even by Samuel's account, seen as a

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<sup>135</sup> For details on Aikin and the Kibworth School, see David L. Wykes, 'The Revd John Aikin senior: Kibworth School and Warrington Academy', in Felicity James and Ian Inkster (eds), *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 28-51.

<sup>136</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 17.

‘spirited and energetic manufacturer’, becoming an early adopter of yarn spinning machinery to help reduce the costs of hosiery manufacture.<sup>137</sup> He was also a respected scholar and antiquary, devoting much of his life to classical and philosophical study and amassing a renowned collection of Roman coins. He was a leading figure within Leicester radical circles, helping to found, for example, the literary and philosophical society.<sup>138</sup> The family appear to have been comfortably prosperous, though not wealthy, apart from a significant occurrence in John Coltman’s professional life that is focussed upon to a great degree in familial accounts of his life as evidence of his characteristic unfitness for business.

Joseph Brookhouse (1758-31) was the inventor of the first functional machinery for the spinning of worsted, the material used in the manufacture of hosiery. His initial experiments in this area had been unsuccessful, however, and having been financially supported by his brother-in-law he was imprisoned for debt following his failure to produce the promised machinery. Along with Joseph Whetstone, a prominent woolcomber, Coltman procured Brookhouse’s release with the intention of partnering with him in business if he succeeded in creating the desired apparatus.<sup>139</sup> Although the machinery was successfully built and housed at Market Harborough, it was later destroyed by furious mobs, fearful of the job losses mechanised woolcombing would cause. Coltman and Brookhouse then transferred their project to a converted cotton mill in Bromsgrove, bringing in Coltman’s step-nephew, John Adams (1766-1858) as a manager. Trusting his two partners, Coltman did not seek legal documentation of their partnership, a move that was to cause him severe financial losses. Brookhouse left the concern to enter into a different partnership, and John Adams defrauded Coltman of his stake in, and income from, the works, Coltman possessing no legal documents with which to make a claim for his property.<sup>140</sup> The losses incurred by this event

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>138</sup> For further details on radical Leicester circles at this period, and Coltman’s role within them, see A. Temple Patterson, *Radical Leicester: A History of Leicester, 1780-1850* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1954), pp. 67-68.

<sup>139</sup> Wykes, ‘The Reluctant Businessman’, p. 81.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82.

caused Elizabeth Coltman to sell the patrimony left to her by her parents, to ease her husband's financial difficulties. It is unclear the degree to which the long-term family finances of the Coltmans were affected, but it may have been to a significant extent. Following John Coltman's death, Elizabeth Coltman and her daughter Mary Ann lived with, and were partially supported by, Elizabeth Heyrick, suggesting John Coltman had little to leave for their support after his death.

In order to understand the significance of this event from the point of view of the life-writers of Coltman's family circle, his actions must be viewed within the social parameters of manufacturing members of the dissenting middle class. The idealised image of a manufacturing father figure has been explored in depth in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850*, which offers a valuable discussion of the interrelation of the private and public spheres for members of the industrial middle class. Although the lines between domestic home life and professional industry in the public sphere were often blurred, families often living in the same premises as their business with significant involvement from wives and daughters in its day to day running, an ideal division remained that enough income was generated through professional industry that the necessity for wives and daughters involvement in the public sphere was negated.<sup>141</sup>

As ideas of domestic and desirable femininity, family life and middle-class attainments evolved, the home environment and women within it were increasingly seen as a sanctuary of peace, morality and the private pursuit of self-improving scholarship. Women's role within the middle-class home in this period shifted from active domestic work and housekeeping, to one of refined and

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<sup>141</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), p. 25. For further explorations of nineteenth-century masculinity, although with an emphasis on the later decades, see John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999), particularly the first section, and John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005), pp. 61–82.

responsible leisure. Although financial extravagance or over-indulgence were not in keeping with middle-class values, a level of civilised gentility was desired within a prosperous middle-class home. Women, shielded from the potentially corrupting influence of public life, were to provide a moral haven and inspiration to their husbands and sons. In supporting their families, and thus the institution of domestic morality, men involved in industry were provided with a principled inspiration to expand and profit from their businesses. The emphasis on the desirability of domestic, and often rural, retirement and harmony saw a visualised end point for professional expansion, at the point at which a ‘competency’ was achieved upon which the family could retire from public life in comfort and live in civilised gentility. To seek to expand a business and gain profit from it far beyond what was needful for the support of a family removed the element of moral responsibility in personal involvement in industry, reducing it to crass greed.<sup>142</sup>

The personal life and pursuits of a manufacturer were an essential element of his identity, balancing his identity in the public sphere. Disinterested pursuit of knowledge through scholarship, gardening and landscaping and other genteelly creative activities showed a man to be a member of a more refined form of civilisation than one entirely shaped by expansion and profit. His guidance, protection and affection towards his family were both a demonstration of sensibility and personal responsibility and a contribution to the ongoing development of civilisation in British society, providing an environment and leadership that enabled the next generation to maintain the moral values of the middle class.

The presentation of male figures in *Time’s Stepping Stones* and *Oakwood Hall* functions noticeably within this framework of middle-class masculinity. Both Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton depict the male members of the Coltman family, and their fictional counterparts, with a marked attention to the

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<sup>142</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 16.

ways in which they fulfil, and fail to meet, an archetypal middle-class masculine ideal. This is particularly noticeable in the deliberate juxtaposition, in both *Time's Stepping Stones* and *Oakwood Hall*, of the character of John Coltman and his father-in-law, Samuel Cartwright.

In *Time's Stepping Stones*, although Samuel emphasises his father's superior qualities, he also frequently highlights the ways in which John Coltman did not adhere to the ideal format of a middle-class father figure. Within the physical space of the Coltman's domestic sphere, John Coltman is shown by his son to be absent and secluded, deliberately isolating himself from his family in order to pursue his own intellectual interests. The tensions between the life and household he desires, one of leisured scholarship, and the realities of their financial and domestic situation are shown in his interactions with Elizabeth Coltman. He is depicted as expressing frustration that her work within the household meant her attention was often diverted from the intellectual discussion he tried to maintain. Samuel credits Coltman's early success to his wife's assistance, suggesting that early on in the marriage she learned:

how little sinecure that woman has, who undertakes to manage a household of which the Father is a Book-Worm and Philosopher; no less, or rather more than a man of business...That his business was progressive and even prosperous is true...but still if he had not been aided by the vigilance and care of my Mother, not only in her domestic duties, but often lending her assistance to her Husband in his own immediate department, it is doubtful if at times his love of studious ease...might not have led him into difficulties<sup>143</sup>

The fact that Elizabeth appears to take on a large portion of the family housework, as opposed to it being done primarily by servants, and also plays an active part in her husband's business endeavours, suggests a household lacking a desired level of financial comfort and gentility, one that would allow a

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<sup>143</sup>Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 92.

manufacturer's wife to employ servants to take care of the manual labour involved in housekeeping and to be free of involvement in the public sphere of business. The image is complicated by the fact that Elizabeth's assistance is not portrayed as necessary due to the volume of work or early financial difficulties, but Coltman's own reluctance or inability to devote himself sufficiently to business in order adequately to support his family.

It is unclear how accurate this assessment is. Samuel's perception of his father's professional life is conspicuously coloured by his view of the financial losses Coltman sustained later in his career, and possibly by any personal resentment Samuel felt towards him as an absent and undemonstrative father figure. Alongside Samuel's recollections of Coltman secluding himself in his study for hours each day in order to pursue his intellectual interests, Hutton in her account also suggests that 'He was not a fond husband, or a fond father' though she does state that 'love for his wife and children lay deep in his heart'.<sup>144</sup> Samuel's idea of his father is very much fixed and throughout the text of *Time's Stepping Stones* he uses many instances of his father's life as evidence of the 'natural indolence, almost apathy of my father, absorbed as he was in speculative philosophical matters, when not engaged in business.'<sup>145</sup> He notes later that, 'We see in the conduct of my Father, the very traits that afterwards caused much loss and discomfort to himself in his affairs, and in his family, viz. Procrastination, absence of mind, and too much indolent confidence in others.'<sup>146</sup> Although these traits are sometimes detached from Coltman's love of study, they are most often grouped together, Coltman's desire to pursue his intellectual interests being seen as encouraging an 'indolent' lifestyle at the expense of his business.

In Hutton's 'Sketch of a Family of Originals', she portrays an (unverified) scene in which Coltman himself perceives this flaw in his character:

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<sup>144</sup>Hutton, 'A Sketch of a Family', p. 58.

<sup>145</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 19.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

I was once looking over Mr. Adeling's cabinet of rare and valuable Roman and English coins, when he entered the room. I was particularly admiring a halfcrown of Oliver Cromwell's, fresh as from the mint.

" Take it!" said he. " Take any! I can't bear to look at them. I collected them when I ought to have been watching a knave!"<sup>147</sup>

The scene is symbolically resonant: absorbed in his interest in antique coins, Coltman neglects to take care of his family's immediate finances. Preoccupation with the past has usurped attention to the present.

Academic study as an occupation or interest was highly respectable and admired in both Nonconformist communities and in wider areas of British society. In *Oakwood Hall* the library of the owner of the titular hall is praised for the scope and diversity of its literature as befitting a true gentleman:

My brother's library is all that an English gentleman could desire. Besides the best histories, ancient and modern, of every country in the world, he has all English historians...I should swell my letter into a Bookseller's catalogue, were I to enumerate the Antiquities, Topography, and Miscellaneous Works ; and he is continually adding all that comes out, which is either worth reading or looking at.<sup>148</sup>

The problem inherent in Coltman's devotion to study is his lack of status as a gentleman of means. As a middle-class manufacturer, the leisure of scholarly pursuits was to be achieved through dedicated application to business and the achievement of financial independence. In allowing himself to excessively pursue his own private interests at the cost of his public and familial responsibilities, Coltman's perceived leisure activities are turned to 'indolence' and a mark of a character unfit for the rigours of industry.

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<sup>147</sup> Hutton, 'A Sketch of a Family', p. 59.

<sup>148</sup> Hutton, *Oakwood Hall*, p. 34.

Educational levels and interest in scholarship and literature are used by both Samuel and Hutton as markers of character. Samuel Cartwright, Coltman's father-in-law, appears in the texts of both authors as a 'John Bull' figure, a well-to-do countryman with a bluff and argumentative temperament, moderately educated and clumsily affectionate in his role as father and grandfather. Following the death of his wife, Cartwright retired to the Coltman's home in 1772, where he was to reside for almost 20 years. Samuel, a great favourite of his grandfather, having been born on the day of Cartwright's arrival in the Coltman's home and named after him, provides an image of a retired yeoman now at leisure: 'He was fond of bees, superintended the garden and was seldom without a pipe in his mouth.'<sup>149</sup> His description of Cartwright's education and literary interests adds a further dimension to his character:

he was well read in history, ancient and modern, sacred and profane. The whole world of fiction he utterly despised, he believed in the celebrated maxim of Boileau – "Nothing is beautiful that is not true".<sup>150</sup>

Interestingly, although he does not explicitly acknowledge the fact, Samuel is here drawing on Hutton's novel for this detail on Cartwright's reading, whilst casting it in a more positive light, since the second sentence and reference to Boileau, is a direct quotation from *Oakwood Hall*.<sup>151</sup>

In Hutton's novel, Cartwright's fictional counterpart, John Freeman, is given somewhat more restricted reading tastes, but they are similarly used by Hutton to delineate his character:

The whole of John's education consisted in learning to read and write; but he had such an uncommon fondness for the former of these occupations, that, at a very early period, almost in infancy, he had read the Bible and Rapin's History of England....This knowledge was prodigious ; but here

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<sup>149</sup>Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>151</sup> See Hutton, *Oakwood Hall*, p. 40.

John stopped.... Here his knowledge rests for ever; and he would shut his eyes manfully against any thing that should tend to increase it.<sup>152</sup>

Freeman/Cartwright is educated – to a degree - but circumscribes his literary intake through his own prejudices, narrowing his engagement with scholarship. By contrast, the positive qualities of John Coltman’s fictional counterpart in *Oakwood Hall*, the aptly named Mr Millichamp, are portrayed as linked to the expansive range of his intellectual capabilities and interests. Although they render him deeply forgetful and ineffectual in practical matters, such capabilities act as positive indices of the hero’s character. For the young Margaret Freeman/Elizabeth Coltman, who falls rapidly in love with him, ‘his countenance sometimes smiles with the benevolence of a good heart, and sometimes glows with the dignity of a great mind’.<sup>153</sup> The judgment of Hutton’s character/narrator, is more balanced, endorsing the depth of scholarship, but archly pointing to the deficiencies in worldliness it also generates: ‘To the most profound erudition; to a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, and Italian languages; he joins the dignity of a philosopher, the modesty of a maiden, the simplicity of a child, and the forgetfulness of parson Adams.’<sup>154</sup>

Although John Coltman’s higher degree of sensibility, intellect and interest in education and philosophy are portrayed as superior to those of his father-in-law, he is shown to lack the requisite qualities of a family figurehead, which Samuel Cartwright clearly possessed. Cartwright’s presence in the domestic scenes of *Time’s Stepping Stones* and *Oakwood Hall* is not always conducive to domestic harmony, but it is portrayed as powerful, becoming the dominant centre of the family circle. Despite his actions and decisions sometimes being less than ideal, his active role as the head of his family is shown to fulfil an essential requirement of positive masculinity. Catherine Hutton regarded him as

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, p. 42.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

‘the founder of the family’,<sup>155</sup> and Samuel portrays him lovingly as a father figure, ‘whose tenderness made me love him...I owe him the remembrance of almost all the happiness of my early days’.<sup>156</sup> There is a level of bitterness in Samuel’s words. Despite his grandfather’s lesser education and blunter sensibilities, Samuel clearly elevates him in the domestic sphere to a position above that of his own father, as the true masculine leader of the household.

Whilst Hutton and Samuel take pains to emphasise Coltman’s positive attributes, their criticism of his character flaws is by far the most striking aspect of their presentation of him within the family narrative. These flaws are made noticeable by their disruptive effect on the communal narrative of the family’s combined identity. Coltman’s failure to adhere to a prescribed role of masculine excellence, within the ideological framework of the family unit employed by Samuel and Hutton, leads to a divergence from a collective chronicle to an exploration of an individual character within it.

### **Elizabeth Coltman: A Model Heroine**

Mrs Coltman, when Miss Cartwright, was held up to me as the model of all earthly perfection; and I believe she deserved it better than most such models do.

Catherine Hutton, *Hasty Sketch of the Coltman Family*, 1802

To both Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton, Elizabeth Coltman’s life was of remarkable interest, and her character of the highest quality. In both *Time’s Stepping Stones* and Hutton’s several accounts of the family, Elizabeth is repeatedly featured as the central figure of the family circle, receiving markedly enthusiastic praise for her character and actions in comparison to her husband and children. A large proportion of the first chapters of *Time’s Stepping Stones* is

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<sup>155</sup> Hutton, ‘A Sketch of a Family’, p. 56.

<sup>156</sup> Coltman, *Time’s Stepping Stones*, p. 9.

devoted to Elizabeth Coltman's (née Cartwright) younger life and courtship, not solely in relation to the development of her relationship with John Coltman, but also of her interests and talents, social position in her local community and even her other suitors. To Catherine Hutton, this period of Elizabeth's life was of such interest that, as we have seen, it formed the basis of the plot of *Oakwood Hall*, which cast a fictional version of Elizabeth as its young heroine.

Despite the attention Hutton and Samuel Coltman focus upon Elizabeth in their life writing featuring the Coltman family, their descriptions, although augmented by letters written by Elizabeth herself, struggle to convey a defined sense of Elizabeth Cartwright/Coltman's personality as a young woman. Alongside the highly articulated personalities of Samuel Cartwright and Heyrick, and the in-depth character analysis given to John Coltman, Elizabeth Coltman appears virtuous but vaguely defined, described in platitudes that convey the conventional attributes of respectable womanhood whilst providing little by which her individual character can be assessed or identified.

Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton's portrayals of Elizabeth's early life, prior to her marriage, work to present her as a romanticised ideal of womanhood. *Time's Stepping Stones* and Hutton's *Oakwood Hall* are formed around a traditional narrative that focusses upon a beautiful, young and virtuous woman and the various male suitors she attracts as a paragon of femininity. Such tales were widely and frequently consumed by a reading public in numerous novels and memoirs of the day, Elizabeth's younger years fitting easily into a conventional chronology of fictionalised female experience. By drawing upon these literary conventions in their depiction of her romantic life, Samuel and Hutton aimed to establish her within a recognised canon of virtuous femininity.

In their descriptions of Elizabeth as a young woman, Samuel and Hutton pay great attention to her numerous refined accomplishments, and aspects of her character that establish parallels with romantic heroines. Being born in relative isolation as a yeoman farmer's daughter in rural Duffield in Derbyshire, they

focus on the ‘charmingly naïve’ world view this afforded her, and the ‘ardent love for the beauties of nature’ her situation inspired, such that she ‘frequently expressed her feelings in verse’.<sup>157</sup> Whilst she assisted her mother in keeping the house in ‘exquisite neatness and order’, her more cultured abilities in poetry, painting, and her cultivated ‘taste for reading’ are emphasised as evidence of her ‘superior merit and refinement’.<sup>158</sup> According to Hutton’s eulogistic account,

She was the friend of Dodsley, Spence and Shenstone; knew all things; read all things; from reviewing new publications to sweeping the house. Her needlework was unrivalled, her landscapes, cut with scissors in writing paper incredible; and her ingenuity inexhaustible.<sup>159</sup>

In similar vein, Samuel comments that, ‘In short she was gifted with so much of beauty, talent and gracefulness of deportment, that her neighbours gave her the appellation ‘the fairest flower of Duffield’.<sup>160</sup> Both accounts focus on the external qualities that drew the admiration of others. Although this highlighting of Elizabeth’s outward talents acted to align her with positive representations of refined femininity in the eighteenth century, there is little to indicate her internal thoughts, character and beliefs. In employing socially recognised attributes of respectable femininity to express their sense of her excellence to a reading audience, their representations of Elizabeth fall short of conveying the more individual sense of character found in their less structured accounts of other family members.

### **Oakwood Hall: ‘The Novel of Which Thy Mother is the Heroine’**

Catherine Hutton’s novel *Oakwood Hall*, which features Elizabeth as its heroine, is an unusual text. It acts as an intimate portrait of a close friend’s youth, seen through the eyes of a semi-autobiographical narrator in a fictionalised

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<sup>157</sup>Coltman, *Time’s Stepping Stones*, p. 9.

<sup>158</sup>*Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>159</sup>Hutton, ‘Hasty Sketch’, p. 1.

<sup>160</sup>Coltman, *Time’s Stepping Stones*, p. 9.

narrative of Elizabeth's early life. Written in an epistolary format, the reader's view of Elizabeth's fictionalised counterpart is mediated entirely through the words and emotions of Hutton's narrating persona, making the relationship between protagonist and narrator/author the focal subject of the novel. In this, it adhered to the manner in which Hutton framed all her writings on the Coltmans, through her personal relationship to the family, but most particularly to Elizabeth. In the canon of life writing surrounding the Coltman family, *Oakwood Hall* highlights the diversity of generic expression possible in the literary representation of its members, and the way in which the conventions of these literary genres were employed to convey the author's desired representation of their biographic subjects. By centralising both her relationship and voice in her fictional, as well as biographical, depictions of Elizabeth and her family, Hutton demonstrates the importance of the interpersonal relationship between the subject and author, not only as an inspiration for their memorialisation, but as a focal point of the life writing itself.

Despite this focus upon Elizabeth, when the novel was published after her death it contained no textual indication that it was a memorial work, or any mention of the woman whose life and relationship with Hutton inspired its narrative. Hutton's exact motivation in writing it is unclear, she evidently felt her friend's early life was of sufficient interest to be presented to a public audience not just as a biographical account of a virtuous life, but as a romantic, three volume novel. Although it was actually published after her earlier fictional works, *Oakwood Hall* was Hutton's first attempt at writing a novel, suggesting that her fascination with Elizabeth's early life was such that it formed the inspiration for her first foray into extended fiction.

Elizabeth Coltman, to all appearances, lived a retiring, domestic life, following her marriage, seeming to have limited interaction with the wider social circles with which she had previously been involved. Although evidently well respected by her family, friends and local community, there is little in her married life to suggest her as an obvious subject for a published biography intended to interest the public, other than her biographers' accounts of her

exemplary character. Despite this, Hutton focussed a great deal of her literary energy on documenting, analysing and publishing the circumstances of her life and character, far more than she devoted to any other friend or relation. In terms of narrative interest and literary suitability, the events of Elizabeth's early life lend themselves far more to public interest than the relative social retirement of her married years, possibly offering Hutton the opportunity she desired to demonstrate her friend's excellence in a manner most calculated to engage interest.

Hutton remained a close friend of Elizabeth's throughout her life, but the events featured in the novel took place when Hutton was only a young girl, known to, but not intimate with Elizabeth Coltman. Hutton witnessed none of the events of this stage of her friend's life, hearing of them only in their later form as part of the Coltmans' family narrative. Given Hutton's age and lack of contact with Elizabeth during her younger days, Hutton's choice of primary narrator for the text is particularly noteworthy: Mrs Oakwood represents an only mildly fictionalised version of herself. In many parts of the novel, this veers off into direct autobiography, as Hutton presents extended tracts of travel writing detailing her personal experiences in the Lake District, a rather clumsy insertion that disrupts the dramatic pace of the novel's plot with the long meandering adventures Hutton's alter-ego takes through the valleys and inns of the lakes.

Instead of a young girl entirely removed from the interesting events of her friend's early life, Hutton places herself within the central coterie of characters, as sister to the local squire, friend of the Cartwright/Freeman family. In the absence of any other educated or cultured women, Hutton/Oakwood becomes an older mentor to Elizabeth/Margaret, recognising and encouraging her talents and guiding her through her romantic trials. In this replaying of past events, Hutton inserts her fictionalised presence to steer them to their desired outcome, which given the complexity of the situation the young unmarried Coltmans found themselves in, seemed only resolved by chance. The identity of this mature and cultured narrator also acts to bolster the presentation of the heroine's virtuous

character through the impression she makes upon Mrs Oakwood, who sees her first with the eyes of an unbiased stranger.

Beautiful, intelligent and talented, the young Elizabeth Cartwright attracted a number of respectable suitors, a scenario which, when fictionalised and dramatically heightened by Hutton, appears as almost excessive within the space of a single novel. It is intriguing that Hutton, given her desire to present Elizabeth as the epitome of domestic virtue and piety, should chose to focus on her early romantic dilemmas. Both Samuel Coltman and Hutton, however, use the calibre of Elizabeth's suitors as a device to emphasise her quality of character, as demonstrated by the recognition bestowed upon her by men of a higher social standing. Samuel and Hutton mention there were 'numerous' suitors for Elizabeth's hand, but focus on the three possessing the greatest social significance: a minister, a country gentleman, and John Coltman himself. Each of these suitors is used by both Samuel and Hutton to illustrate praiseworthy aspects of Elizabeth's character and abilities. Although Samuel was writing decades later, and with the advantage of his parents' letters to hand, it is clear that he also drew substantially on Hutton's novelised account in creating the structure of his narrative of his mother's early life.

The minister, who fell in love with Elizabeth after lending her books and encouraging her literary talents, admired her mind as well as her beauty; his courtship is used in both novel and memoir to highlight Elizabeth's intelligence and academic abilities, which were highly elevated for a yeoman farmer's daughter. As Samuel notes, the minister's 'discernment soon detected beneath the veil of her retiring modesty, my Mother's superior merit and refinement'.<sup>161</sup> According to Samuel and Hutton, he was deeply in love with Elizabeth but, unable to overcome his preoccupation with his high social standing and low income, 'married for fortune' and allied himself with an older, upper-class woman of inferior character to Elizabeth, leading (in Samuel and Hutton's accounts) to

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<sup>161</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 10.

an unhappy marriage due to the ‘sacrifices he had made to the shrine of worldly ambition’.<sup>162</sup> By contrast, Elizabeth’s earlier rejection of rich but uncouth suitors, such as a wealthy farmer, allows Samuel to assure the reader that never ‘at any time would the mere possession of money or “of dirty acres” have been a recommendation to her favour’, thus elevating her romantically and morally above her worldly and unfaithful suitor.<sup>163</sup>

Social standing, and Elizabeth’s suitability for inhabiting ‘elevated spheres’ is a similar preoccupation in the telling of her other significant courtships, which featured a complex triangle between her, John Coltman and the nephew and heir of the local squire. After meeting John Coltman in Matlock whilst visiting friends, Elizabeth began a correspondence with him based on a mutual love of literature. Coltman’s intelligence and refinement are employed to elevate for the reader the quality of Elizabeth’s beauty and mind; his discerning interest is used by Samuel as evidence of his mother’s refinement:

Her beauty was of the delicate sort, refined yet dignified, calculated to make an impression on a mind like my Father’s, whose cultivated intellect could appreciate besides the pure, exalted tone of mind and manners for which my mother was distinguished.<sup>164</sup>

Although Coltman declared his affection for her, Elizabeth did not initially receive a proposal from him, due in part to his uncle’s opposition to the match and the financial difficulties that would be incurred should he lose his position in his uncle’s business. The correspondence and courtship were prolonged, but saw no progression towards an engagement. Coltman’s letters became increasingly delayed until, at one point, they ceased entirely. Despite several entreaties from Elizabeth, Coltman continued to remain silent, leading her to believe he had given up his attachment to her. This behaviour on Coltman’s part is condemned by both Samuel and Hutton. Although they offer some acknowledgement of ill

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

health and personal difficulties that may have complicated his situation, their primary concern is the emotional distress his silence caused for Elizabeth.

At this point in both narratives, Elizabeth/Margaret, suffering from the effects of her romantic disappointment, is aggressively pursued by a third man, a gentleman who has been for some time in admiration of her, but remained respectful in his addresses until this point. Her suitor, the nephew and heir of a local squire, perceives Elizabeth's unusually high qualities and character, falling in love with her and asking for her hand in marriage. As heir to an estate and position of social influence, his pursuit of Elizabeth confirms her suitability for a position in the higher ranks of society, in spite, and in many respects because of, her lack of desire for social advancement. In *Oakwood Hall*, Hutton creates for the squire's nephew an immoral sister, who deliberately marries for wealth and social status, an act which is portrayed as one of deceit towards her unsuspecting husband that leads to the breakdown of their marriage. Contrasted to the two failed marriages of the novel (this and the minister's), Elizabeth's insistence on marrying for love becomes both romantic and prudent, not just ideal but essential for the formation of a stable marriage that would form the basis of the Coltman family's communal biographic identity.

Although Elizabeth eventually assented and became engaged to the squire's heir, this is strongly presented by both Hutton and Samuel as preceded by only a lukewarm attachment on her part, but considerable pressure from her parents, delighted by the opportunities for social advancement the match offered. Her agreeing to the marriage is implied to be at least partially due to her desire to be obedient to her parent's wishes, despite the inclinations of her own heart, which had not forgotten John Coltman. Whilst this presented a highly romantic narrative - a young girl, bereft and pining for her lover, pushed into a marriage against her wishes by her family's persuasion - it was greatly within the interests of Samuel and Hutton to portray Elizabeth's devotion to Coltman as unwavering. Not only was constancy an ideal attribute of a virtuous woman, but Samuel owed his existence to the eventual union of Elizabeth with John Coltman, a couple Hutton viewed as her most admirable friends. Representing their marriage as

anything other than an ardently hoped for love match on both sides would entirely disrupt the idealised love their union came to represent in their biographical narratives.

Their marriage was made possible by a twist of fate worthy of a romantic novel. Elizabeth's then fiancé, in his eagerness to see her, walked through a rainstorm to her parent's house, then sat in his wet clothes all evening, too delighted by her company to think of changing them. He fell ill, and died in a matter of days, to Elizabeth's (apparently moderate) distress. Although the situation was still complicated by Coltman's ties to his uncle, he and Elizabeth were eventually reunited and married, moving to Leicester to begin their married life as members of the manufacturing middle class.

In *Oakwood Hall*, the young lovers' marriage conveniently does not cause a rift with Coltman's uncle, who provides them with a house and income as a wedding gift. In this alternative fictionalised timeline, Elizabeth and John are left with the leisure and income to pursue their natural inclinations towards academic and artistic pursuits, portrayed as the course most suited to their characters and abilities. This romanticised ending to their courtship eradicates the difficulties raised by John and Elizabeth's educations and interests, and the realities of their financial situation. Whilst Coltman was able, to a degree, to continue his scholarly activities (though possibly to the detriment of his business and financial affairs), Elizabeth's duties as a married woman appear to have precluded a continuation of her academic and artistic interests.

In Hutton's novelised version of events, the character representing Elizabeth's mother (Mrs Freeman) and the squire's housekeeper, as respectable but uneducated women, discuss the problem posed by Elizabeth/Margaret's education and abilities and her future role in the management of a married household. Although Mrs Freeman/Cartwright is unable to share her daughter's refined pursuits, she still views them as suitable female employment for the daughter of a household: 'if my daughter likes to read, and I like to make a pudding and sweep the house, I think nobody can blame us for our separate

employments'.<sup>165</sup> The housekeeper, however, sees such division of labour as an essential shortcoming in Elizabeth's education for future life, allowing her to prioritise ornamental talents over the practical skills necessary to maintain a husband and family: 'but I know if I'd a daughter, I'd make her good for something. Your hundred a year won't buy Peggy a gentleman, and all her learning won't cook her husband's dinner, nor her *ingenousness* (*sic*) mend his stockings'.<sup>166</sup> Samuel similarly noted the difficulties Elizabeth faced in her role as housekeeper in a middle-class household of moderate income, given her propensity for cultured occupations: 'My mother's mind was of an elevated sort, that the mere drudgery of life could not suffice for its scope, and employment'.<sup>167</sup> In achieving a state of educated refinement that made her character both admirable within her own community and suited to social classes above her own, Elizabeth was seen to possess an idealised feminine identity. But as shown in the concerns her family and friends raised, it was acknowledged that for members of the dissenting middle-classes, the refined and educated identities of their daughters could not remain stable across their life time. The talents and characteristics valued in an unmarried woman as a mark of her quality became impractical as her role and identity shifted to that of a wife and mother.

In moving from the role of romantic young woman, that presented an obvious structure for literary representation, to the more firmly private and domestic role of a manufacturer's wife, there is a marked shift in the way in which Elizabeth is portrayed in Samuel and Hutton's life writing. Although the interest in her early life is generated through her relation to the male figures surrounding her, and their actions towards her, the presentation of this portion of her life is nevertheless a narrative with Elizabeth at its centre, with her fate as the primary point of interest. As the matriarch of the Coltmans, although still revered by Samuel and Hutton, Elizabeth becomes somewhat of a background figure to the lives of her family, her actions only seen in their relation to the lives

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<sup>165</sup> Hutton, *Oakwood Hall*, p. 45.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>167</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 47.

and narratives of her husband, father and children. Given the reverence in which both Samuel and Hutton held Elizabeth, it is unlikely this is from lack of interest in her subsequent life, but rather a lack of narrative forms for the domestic life of a wife and mother.

The qualities for which Elizabeth receives praise as a married woman diverge significantly from the ‘retiring modesty’ and gentle, poetic talents portrayed in the accounts of her early life. Instead, Samuel praises her ‘prudence, activity and skilful management’<sup>168</sup> in the running of her household, and the authority she employed in running their family affairs, noting that, ‘My Father wanted the decision of character on most occasions that my dear Mother possessed in high degree.’<sup>169</sup> In this account her previous occupations of literature, painting and creating paper landscapes appear to have ceased with her marriage: Samuel observes that although her children must have received their artistic talent from their mother, they had never seen her paint, or any examples of her work. Seen as socially ornamental, Elizabeth’s early pursuits are frequently made visible to the reading audience by both Samuel and Hutton, their merit lying in their display of cultured ability. In contrast, Elizabeth’s work as a wife is almost entirely hidden. Although she was seen to sweep floors whilst still in her parents’ home, this was combined with loftier pursuits to create an ideal whole. As her work moved entirely to household management, the tasks this entailed lack a redeeming counterpart of genteel activity. While not unrespectable, the work of a housewife did not imply the same level of refinement and culture created by Elizabeth’s earlier portrayal as a gifted young woman, the necessity of her taking on the burden of household work indicating a lack of financial ease that would allow the employment of sufficient household staff to undertake such work. Elizabeth’s earlier gentleness, obedience and sensitive intelligence, although still present, become secondary characteristics in the depiction of her as

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<sup>168</sup> Coltman, *Time’s Stepping Stones*, p. 87.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

a wife and mother, in which the harder qualities of industry, practicality and authority become the defining features of her role.

Deprived of her artistic pursuits, Elizabeth Coltman's devotion to the moral development of her offspring becomes a striking element of *Time's Stepping Stones*, even by the standards of a middle-class dissenting household. Highly educated and devout, Elizabeth's role as moral educator in the lives of her children appears as an outlet for her intelligence, belief and ideas of social responsibility. From the point of her marriage in both *Time's Stepping Stones* and Catherine Hutton's accounts of the Coltman family, the majority of recorded and reported actions Elizabeth takes are in relation to her children's upbringing. Whilst this representation of Elizabeth in *Time's Stepping Stones* is understandable in a memoir written by her son, viewing his mother through his personal memories and experiences with her, Catherine Hutton's similar adherence to this portrayal of an adult friend indicates the importance of this role both to Elizabeth personally, and as a positive literary representation of a married, middle-class woman within a collective familial biography.

Although Elizabeth is depicted by her various life-writing family members as consistently virtuous across her lifetime, there is a marked difference in the way in which she is presented as she transitions from a young unmarried woman to a wife and mother. Such shifts illustrate the ways in which conventional literary models of admirable femininity, and social ideas of female distinction, influence the forms of life writing adopted within the Coltman circle. Prior to her marriage, Elizabeth appears not as a member of collective family unit, but as an individual biographical subject at the heart of her own personal narrative. As a wife and mother, however, Elizabeth becomes a part of a communal chronicle; her character and role within the familial collective are demonstrated through her actions towards her husband, father and children within their shared domestic space. In these narratives, Elizabeth acts as the primary female figure within the Coltman family, and her identity and representation within the collective biographies offers an essential background for the interpretation of how Heyrick is presented as a daughter of the family.

## Elizabeth Heyrick: The ‘talented and lofty-spirited daughter’

Previous critical works on Heyrick have focused on her family’s connections with dissenting culture, radical politics and intellectual pursuits, as well as her brief time at a Quaker school, as influential factors in her upbringing that were to impact on her future work.<sup>170</sup> Whilst these were doubtless important elements in forming her eventual worldview, Elizabeth Coltman’s role as an educator and moral and religious guide to her children should not be ignored. As one of the primary relationships in Heyrick’s life, and a figure who was to shape much of the course of her education, both practical and religious, Elizabeth Coltman’s influence in the development of her daughter’s character, worldview and work should not be underestimated. This is not to say that Heyrick adhered closely to the guidance her mother offered, or that Elizabeth Coltman wholly approved of her daughter’s life choices in adulthood. Rather, viewing Heyrick’s life and works within the context of her early domestic upbringing provides a valuable measure of the degree to which her later ideas and works were a continuation of the ideals of the dissenting culture within which she was raised, as experienced by female members of her family, and how far they may be seen as an evolution or separation from the social and religious traditions in her immediate circle.

Samuel Coltman includes in *Time’s Stepping Stones* a letter from his mother Elizabeth to her husband on the matter of family prayer, as an illustration of the care and anxiety she took over her duties as a mother and moral guide to her children. The letter, he observes, ‘evinces my Mother’s conscientious anxiety about our initiation into habits of daily piety as well as those of regularity in the

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<sup>170</sup> See Kenneth Corfield, ‘Elizabeth Heyrick: Radical Quaker’, in Gail Malmgreen (ed.), *Religion in the lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 41-67; Clare Midgley, ‘The Dissenting Voice of Elizabeth Heyrick: An Exploration of the Links between Gender, Religious Dissent, and Anti-Slavery Radicalism’, in Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey (eds) *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Shirley Aucott, *Elizabeth Heyrick 1769 to 1831: The Leicester Quaker who Demanded the Immediate Emancipation of Slaves in the British Colonies* (Leicester: Shirley Aucott, 2007).

performance of moral duty'.<sup>171</sup> It appears from the letter that John Coltman had been resistant to the performance of shared family prayer, a practise Elizabeth was anxious to instil:

Tho' it is painful for me to solicit anything from you which you seem unwilling to comply with, yet you know no difficulty should deter us from what appears to be our duty...I do not know that I should have had the fortitude to mention it anymore, if I did not suppose that my duty as the Mother of our dear Children – required it of me. Their happiness and welfare in both worlds is the highest object of my ambition, and I cannot think but that the likeliest way to secure this is by not only a moral but a pious and religious education. For, as young minds cannot long be kept without impression or perhaps prejudices of one kind or another, I think the likeliest way to secure them from the various temptations of the world, is by an early tincture of rational Piety and Devotion.<sup>172</sup>

To Elizabeth, her religious duty as a mother, in ensuring the spiritual welfare of her children, superseded her duties of wifely obedience to her husband. Her conception of the easily impressed state of children's minds suggests a Lockean understanding of their formation, requiring constant and active guidance to shape their characters to a positive end through both piety and rationality. It was also a duty that could be openly discussed and described by Samuel as continued evidence of his mother's high character and morality, her devotion to her family's morality and piety contributing to an ongoing culture of rational religious dissent.

Elizabeth Coltman's involvement in the moral and religious lives of her daughters was particularly pronounced as, other than a brief period at a Quaker boarding school, they remained in the family home over the course of their education, attending a local day school unlike their brothers, who were sent away

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<sup>171</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 106.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p. 106-7.

to school. With both of her daughters, Elizabeth Coltman was disconcerted by the intensity of their moral beliefs and the campaigns they were to adopt in adult life, despite having anxiously guided their youthful actions to moral paths. Catherine Hutton, in her 'Sketch of a Family of Originals', recounted how Heyrick's younger sister, Mary Ann Coltman, became a devout vegetarian, and Heyrick a campaigner for the rights of animals, due to Mrs Coltman having impressed upon them, throughout their childhood, the importance of empathy:

Mrs. Adeling [a thinly veiled Elizabeth Coltman] had regarded the feelings of everything that had life, and this she impressed upon her daughters. It operated strongly on both, but in a different way, according to the different constitution of their minds. Mary Anne, the younger daughter, who was of a placid temper, it taught to spare; Elizabeth, the elder, who was all energy and enterprise, it taught to combat. Mary Anne, when a child, would see a joint of veal roasting at the kitchen fire, and would say,

"Mamma, what was that when it was alive?"

"A calf."

"Then I'm sure I won't eat calf."

This went on, extending itself, until she would not eat a raspberry before she had minutely examined it, to be assured that she should not destroy a worm. Having found one, I have seen her place it carefully on a leaf.

Mamma repented that she had suffered Humanity to go so far, and she used every means in her power to induce her daughter to eat animal food; but all her efforts were in vain.<sup>173</sup>

Hutton acknowledges that individuals may have a 'different constitution' of mind, but attributes the heightened empathy of the two sisters to their mother's influence, even if Mrs Coltman herself 'repented' the extremity to which her

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<sup>173</sup>Hutton, 'A Sketch of a Family', p. 60.

instruction was taken. In seeing the early inducements to piety and compassion Heyrick experienced as a child, her later continuance of these practises, whilst seen as extreme by her family, do appear in part as an extension of the culture in which she was raised.

Although not brought together explicitly by Samuel, the combined primary texts included in *Time's Stepping Stones* in the form of letters from Elizabeth Coltman to her daughter, and extracts from Heyrick's later adult diaries, reveal a striking similarity between Mrs Coltman's early methods for the encouragement of moral practise and self-assessment, and Heyrick's adult preoccupation with self-interrogation and improvement. Samuel recalls that as Heyrick grew to be a beautiful young woman,

My Mother ever watchful perceived with anxiety that pride and vanity, the usual attendants of personal beauty, had insidiously crept into the character of her talented and lofty spirited daughter. She mortified where she could such anti-Christian feelings.<sup>174</sup>

This mortification is then demonstrated by Samuel in a letter written by Mrs Coltman to Heyrick as a teenager, when she was staying with friends, in which Heyrick is urged to correct defects in her character:

Nature, my dear girl, has been no niggard to thee, only thy garden is too much like the fields of the slothful – two or three tall weeds (which only require vigorous exertion to pull them up) choke the good seeds of virtue.<sup>175</sup>

This encouragement to moral self-governance and correction is later mirrored by Heyrick herself in the extracts of her journal Samuel includes to illustrate her pious character, which although he viewed them as extreme, suggested her practises of self-mortification were 'doubtless the best preparation for the work

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<sup>174</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 121.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

of self-denial and dedication to the service of God that she meditated and accomplished'.<sup>176</sup> The passage opens with a self-chastising call to duty:

I am negligent and careless of my duty, and forgetful of God and futurity. I am now admonished by the experience of so many years, that happiness or peace of mind are not attainable through the indulgence of the senses...but result only from an unwearied discharge of duty. I must destroy my habits of indolence and self-indulgence – and acquire those of activity and self-denial. And this is a work which cannot be accomplished by active wishes, or by feeble exertions, it will require long, painful and unwearied exercise of mortification, resolution, perseverance and patience.<sup>177</sup>

In the adoption of this mode of self-improving piety, Heyrick's thoughts appear highly reminiscent of Mrs Coltman's modes of religious and moral education, only the previously external admonishments of her character have become internalised – the expressed intention of her mother, who hoped her children would adopt rational religion as a guide for their thoughts and actions. Although dismayed by Heyrick's active and unusual forms of philanthropy, religious expression and later conversion to Quakerism, Samuel's depiction of the religious education of the Coltman family, and Heyrick's modes of adult piety, imply a strong sympathy between the religious and moral practises of Elizabeth Coltman and her daughter.

Elizabeth Heyrick and Susanna Watts both became considerable public figures in their lifetimes, but the pictures we can draw of their lives are restricted by both the form and limited nature of the biographical accounts published at that period. Inevitably, given the focus of the Coltman family papers, there is far more information available for Heyrick than for Watts, although the fact that Samuel died before he completed *Time's Stepping Stones* means that we do not

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

have from his hand a considered assessment of Heyrick's campaigning and philanthropic activities. It is clear, however, from the manuscript that his assessment of her in early life has been inevitably coloured by his awareness of her later public role. For example, in depicting Heyrick's childhood, Samuel relates the story of how, in helping to decide which kitten of a litter should be preserved, she became distraught at the plight of the ugliest kitten, doomed to be destroyed because it did not fit with arbitrary social values of attractiveness. In order to 'stop the child's crying' it was decided both the prettiest and ugliest should be saved.<sup>178</sup> He concludes that 'her sympathies when a mere child were early engaged for the neglected and oppressed', thus foreshadowing her later work campaigning for the rights of slaves and animals.<sup>179</sup>

This model of reading Heyrick's future into her childhood is also evident in Hutton's 'Sketch of a Family of Originals' in *Ainsworth's Magazine* in which she chooses an anecdote to illustrate how 'singular' Heyrick (or 'Elizabeth Adeling' in the 'Sketch') was in her childhood. Heyrick had been given some money to buy herself gingerbread, but passed a beggar on her way, asking for alms. She pressed half of her money into his hand and carried on. However, 'She had not gone far, when her conscience smote her; and she cried aloud, "Stomach, thou sha'n't be gratified!" and running back, she gave the beggar the remaining penny.'<sup>180</sup> The tale, with its histrionic exclaiming aloud, appears to belong to the genre of improving religious stories for children which were circulated in large numbers in the early decades of the nineteenth century, following the success of Hannah More's series of *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795-97), and the founding of the Religious Tract Society in 1799.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, close at hand were the *Plain Tales* by E. C., previously believed to have been by Elizabeth Heyrick, but now correctly identified as being by the Coltman family's friend, Elizabeth Coltman, also of

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<sup>178</sup>Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 104..

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.

<sup>180</sup> Hutton, 'Sketch of a Family', p. 61

<sup>181</sup> See Matthew O. Grenby, *The Child Reader, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Aileen Fyfe, 'Reading Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century Dissenting Families', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 453-74.

Leicester.<sup>182</sup> Two of the tales concern gingerbread. In the first, Jenny Bunney decides to save up the half pennies she has been given to buy gingerbread in order to purchase material to make caps for her poor mother. In the following tale, Nancy Thoughtless spends her half pennies on gingerbread, and then when her father is ill, is unable to help her mother by buying him wine: the moral is summarised in verse:

She who in trifles spends her gain,  
 Will lose all lasting pleasure;  
 And when she would do good, in vain  
 Laments her wasted pleasure.<sup>183</sup>

The stern moralising tone is typical of the overall genre, whilst the rhyme recalls the *Divine Songs* of Isaac Watts which were required reading for both Anglican and Dissenting children at this period.<sup>184</sup> The tale of Heyrick's charity to the beggar fits almost too neatly into this genre suggesting at least a level of embellishment by Hutton. The fact that Samuel does not mention the story in his account of Heyrick's childhood raises the possibility that Hutton, in recrafting her portrait of Heyrick for posterity, drew rather freely on both her recollections and her reading.

Both anecdotes of Heyrick's childhood, of the kitten and the gingerbread, which had appeared separately, in *Time's Stepping Stones* and *Ainsworth's Magazine*, respectively, are later found combined in Beale's 1895 *Catherine Hutton and her Friends* where she draws in turn on a further unpublished

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<sup>182</sup> See Timothy Whelan, ed., 'Introduction', *Nonconformist Women Writers 1720-1840*, vol. 7 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), pp. 14-22 for details on the other Elizabeth Coltman.

<sup>183</sup> E\_\_ C\_\_ *Plain Tales; or, The Advantages of Industry*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Darton and Harvey; Leicester: T. Combe and I Cockshaw, Leicester, 1806), p. 21. The first two editions were in 1799 and 1801, without any indications as to author (Whelan, *Nonconformist Women*), p. 16.

<sup>184</sup> Isaac Watts' *Divine Songs, Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* were first published in 1715, but remained hugely popular through to the late nineteenth century. See <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/divine-songs-attempted-in-easy-language-for-the-use-of-children>.

biographical account of Heyrick.<sup>185</sup> The memoir opens with these two vignettes of Heyrick's childhood, skilfully woven together to suggest that 'this principle of sympathy for the outcast, and the one who had no helper, was conspicuous throughout life'.<sup>186</sup> The transmission, and reworking of the original materials, to create a unified biography which fits squarely into a narrative of virtuous achievement, illustrates the ways in which material was passed on within the community, and then reshaped by subsequent writers to fit within standard narratives of virtuous lives.

Interestingly, there are marked difference between the representations of Heyrick and Watts' lives by their close friends and family, and those who are writing in subsequent periods, without direct personal connection to their subjects. In the former accounts, the focus is almost entirely on the domestic aspects of their lives, with only minimal detail on their social and political campaigns. For those writing later, however, these public and social aspects of their lives take centre stage. These texts provide a more comprehensive overview of the external aspects of their subjects' lives, but one that is moulded to fit an interpretation of their character, as seen through earlier life writing texts, at a distance of several decades.

In later published accounts there is also an awareness of their subjects as representatives of a previous era, bringing the author's conception of this earlier period to bear upon their interpretation of Heyrick and Watts' actions and characters. The anonymous 1862 text, *A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mrs Elizabeth Heyrick*, for example, opens with a strong statement of historic contextualisation, stating that:

Half a century ago, the sphere in which educated Englishwomen lived and moved was a far more restricted one than is the case at the present day....An amount of courage which we can scarcely estimate was required

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<sup>185</sup> In her introduction, Beale thanks the various family members and friends who have given her material, including, 'Mrs E. Hudson for the MS. Memoir of Mrs Heyrick', p. vii.

<sup>186</sup> Beale, *Catherine Hutton*, p. 186.

by any woman who chose, or felt impelled by the obligation of duty, to overstep these boundary lines. She was either pronounced an enthusiast, or was in danger of gaining for herself that distinction summed up in the epithet 'masculine', from which women of fine sensibility have at all times instinctively shrunk.<sup>187</sup>

Set against this interpretation of an earlier British society (and of fine feminine sensibility), the author's depiction of Heyrick's life and character is framed by a mid-century understanding of the social contexts of a previous era, which permits her to emphasise the courage of her subject.<sup>188</sup> A technique of historical distancing is deployed to highlight the difficulties faced by her subject, whilst the underlying concerns are very much of her own era: the problems faced by the feminists of the 1860s in calling for social change, without finding themselves branded as 'masculine' women. Prominent women's rights campaigner Bessie Rayner Parkes (1829-1925), for example, who was the great-granddaughter of Joseph Priestley and had been brought up amidst the Birmingham Unitarian community, wrote and campaigned extensively for women's education and suffrage from the 1850s onwards. During the time this biography of Heyrick was written, Parkes was the primary editor of the feminist periodical the *English Woman's Journal* (1858-1864), which she founded with her friend Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and others, just as Heyrick and Watts had founded and edited their own anti-slavery journal *The Humming Bird* several decades earlier.<sup>189</sup> In this memoir of Heyrick, it would seem, the interpretation of the past is being refracted through the concerns of the present.

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<sup>187</sup> Anonymous, *A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mrs Elizabeth Heyrick* (Leicester: Crossley and Clarke, 1862), p. 1-2.

<sup>188</sup> Although the author of this text is anonymous, it reads as if it is the work of a woman, and has been tentatively attributed to Alicia Cooper by Isobel Grundy in her ODNB entry on Heyrick. Alicia Cooper, who got to know Mary Ann Coltman in the later years of her life, produced a memorial sketch of Mary Ann Coltman which is published in Beale, pp. 231-39.

<sup>189</sup> For the continuities between earlier abolitionist campaigns amidst dissenting communities, and the feminist campaigns in the 1860s for female education and suffrage, see Jane Rendall, 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867', in Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119-178, pp. 125-126.

In the case of Heyrick, where we have biographical accounts dating from her life before she took on any public role, it is possible to track another, very different, pattern of representation, where scepticism, rather than adulation, is the dominant note. Hutton's 'Hasty Sketch', written when Heyrick was initially contemplating joining the Quakers, is both sceptical and critical in tone:

A mind like hers, having renounced mankind, could only find refuge in religion. Methodism might have done; but Quakerism presented itself, which was preferred in two respects: First in enjoining a more *savage* renunciation of all her taste and elegant accomplishments. Secondly (for if we show vanity in at one door, it will out at another), it presented a distant prospect of displaying her fine sense and elocution; for, if she continues a Quaker she will certainly one day be a distinguished speaker.<sup>190</sup>

Whilst the opening sections of the 'Hasty Sketch' are full of admiration for Heyrick's mother and siblings, over half the text is given over to complaints about Heyrick, which no doubt echo to some degree her mother's exasperation with her strong-willed daughter. Hutton here sees Heyrick as attracted to Quakerism for the opportunity it would provide to further pre-existing inclinations towards dramatic forms of self-sacrifice, and her desire to gain social recognition for eloquent public speaking. The emphasis on '*savage*' renunciation, suggests its base in a deeply unchristian self-regard, whilst there is a premonition here that Heyrick was leaning towards conversion since the Quakers were one of the few sects which would permit women to engage in public speaking, and thus offer her a platform for public campaigns. Quakerism is seen as an extension of Heyrick's character, rather than an alteration to it; her interest in Quakerism an expression of a pre-existing individuality, rather than an act of religious conformity. Her future career as public campaigner is anticipated, not with admiration, but rather as an aspect of personal vanity, to be disparaged.

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<sup>190</sup> Hutton, 'Hasty Sketch', p.3.

In later years, Hutton seems to have warmed more to Heyrick. Thus in a letter of 1812 to Heyrick's sister, Mary Ann, she writes, 'The two hours she spent with me I shall never forget. Such an open, unreserved communication of each other's thoughts was new and most delightful for me. She laid aside the Quaker, and while I admired Mrs Heyrick, I saw and loved Bess Coltman.'<sup>191</sup> Here 'the Quaker' in Heyrick appears to have displaced both 'Mrs Heyrick' and 'Bess Coltman', and must be 'laid aside' in order for Hutton to interact with either of these previous incarnations. The fact that they are still present beneath the outward persona of 'the Quaker' suggests a degree of performativity in Heyrick's religious role, possibly highlighted by the Quaker custom of using deliberately 'plain' speech and wearing unadorned clothing. Heyrick's performance of her Quakerism appears as an artificial front that prevents 'open, unreserved communication' of her true thoughts and self, suggesting conformity with Quaker practise has stifled her individuality.

In a 'Hasty Sketch', Hutton shows herself to be deeply preoccupied with Heyrick's 'improvident' past actions, including her mistaken marriage to John Heyrick, whose jealousies separated her from her family until he 'dropped down dead, not in the field of battle [he had become a soldier], but by the visitation of God'. Such Godly deliverance, however, did not seem to improve matters since Heyrick then adopted, to Hutton's eyes, the very mistaken notion of running a school. She comments tartly,

In her place, I should imagine it right to make a husband happy, if one fell in my way; if not, to contribute all in my power to the happiness of my father and mother. But she cannot find any way in the world to be useful or happy, but by voluntarily submitting to the drudgery of keeping a quaker boarding school, and such is now actually her plan.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Beale, *Catherine Hutton*, p. 152.

<sup>192</sup> Hutton, 'Hasty Sketch', p. 3.

Hutton, who had herself refused two offers of marriage, and was on the verge of her own independent writing career, nonetheless seems keen to insist that the widowed Heyrick should adopt a traditional path of daughterly obedience and dependence.<sup>193</sup>

Although there are not many surviving personal letters from Heyrick, there is one in the Leicestershire Record Office which addresses the issue of the school, thus allowing her a voice which speaks back to the criticisms of her first biographer. The letter to her mother, although written at a time of spiritual uncertainty, is determinedly rational, and shows a strong awareness of her own character and motivations. It addresses her frustration that her actions, which she believed demonstrated fixity of purpose and intention, are misconstrued by her family and friends. She is clearly hurt by her family's opposition to her plans, stating:

You know the ardour of my disposition, and when I tell you that I did not entertain a doubt of the success of one of my late proposals...you will not wonder that your letter produced effects which time can only soften to acquiescence...whatever mortification I may experience from my dear Mother's continued opposition to them.<sup>194</sup>

This illustration of her emotional reaction to the disappointment of her plans reveals an element of externality in her assessment: she is able to predict both her family's responses to her 'ardour of disposition', and her own eventual acceptance of their opposition.

Heyrick similarly displays a distinct sense of her own abilities and desires, supported by an empirical assessment of her experiences and tendencies. Whilst she agrees to return to the family home instead of carrying out her desired plan of founding a boarding school, 'I shall not so easily loose the conviction that I

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<sup>193</sup> See Rosemary Mitchell, 'Hutton, Catherine (1756-1846)', *ODNB*. Hutton received two proposals of marriage during a visit to Aberystwyth in 1787.

<sup>194</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick, Letter to Elizabeth Coltman, Leics. RO, The Coltman Family Letters, 15D57/64.

have both inclination and capacity for more active employment.<sup>195</sup> This statement is followed by an explanation of the experiences that have led to this conviction - several months assisting her Quaker friends in York at their teaching establishment, where she found,

my inclinations strengthened and confirmed by the observations and experiences I have devised from my present situation, and after a diligent application of three months to the duties of the employment, in which every day seem'd to furnish me with some fresh proof that the object of my pursuit was congenial to my disposition.<sup>196</sup>

Heyrick's language draws perceptibly on rational, Enlightenment ideas of the importance of knowledge derived from the two areas she is keen to emphasise: observation and experience. Although an 'inclination', Heyrick's intentions are presented as reliably supported by three months' worth of diligent, dutiful and enjoyable work as 'proof' of the rationality of her own self-awareness.

This emphasis on the importance of evidentially supported rationality in the formation of an opinion is used by Heyrick not only in support of her own views, but in denigration of those who oppose her. She hopes she, 'may be allowed to enter into a vindication of the *consistency* of my conduct in this affair, which I find has been the subject of very free, and general animadversion.'<sup>197</sup> It would appear that Hutton's 'Hasty Sketch', written in the same year as this letter, is part of this 'free, and general animadversion', suggesting how closely interknit this dissenting circle was, with seemingly personal and private decisions, of a widow in her thirties, seen as the legitimate concern and subject for discussion of the community. The criticism, apparently conveyed in Heyrick's mother's letter and originating from those 'who class themselves in the number of my friends', seems to have focussed on the suitability of Heyrick's house, Bow Bridge, as the

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<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* See Clare Midgley, 'The Dissenting Voice of Elizabeth Heyrick', p. 95, for a brief discussion of Heyrick's time with the Tukes.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

site for a school. Part of this criticism is the accusation that ‘my attachment is more to the place, than to the employment I have been seeking for’, implying Heyrick’s plans are based on a sentimental emotional attachment, rather than the rational ‘consistency’ she is at pains to present. She does, however, as she points out, have a significant advantage over her critics in the empirical evaluation of the house, which she and her husband had had built: ‘I do not need to be told what the house *really is*, of that I must be allow’d a competent judge, as I have resided in it longer than any other individual – The house, and situation are *intrinsically the same*, and cannot change with the fluctuations of opinion.’<sup>198</sup> The criticism of sentimental attachment is reduced to an unstable, fluctuating opinion that has little backing compared to Heyrick’s several years of personal experience living in the debated location. This insistence on empirical evidence, whilst not out of keeping with the development of social trends over the previous century, is nevertheless at least moderately unusual in the rhetoric of a religiously devout woman, corresponding privately with her family in the opening years of the nineteenth century.

Heyrick’s letter allows her to ‘write back’, constructing her own version of events, exactly at the time that the first biography of her life was being crafted. The juxtaposition highlights the contextual and partial nature of all biography. The communal intervention into her personal decisions also illuminates the problem of viewing the history of the era in terms of a divide between the public and private realms. As Sylvana Tomaselli has argued in ‘The most Public Sphere of all: the Family’, to think in terms of a separation between the private, domestic sphere and that of the public is to limit ‘our capacity to understand the realm of mores, morals and education with which women have been particularly identified for centuries’.<sup>199</sup> While bowing, reluctantly, to her parents’ right to guide her in

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Sylvana Tomaselli, ‘The most Public Sphere of All: the Family’, in Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (eds), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 239-56, p. 239. See also Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago

this matter, Heyrick, in this domestic dispute, displays the same belief in rational, individual judgment that was to inform her startling pamphlet, twenty-two years later, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition* (1824).

Although she acquiesces to her parents' desires, Heyrick still insists on her right to use her own rational thought as a behavioural guide:

I cease to urge my own sentiments whilst *yours*, and my *Father's* remain so dissimilar...I wish it to be understood that I submit my own judgement on this subject *only* to yours, and my Father's, the rest of my family and friends disagreeing with me in opinion, is no reason why my own judgement is to be discarded as a useless thing.<sup>200</sup>

In citing the duty of daughterly obedience to her parents as the reason for her reluctant acceptance of their views on her intended plans, Heyrick is able to concede her intentions without admitting any rational superiority in her parents', and their wider circle of friends', assessment of her plans. The moral and religious duty of obeying her parents' desires, though resented, is used by Heyrick to vocally maintain her confidence in her own rational assessment of her actions and ideas. Conduct, she suggests to her parents, should be guided by individual rationality rather than social pressure:

We are not all endowed with equal degrees of reason and discernment; but, when arrived at years of maturity, every individual must govern his actions according to the measure he has received, and not by that of another – and by his work he will either be acquitted or condemned.<sup>201</sup>

Widening her discussion from her personal decisions to a consideration of personal rationality and responsibility within society, Heyrick implies she is barred from full participation in a society where an individual should be judged

Press, 2000), in which she also challenges ideas of a private/public split, and argues for seeing the value and significance of the 'small coin' of domestic femininity.

<sup>200</sup>Leicester RO, 15D57/64.

<sup>201</sup>Leicester RO, 15D57/64.

by their 'work' and guided by personal reason, by having to concede to her parents' desires. In this interchange we can see how a personal decision becomes the fulcrum of extended debate which crosses the boundaries of private/public, or domestic/social, and reveals clashing views on family, personhood, religion, and the forms in which female dissent, as both a personal and religious stance, could take.

Hutton's final attempt to offer a biographical account of Heyrick comes in 1844, in her 'Sketch of a Family of Originals', written at the end of her own long life, and thirteen years after the death of Heyrick. This time she was dealing not with a headstrong young woman, disrupting family peace, but with an individual who had become a celebrated public figure, renowned not only for her campaigns for the abolition of slavery, but also philanthropic work for a variety of causes, including ending animal cruelty, support for the poor, and prisoners. Although Hutton gives the family lightly-veiled pseudonyms in the article, the fact that she names herself at the end means that the actual identities of the family were easily uncovered. By naming herself as 'an Original', it is clear that Hutton wished to identify with the family, and with the cultural credit Heyrick's philanthropic activities had created. This time Elizabeth is introduced in startlingly positive terms: 'With every charming feminine quality, she was a heroine — such a heroine as I have not known since the days of Joan of Arc. There was, however, this difference between the two – the one endeavoured to wound and destroy, the other to succour and to save.'<sup>202</sup> Even accounting for the lapse of time between the creation of 'A Hasty Sketch' and this account, Hutton's biographical representation of Heyrick has shifted dramatically in image and tone as her writing has moved from a privately written work to be circulated within an intimate circle, to a public representation of this group in a national magazine. There is still tension in the account, however: the dramatic association with Joan of Arc is softened by an initial insistence on her femininity, and in the ensuing description, we have the childhood anecdote of the gingerbread, followed by a

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<sup>202</sup> Hutton, 'Sketch of a Family', p. 61.

full paragraph on the remarkable quality of her needlework which places her firmly within the domestic sphere of femininity. There is an account of her ill-fated marriage, but of her philanthropic activities, Hutton chooses to focus on her early opposition to bull baiting, rather than her more radical anti-slavery campaigning, which figures only in the claim that she 'stepped boldly forward the champion of black men and tortured beasts'. The association, and unfortunate alliterative phrasing, suggest that Hutton, although a member of dissenting circles, was uncomfortable with, and did not share the values and zeal which fuelled Heyrick's abolitionist activities. As with Samuel's family memoir, acknowledgement is given of Heyrick's political activity, but the primary focus, as in her earliest account, is on Heyrick within the domestic sphere. The 'Sketch' encompasses and contains Heyrick, offering her life both to their immediate community, and the wider reading public, as one of primarily domestic and feminine virtue.

This stark contrast in the presentation of an individual between an early private and a later public account is a strong illustration of the way in which this community crafted and maintained a public identity through their life writing. Heyrick is discussed as a flawed individual within domestically circulated life writing, but when moved to the public sphere, her identity as a representative figure of her community supersedes her perceived flaws. Hutton carefully modulates the account, however, to sustain her own version of virtuous, dissenting womanhood.

## Narratives of Devotional Lives: Susanna and Elizabeth

By the end of the eighteenth century, as Felicity Nussbaum notes, the dissenting tradition of compiling spiritual autobiographies had become fully recognised, so that 'Quaker and Methodist lives have a repetitive and predictable quality, and their generic codes and structures are easily recognised'.<sup>203</sup> In the various biographical accounts of the lives of Heyrick and Watts, one can see tensions as the authors work across conventions and genres, attempting to reconcile narratives of family, or public lives, with those of the recognisable form of the progression of a virtuous, female religious devotee. This was a highly familiar narrative in female biographies throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, being one of the most common forms of individual biography in which women were represented. Its focus on the subject's faith and good works saw it adapted across religious communities as a way of memorialising and perpetuating exemplary members of their community and the values they represented. For religious groups which regarded fictional works as morally dubious, biographies of the lives of exemplary women provided inspirational and improving literature.

Although varying in circumstances, the subjects of these works were presented as following a relatively set pattern of personal and religious development. Most often written by close members of their religious community, the narratives were largely domestic in setting, illustrating the women's character and faith through memories and anecdotes experienced by the author or those close to the subject. A virtuous character was generally presented as innate, but in need of experience and spiritual growth to develop deep religious devotion. This would appear in the form of a 'spiritual crisis', a period of great personal adversity. The challenge this crisis presented to the subject's faith and attachment to worldly cares leads to an acceptance of divine will and strengthened faith that allows them henceforth to lead sincerely devout lives. The subject's manner of death was also a highly important element of this narrative,

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<sup>203</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 177.

which tended to depict them reaching a state of acceptance and spiritual peace even when suffering in illness or old age. These conventional religious tropes are very clear in the narratives devoted to the life of Susanna Watts, but also emerge prominently, in more complex ways, in Samuel's depictions of his sister's life.

It is unfortunate that for Watts we do not have any biographical account which precedes her adoption of a public role, apart from the brief discussion of her literary works by Mrs Pilkington in 1804. There is no equivalent, therefore, of Hutton's 'Hasty Sketch' to compare with the short biographical documents we do have which are all constructed with hindsight, in light of the acclaim she received for her philanthropic work. The short manuscript biography appended to Watts' Scrapbook by Heyrick and Mary Ann Coltman's great-great niece, Clara Parkes, is a very sedate document, which does little to capture her lively and satirical mind (as glimpsed in her surviving letters), or the challenging nature of some of her political campaigning. Starting with details of her illustrious lineage (on the father's side), it depicts in detail first her artistic skills, including needlework with hair, and the creation of landscapes with feathers, before praising her unpublished translation of Tasso, written in 'chaste and easy rhyme'.<sup>204</sup> Her philanthropic activities with Heyrick are briefly summarised, with an emphasis on her concern for nature, and her 'delight to alleviate the sufferings of a butterfly or a worm', rather than her anti-slavery activities.<sup>205</sup> In sum, 'She was a sincere and affectionate friend, a gentle and lowly-minded woman; and a meek and humble disciple of the LORD JESUS CHRIST'.<sup>206</sup> Her personality is completely flattened out, in the interests of presenting a model life of exemplary piety.

As with the case of Heyrick, Samuel Coltman's discussion of Watts in *Time's Stepping Stones* is less overtly religious, and more mixed in content and tone, as he struggles to reduce a woman he had known most of his life as 'Sister

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<sup>204</sup> Clara Parkes, 'Susanna Watts', biographical sketch dated Feb. 2, 1865. MS attached to Watts' Scrapbook, Leics. RO., Rare Books, L.A Watts.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

Sue' into recognisable, and acceptable, patterns. There is gossip – he suggests her father married his cook, and that their fortune was lost in speculation in the South Sea Bubble – and also considerable focus on the feather pictures, with again virtually no discussion of her political campaigning. He does suggest, however, that after the death of her mother, who had latterly suffered from mental disorder, 'those who knew her best' at this time, were worried that 'the balance of her mind should give way under suffering so acute' but were convinced that her increased piety 'was the preservative from the malady under which her mother had sunk'.<sup>207</sup> At this point, Samuel notes that he is indebted for some of his information on Watts to the Memoir published 'by a young lady of Leicester who had been a sort of pupil of Miss Watts', and to the 'Recollections' appended to the posthumous edition of her poems. Nonetheless, he does not follow his informant in his interpretation of Watts' spiritual crisis, and deepening religiosity; unlike the former, his account suggests a divided impulse.

Samuel praises Watts' rise from affliction to 'pursuits of a loftier, a holier calling' but there is also a tone of reproach in his observation (not in the 'Recollections' on which he was drawing), that she now changed her associates: 'The gay, the thoughtless, nay the witty, the refined, the literary, were prized no more for qualities which she had "weighed in her calamity, "and found wanting"'. He is also clearly disturbed by the fact that she started at this time to follow the charismatic Baptist preacher, Robert Hall, associating largely with his followers, and thus adopting 'some peculiar tenets'.<sup>208</sup> Even within dissent there was internal discord, and Samuel, as a follower of rational dissent, finds it hard to subscribe fully to a narrative of spiritual crisis leading to a more refined soul, when it also brought with it a change in beliefs, and a move away from those "found wanting". Although Watts still remained very close to Heyrick at this

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<sup>207</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 142.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, p. 142. For details on Robert Hall, his radical philanthropic activities, and charismatic preaching see the website for the Robert Hall Memorial Baptist Church, in Leicester: <http://www.rhmbc.org.uk/welcome/rev-robert-hall/>

time, it is possible that Samuel himself is still smarting from the sense that he was perhaps judged and “found wanting”.

The biographer of ‘A Few Recollections of the late Mrs Susanna Watts’ (1842), which was first published in the Baptist periodical, and then appended to an edition of her *Hymns and Poems* in 1842, was, as one might expect from its publication venues, clearly written within the genre of exemplary religious lives. The text combines descriptions of Watts’ intelligence with illustrations of her incorruptible humility. In a reversal of the pattern of Hutton’s ‘Hasty Sketch’, Watts is depicted as almost saintly in her forbearance as a child, whilst her mother is depicted as the cross she has to bear. The mother is portrayed as a mere country girl who married a gentleman above herself in station, before being widowed at a young age with three small daughters. There is noticeable class bias in the biographer’s account of the mother, which represents her as vulgar and uneducated, and her behaviour a great trial to her naturally refined and gifted daughter:

The early genius of her youngest daughter was a source of the highest gratification to her, and as it became more developed and appreciated by friends, the weak mother, deficient in delicacy and true refinement of mind, was perpetually speaking in her daughter’s praise before her. This would have been enough in all ordinary cases to have perverted, if not blighted, the young bud of promise. But while Miss Watts’s delicacy was thus pained and her humility severely tried, her filial regard and respect continued to be evinced in a way that won her the love of all who looked on, and forbade any expression of rebuke of the mother’s vanity.<sup>209</sup>

In the face of her mother’s vulgarity, Watts remains untainted, displaying innate humility, delicacy and familial regard, despite the negative role model presented to her. There is unacknowledged irony here, in that the narrative heaps scorn on the mother for displaying pride in her daughter’s achievements, whilst at the

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<sup>209</sup> Watts, *Hymns and Poems*, p. 55.

same time itself praising Watts' conduct effusively, offering her to readers as a perfect model for religious emulation.

Although anonymous, these 'recollections' appear to have been written by one of Watts' close circle of friends. The account claims the author was present at her death bed, and describes the close relationship Watts held with her adopted daughter, a detail that does not emerge in the few other accounts of her life. It suggests, therefore, that the writer was quite possibly the 'adopted daughter', a phrase that could depict her sense of an affective bond, rather than any legal relationship. She may also have been the 'young lady' who was 'some sort of pupil of Miss Watts' who Samuel identifies as the author of the biography in his own account of her life.<sup>210</sup> Published initially in a religious periodical sold in support of a Baptist mission, this biography's primary purpose appears to be a celebration and inclusion of Watts within a wider community of religious piety whose virtues she was perceived to exemplify.

In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that Watts' sufferings in early life are portrayed as a device of divine intention. The death of Watts' father, the family's subsequent descent into poverty, and the loss of her two sisters to tuberculosis are framed as orchestrated events intended to shape her character for the later good she would perform for humanity:

He was with them in the furnace of affliction, as he always is, overruling the trying process, that it refine only and not injure. He foreknew the long life that lay before one of them, and it was his good pleasure to fit her by all she passed through, to become an instrument of much good to others. ...the sympathy for suffering and the enlarged benevolence that characterised the subject of these recollections, were doubtless strengthened, if not wholly awakened, by the years of privation that rolled tardily over her young head.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p. 141.

<sup>211</sup> Watts, *Hymns and Poems*, p. 54.

Within the conventions of this genre, all afflictions are retrospectively interpreted as the hand of the Lord, guiding his subject to a higher, more refined sensibility, just as metal is refined in a furnace. Such narratives conveniently forget those who do not benefit from a diet of suffering, but then they do not become the subjects of exemplary biographies.

By contrast, in the various biographical depictions of Heyrick's sufferings and points of crisis there is, as we have seen, more uncertainty as to interpretation. Hutton, certainly, did not detect any increased virtue or humility arising from Heyrick's difficult marriage and early widowhood. Samuel, however, did attempt, with difficulty, to impose a religious pattern of growth through suffering on his sister's life. Samuel's conflicting tasks in providing an account of Heyrick's life and character that was loyal to his own memories of his sister and family, whilst also adhering to a more idealised narrative of the development of a public, religious figure, cause a somewhat disjointed representation of Heyrick in *Time's Stepping Stones*. Extracts from Heyrick's diaries are shared at great length in demonstration of her deep religious piety and feeling, including lengthy sections in which she berates herself for her perceived flaws and transgressions.

These evidently made uncomfortable reading for Samuel, who wished to portray them as insights into the development of a religious character, but found himself distressed by his sister's evident pain and anguish. Sharing diary entries written by Heyrick whilst at Croydon barracks with her husband, Samuel frames her harsh self-criticism as evidence of her intelligence and determination for self-improvement:

We here see, how early in her case, began the teachings of adversity – how, whatever might be the anguish of her own heart, she exerted her naturally

courageous and powerful mind, to probe to the quick the errors which she thought had brought down upon her the cruellest of trials.<sup>212</sup>

Despite this attempt at a positive rewriting of his sister's suffering, Samuel is unable to suppress his own personal reactions of dismay in rereading her thoughts at a distance of over half a century. He describes her character at this point as, 'sincerely devout and humble, yet over scrupulous and inclined to despondency. Rigid in her own practice, her self-accusations as recorded in her diaries are painful and depressing.'<sup>213</sup> Less devout than his sister, he clearly has difficulty in accepting that such tortured forms of introspection are necessarily beneficial. Nonetheless, setting aside his deeply personal reaction to the pain of his biographical subject, Samuel clearly feels compelled to follow accepted conventions and to portray it as essential to Heyrick's developmental path as a religious figure. Although describing her thoughts at this time as extreme expressions of 'mental self-flagellation', he nevertheless concludes that they were 'doubtless the best preparation for the work of self-denial and dedication to the service of God that she meditated and accomplished'.<sup>214</sup> His use of the term 'doubtless' here conveys both assertion, but also, a willed attempt to silence his own doubts as to the healthiness of such mental combat.

Heyrick's own early subscription to narratives of pious progression are demonstrated by Samuel in his reprinting of an extract from her youthful diary in which she expresses her frustration that she feels herself incapable of true religious devotion, due to her preoccupation with worldly matters:

Shall I wait until the death of *some dear Friend* shall loosen my attachment to the world, whose soul perhaps I might be the means of saving from

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<sup>212</sup> Coltman, *Time's Stepping Stones*, p.150.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, p.170.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, p.177.

destruction by a Christian example, and by affectionate and religious admonitions?<sup>215</sup>

Her fears that she will only be inspired to true piety through personal loss foreshadow the subsequent retelling of her life's story by her biographers. In the various accounts of Heyrick's life, the death of her husband is framed as precisely this feared loss, which carries with it the desired consequence of heightened faith and piety.

Heyrick experienced a period of deep depression following the death of her husband John, during which she returned to her parents' home and lived in relative seclusion before beginning her ventures into charity, activism and Quakerism. The sequence of these events provided an obvious point of spiritual crisis and awakening for biographers wishing to narrate a traditional journey of religious development. When discussing John Heyrick's death in *Time's Stepping Stones*, Samuel explains that:

My sister was not permitted long to enjoy the conjugal happiness that would have absorbed her ardent mind; and prevented that early choice of the better path, from which we shall find she seldom swerved, when once the sacrifice of all the cherished idols of her youth had been completed.<sup>216</sup>

John Heyrick is portrayed not as a beloved husband, but rather as an 'idol' (presumably false) that prevented Heyrick from devoting the powers of her 'ardent mind' to a 'better path'. His 'sacrifice' was therefore necessary for her spiritual development, and for the conventions of pious narratives.

The anonymous 1862 account of Heyrick's life was particularly explicit in identifying John Heyrick's death as a key marker in the developmental trajectory of Heyrick's religious identity:

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, p.150.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, p.150.

We have now arrived at a period in the life of Mrs. Heyrick, which was the turning point, - the crisis in her spiritual history; her soul then first awakened to the sense of the greatness of its destiny, and we date from this time those strong convictions of duty, which, having first led to a close examination of her own heart, as in the sight of God, ended in the dedication of her whole being to His service.<sup>217</sup>

In this retelling, John Heyrick's death is preordained by the 'destiny' his wife must later fulfil, a necessary sacrifice to allow her to dedicate her 'whole being to His service'. In both of these accounts Heyrick's husband, difficult and disliked by her family and friends but nevertheless deeply beloved by Heyrick, is reduced to a device of divinely ordained narrative, the grief his death provoked reframed as positive character development.

The death of Susanna Watts' mother plays an identical role in the narration of Watts' life, being shown to inspire deep and lasting faith through her experience of worldly loss and grief. Watts was deeply affected by the death of her mother, her last surviving relative, whom she had nursed through severe difficulties in mental and physical health for many years. The sole remaining letter sent between Heyrick and Watts dates from the period of Watts' profound grief and depression following her mother's death, causing Heyrick to offer her spiritual counsel in an attempt to comfort her. Interestingly, even Heyrick views her friend's religious self-torture at this time as excessive, counselling her that, 'We are lead into the furnace of affliction that we may be refined and made more fit for use, but we are not by our own wills to keep ourselves there.'<sup>218</sup> Whilst subscribing to narratives of religious development through suffering, she is nonetheless alert to the possibilities of over-indulgence in grief.

For the author of the 'Recollections' of Watts, the great trial of Watts' religious progression is to be found in her overcoming her anguish at this period,

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<sup>217</sup> Anon., *A Brief Sketch*, p. 9.

<sup>218</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick to Susanna Watts, 21 March 1808; Leics. RO., MS. 15D57/81.

to find greater spiritual acceptance and devotion. She suggests that it was only her religious faith which kept Watts from succumbing to the mental disorder exhibited by her mother (the fatal malady):

The years 1806 and 1807 were a period of very heavy trial, most probably known in all its fullness only to God and her own soul. Externally the ravages were evident, the fine mind was bent, and the heart while not a repining thought or word was permitted, bled in agony.... amid this long winter of adversity, a slow but steady process of healthy, vigorous germination of spiritual excellence was going on. Her natural graces were such as scarcely to demand an outward change, but in the quiet of the inner being, there took place a change of motives; she became actuated by purer principles, which God discerns, though man cannot. And it is the firm belief of the writer, that her piety, one feature of which, trust in God, was singularly exhibited in her through life, preserved her from the fatal malady, whose dominion over her she constantly dreaded and deprecated.<sup>219</sup>

The narrative suggests a dual development: an outer deterioration, but an inner re-invigoration, visible at the time only to God. Writing in retrospect, the author can celebrate the emergence of God's hidden plan, when at the time, even to Watts' religious friends, it looked as if her mind, body and faith were crumbling.

The allusion to Watts' life-long fear of developing a mental disorder hints at the close intersection of narratives of religious development, and of mental disintegration, raising the question of when the 'mental flagellation' of religious introspection might shade into a form of insanity. Interestingly, at the point of her own religious crisis, Heyrick had gone to work with William Tuke in York, the founder not only of Quaker schools, but also of the York Retreat, a lunatic asylum for Quakers which introduced the principles of moral management of the insane. In place of the previous system of physical restraint, Tuke had argued

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<sup>219</sup> Watts, *Hymns and Poems*, pp.57-58.

that with kind management, and strong self-discipline, patients could be cured. The principles of psychiatric management, which were to be widely adopted in the nineteenth century, had their roots in the narratives of religious crisis.<sup>220</sup>

Within the biographical accounts of Heyrick and Watts' lives, neither John Heyrick nor Watts' mother receive a positive portrayal. John Heyrick is portrayed by both Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton as jealous, controlling and erratic, whilst Watts' anonymous biographer and Samuel depict Watts' mother as vulgar, uneducated and placing undue burdens upon her daughter. By portraying the husband and mother, respectively, as lacking in admirable character traits, the various biographers are able to minimise the significance of Heyrick and Watts' relationships to them, turning them rather into necessary vehicles for their subjects' religious transcendence into a higher, more virtuous form of life.

In marked contrast to the deaths of Mrs Watts and John Heyrick, which receive scant attention or sympathy, the deaths of Watts and Heyrick themselves act in these narratives as the culmination of their religious progression, their achieving of spiritual peace following a life of good works. Their continued dedication to moral actions and philanthropic work is emphasised prior to their physical decline, Watts' anonymous biographer describing how in her old age, 'Her activity of mind and body was no longer needed for the supply of domestic claims; yet did it not therefore cease. "Occupy till I come" was a cherished precept and truly exemplified in her life.'<sup>221</sup> The author of *A Brief Sketch of the Life and Labours of Mrs Elizabeth Heyrick* similarly mentions her subject's 'labours', stating that, 'Her activity of mind was maintained to the latest period of her life, for her energetic labours were not interrupted by lingering illness.'<sup>222</sup> In similar vein, Catherine Beale wrote in 1895 of Heyrick's anti-slavery works that,

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<sup>220</sup> For an account of the development of the Retreat, and the methods of the moral management of the insane, see the account by William's son, Samuel, who took over management of the asylum from his father: Samuel Tuke, *Description of the Retreat: an Institution near York, for Insane Persons of the Society of Friends, containing an Account of its Origin and Progress, the Modes of Treatment, and a Statement of Cases* (York: Printed for W. Alexander, 1813).

<sup>221</sup> Watts, *Hymns and Poems*, p.60.

<sup>222</sup> Anon., *A Brief Sketch*, p.23.

‘In this great cause, until the day of her death, did Mrs. Heyrick continue "in labours more abundant"'.<sup>223</sup> In this emphasis upon worthy actions as a core aspect of religious identity, the narrative relies upon a concept of a fixed state of spiritual strength that permits a continual dedication to godly works, to be achieved through overcoming the challenges of spiritual crises.

Although Heyrick and Watts are acknowledged to have experienced fear and doubt as to their true piety throughout their lives, both are shown to have reached death in a state of serenity and acceptance. The importance of this aspect of the narrative can be seen in the various authors’ determination to establish this serenity as a point of fact, despite, in both cases, their subjects being rendered unable to speak during their last days. Thus Watts’ anonymous biographer, who claims a place by her deathbed as a means of authenticating her account, relates that, ‘Religious hope and trust sustained her in helplessness, as they had animated her in the vigour of life, and the simple truth of the gospel, trust in a crucified Redeemer, was the staff on which her soul leaned’.<sup>224</sup> The actual scene of death is depicted in uplifting Christian detail:

About half an hour before she died, on the writer’s rising and bending over her, she opened her eyes and grasping her hand with her usual warmth, she held it firmly for a minute or two and murmured over it some inarticulate sentences, doubtless rich in holy blessings...In thought we seemed to follow her and to witness the fullness of her joy, when her humble yet well-grounded hope was turned to glad fruition. So sincerely did we sympathize with her, that the very earth she had left seemed to join in the jubilee of inquiring angels as they hailed her arrival on the shores of the heavenly Canaan.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Beale, *Catherine Hutton*, p.211.

<sup>224</sup> Watts, *Hymns and Poems*, p.68.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70.

Although looks of agony and convulsions are noted, the scene is insistently reframed into one of unquestionable transcendence; even the inarticulate sentences become deeply meaningful forms of religious blessing.

In keeping with its general religious orientation, the *Brief Sketch* also accords Heyrick a glorified deathbed scene, even though, like Watts, she was beyond speech at this point. Heyrick's last illness, she notes, 'was of such a nature as entirely to preclude verbal communication with the friends who watched around her dying bed; yet the serene expression that rested upon her countenance told of the settled peace that reigned within.'<sup>226</sup> Religious dedication received its justified reward.

At this point I would like to introduce a new text, not an external biography of Watts or Heyrick, but Watts' own tribute to Heyrick, a poem which I include in its entirety:

TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE ELIZ. HEYRICK, OF LEICESTER, WHO  
DIED OCT. 18, 1831.

FRIEND of the Slave!—of Afric's countless train,

Trampled, for ages, by the nations round;

With noble zeal, she strove to burst the chain,

In whose vast rim a continent is bound!

Friend of the Brute!--of those, that, smarting feel,

The scourge of human tyranny below;

With generous courage and unwearied zeal,

She stood betwixt the animal and woe.

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<sup>226</sup> Anon., *Brief Sketch*, p. 23.

And friend of all!—who in this vale of woe,  
 Are found 'mid human mis'ry's varied scenes;  
 Thither with hand and heart, she lov'd to go,  
 And self-denial lent the lib'ral means.

Deep, tender feeling—wide expanse of heart,  
 And intellectual strength, to her were giv'n,  
 And, best of gifts that Mercy can impart !—  
 The pow'r to dedicate them all to heav'n.

But spare the dead !—they reach the judgment seat;  
 (Their conscious souls reject approving lays;)  
 They go, the sentence of their God to meet;  
 “Then *poor in spirit*,” should be all their praise.

Yet, who shall say, what further deeds of love  
 Engage on high the spirits of the Blest?  
 Errands of mercy, 'mid the worlds above?  
 Heav'n is not idleness and selfish rest.

In the full glories of that holy place

FAITH shall be lost, and Hope shall find no room;

But with new life and renovated grace,

Immortal CHARITY shall ever loom.<sup>227</sup>

Although written in religious vein, the poem is very different in content and tenor to that of all the other life writing texts I have addressed. Far from minimising Heyrick's abolitionist work, it becomes the defining feature of her life and work: 'Friend of the slave!' Her labours are directed not just at alleviating the problems of individuals, or even a class of people, but rather restoring the structures of justice to an entire continent. Her tenderness is praised, but also, her 'intellectual strength', a trait almost entirely missing from other tributes. Crucially, the poem also goes on to consider what will happen to Heyrick in her new life. Here, it would seem, Watts verges dangerously on the heterodox. Far from envisaging Heyrick at peace, reaping her just rewards, she envisages her still fully engaged in active labour: 'Heav'n is not idleness and selfish rest'. Quite how there could be any requirement for charity in Heaven is unclear, yet Watts is decidedly unwilling to relinquish her friend to a future that would confer eternal rest. Indeed rest still carries its earthly connotations of selfish ease. Faith and Hope might be abolished in a state of oneness with God, but not the requirement for good works. In this tribute to her friend, Watts finds herself unable to imagine her without her defining qualities of energetic, transformative power. Far from resting in peace, she is reborn into reinvigorated life, as challenging and determined as ever.

Watts' poem highlights some of the complexities of trying to interpret women's lives according to the tenets of their religious faith. Their biographers sought to impose conventional structures on their accounts of Watts' and Heyrick's lives, but as we have seen, particularly in the case of Samuel Coltman and Catherine Hutton, this produces considerable tensions within the narratives

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<sup>227</sup> Watts, *Hymns and Poems*, pp. 3-4.

themselves which struggle to accommodate unruly lives into their predefined structures. In recent criticism, much has been made of Heyrick's conversion to Quakerism, with Corfield arguing that it enabled her life of activism.<sup>228</sup> Yet it is clear that Heyrick's religious orientation, and internal struggles, for example, predate her conversion, and, as Nussbaum has pointed out, Quakerism itself had a hierarchical structure which did not necessarily encourage female activism.<sup>229</sup>

Whilst religion was undoubtedly a central part of Watts and Heyrick's later lives, what writings we have of theirs that were created prior to the deaths of their mother and husband do not suggest they were notably less devout before their loss. Whilst it does seem that for both women bereavement inspired deep spiritual reflection, it also, highly significantly, altered the practical circumstances in which they lived. Due to her mother's ill health, Watts had devoted much of her time to her care, whilst trying to supplement their restricted income through her writing. For Heyrick, her married life was by all accounts particularly turbulent; her time spent in numerous army barracks, with her husband's jealous and erratic behaviour adding to the not insignificant work of housekeeping in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Both women had defined domestic roles with engrossing responsibilities, which would have precluded the level of involvement they were later to take in their philanthropic and literary works. The deaths of the mother and husband may have altered and deepened the nature of Watts and Heyrick's religious faiths, but it also altered their domestic circumstances to a degree that permitted the charitable endeavours for which their biographers praised them, which noticeably only occurred following the reduction of their domestic responsibilities. Religious faith was certainly a driving factor in their activism, but it was not by faith alone that they were able to undertake their work.

Although religious devotion was an essential part of Heyrick and Watts' life experience, the degree to which it was given prominence in their biographies

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<sup>228</sup> Corfield, 'Elizabeth Heyrick'.

<sup>229</sup> Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, p. 157.

frequently excludes the many other areas of their interests and experiences, with minimal exploration of their friendships and literary and philanthropic work. Whilst none of these biographies were intended as anything other than a positive portrayal, their focus on religious piety to the exclusion of other essential aspects of Heyrick and Watts' lives is an important reminder of the degree to which a life writer's adherence to generic conventions of biography can affect the created historical identity of their subject. Paradoxically, although Heyrick and Watts became important subjects for biographical treatment due to their highly public activism, in the biographical accounts of their lives these dimensions are minimised and in some cases all but erased.

Heyrick and Watts were members of a community with strong life-writing traditions; the biographical writing and restructuring of their lives thus contributed to the Dissenting project of dynastic life writing, preserving the wider history and culture of the circles of which their lives formed a part. While these life writings provide us with an important view of this community and the places individuals held within it, they often come at the expense of Heyrick and Watts' own voices. Their unedited perceptions of self, as expressed through personal forms of life writing, are frequently missing from these biographical accounts. Their literary and political writing is also largely ignored. Yet their voices, both personal and political, were an essential part of the circles of creativity, activism and dissent they inhabited, and in attempting to reconstruct these communities, we need to look beyond the carefully structured forms of the biographies to the disruptive, challenging voices of the protagonists themselves.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to build on the work of figures such as Felicity Nussbaum and Linda Peterson who highlighted the importance of women's autobiographical writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, and also on more recent developments in the field which have moved the agenda forward, from autobiography to the more capacious framework of life writing, which can include all forms of autobiographical and biographical writing.<sup>230</sup> More particularly, my work addresses the growing recognition that, as Peterson herself suggests, life writing can be both collaborative and communal.<sup>231</sup> Earlier work of feminist reclamation tended to privilege the individual voice, speaking out to us from history. In my own work, by contrast, I situate Elizabeth Heyrick and Susanna Watts firmly within their own social, cultural, religious and geographical milieu, looking not so much at how they fashioned themselves, as the processes by which their identities were crafted and created for posterity by their families, friends and admirers. The process I examine is rather one of communal self-fashioning.

None of the life writing texts I consider are written collaboratively, but many of them were written in response to, or with previous documents in mind. Nor do we witness a steady build-up of a unified and harmonious picture. Rather, we see individuals attempting to play their part in a communal exercise of commemoration, yet often from strikingly different perspectives as they seek to place themselves within this narrative, and to come to terms with discordant

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<sup>230</sup> Nussbaum, *Autobiographical Subject*, Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1986); *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999). The collections of Cook and Culley, *Women's Life Writing*, and Winkles and Rehbein, *Women's Literary Networks*, for example, demonstrate this new focus on the broader category of life writing.

<sup>231</sup> See Peterson, 'Collaborative Life Writing as Ideology', and *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), especially ch. 3, 'Working Collaboratively: Mary Howitt and Anna Mary Howitt as Women of Letters'.

elements. The picture which emerges is one of a tight-knit, but far from harmonious community. The circles of rational dissent, it seems, could encourage the development of independent thought and action, but only so far. By taking the processes and forms of life writing which grew up around two of Leicester's most prominent women in the early nineteenth century, I have attempted to hold the mirror back to the biographers, and to find in their work not only a portrait of life within this community at this period, but a model of the complex ways in which diverse forms of life writing can work together to craft a form of communal identity.

The lives of Heyrick and Watts have only begun to attract the scholarly attention they deserve in recent decades. Much still remains to be done, in looking at their writings in depth, and their work beyond the abolitionist movement, which was only one area in their campaigns for the underprivileged, which ran from animal welfare to conditions in prisons and asylums. It is fitting that one of their most interesting productions was a collaborative work, the first anti-slavery periodical, *The Humming Bird*. With its playful tone, and varied content, *The Humming Bird* is a fascinating intervention in the history of women's writing, periodical production, and abolitionist campaigning, and would reward future in-depth study. Another area which deserves further research is the reception of Heyrick's work in America. In 1843, Lucretia Mott, one of the leading anti-slavery campaigners in America, organised an anti-slavery fair in Philadelphia. Amidst the items of clothing and drawings and paintings for sale were various 'fancy articles', donated by supporters in England. They included: 'pressed flowers taken from Melrose Abbey and from the grave of Elizabeth Heyrick' and 'several rulers made from the tree under which George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, had preached'.<sup>232</sup> The eclectic mix speaks to material forms of commemoration, beyond the textual, but also to Heyrick's high renown in American abolitionist circles at that time, such that her grave had become a

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<sup>232</sup> N. Orwin Rush, 'Lucretia Mott and the Philadelphia Antislavery Fairs', *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Association* 35:2 (1946), 69-75, p. 71.

form of shrine. Apparently her flowers, and the rulers, both sold for 25c each, giving her parity with the Quaker founder, although unfortunately not all were purchased. The anecdote is tantalising in terms of suggesting the forms of afterlife Elizabeth Heyrick enjoyed. While my own work has been focused on textual productions within a tight-knit community, future research might be international in scope and encompass both textual and material forms of memorialisation.

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