

'White Lies':  
Amelia Opie, Fiction, and the Quakers  
Submitted by Isabelle Marie Cosgrave to the University of Exeter  
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## Abstract

This thesis offers a reconsideration of Amelia Opie's career as a novelist in the light of her developing religious allegiances over the period 1814-1825 in particular. In twentieth-century scholarship, Opie (1769-1853) was often treated primarily as the author of Adeline Mowbray (1805) and discussed in terms of that novel's relationship with the ideas of Wollstonecraft and Godwin. Recent scholarship (Clive Jones, Roxanne Eberle, Shelley King and John B. Pierce) has begun a fuller assessment of her significance, but there is still a need for a thorough discussion of the relationship between her long journey towards the Quakers and her commitment to the novel as a moral and entertaining medium.

Many scholars (Gary Kelly, Patricia Michaelson, Anne McWhir and others), following Opie's first biographer Cecilia Lucy Brightwell (1854), have represented Opie as giving up her glittering literary career and relinquishing fiction-writing completely: this relinquishment has been linked to Quaker prohibitions of fiction as lying. My thesis shows that Quaker attitudes to fiction were more complicated, and that the relationship between Opie's religious and literary life is, in turn, more complex than has been thought. This project brings evidence from a number of sources which have been overlooked or under-utilised, including a large, under-examined archive of Opie correspondence at the Huntington Library, Opie's last novel Much to Blame (1824), given critical analysis here for the first time, and the republications which Opie undertook in the 1840s. These sources show that Opie never abandoned her commitment to fiction; that her move to the Quakers was a long and fraught process, but that she retained a place in the fashionable world in spite of her conversion.

My Introduction gives a nuanced understanding of Quaker attitudes to fiction, and the first chapter exposes the 'white lies' of Opie's first biographer, Brightwell, and their legacy. I then move on to examine Opie's early works – Dangers of Coquetry (1790), "The Nun" (1795) and The Father and Daughter (1801) – as she flirts with radicalism in the 1790s, and Adeline Mowbray is explored through a Quaker lens in chapter 3. I juxtapose Opie's correspondence with her Quaker mentor Joseph John Gurney and the celebrated writer William Hayley with her developing use of the moral-evangelical novel – Temper (1812), Valentine's Eve (1816) and Madeline (1822) – as Opie was increasingly attracted to the Quakers. Chapter 5

analyses Opie's anonymous novels – The Only Child (1821) and Much to Blame (1824) – alongside her Quaker works (especially Detraction Displayed (1828)) around the time of her official acceptance to the Quakers (1825). The final chapter investigates how Opie balanced her Quaker belonging with her ongoing commitment to fiction, exemplified in her 1840s republications, which I present in the context of her correspondence with publisher friends Josiah Fletcher and Simon Wilkin, and with Gurney. Opie's 'white lies' of social negotiation reveal her difficulties in maintaining a literary career from the 1790s to the 1840s, but her concerted effort to do so in spite of such struggles provides a highly significant insight into the changing religious and literary climates of this long period.

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## 'White Lies: Amelia Opie, Fiction, and the Quakers'

### Introduction

In 2008, the Norwich Castle Museum acquired Pierre-Jean David d'Angers' 1836 marble bust of Amelia Opie (1769-1853), a popular daughter of Norwich. The caption that accompanies the bust focuses on a particular facet of Opie's life - her commitment to the Abolition movement - and stresses the wealth of anti-slavery rhetoric in her works.<sup>1</sup> An article announcing the Museum's purchase of the bust expands on this facet of Opie's character to provide a more thorough introduction to the person of Opie:

As well as being one of the most respected female fiction writers of her time, Amelia Opie was also deeply committed to the abolitionist cause and represented Norwich at the national anti-slavery convention. She had strong political interests and was a reformer and philanthropist, in addition to being a renowned figure in the cultural life of Norwich. She was also well acquainted with the artists of the Norwich School and was able to introduce her husband, the Cornish painter John Opie, to the Norwich art scene.<sup>2</sup>

This article explains how the bust shows Opie 'wearing the Quaker bonnet she had started to wear after her religious conversion some years earlier' (12 Nov. 2008), but no further mention is made to this aspect of Opie's life, which had a large impact on her writing career and which is one of my main focuses here.

The decision to place the bust of Opie in a showcase which concentrates on the theme of slavery and abolition is one example of how much a simple categorisation of Opie has been desired. The attempt to provide a further simple categorisation – often 'Jacobin or anti-Jacobin?' – has fuelled most critical work on Opie since the 1970s, but criticism remains inconclusive. Her most famous work now

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<sup>1</sup> Norwich Castle Museum. Jean-Pierre [sic.] David d'Angers, *Bust of Amelia Opie*. Norwich. 24 July 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery acquires marble bust of Amelia Opie." 12 November 2008.

– Adeline Mowbray (1805) – continues to be claimed for either side, sympathetic or damning of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, on whose lives the work seems to be based.<sup>3</sup>

With criticism having focussed for so long on a single work of Opie's, there has been very little treatment of her literary career as a whole, the strains on her publication choices that a decision to join the Quakers provoked, and the comparisons that can therefore be made between her earlier and later works. Misunderstandings about Quaker attitudes to fiction have only further prevented a nuanced reading of Opie's long literary career.<sup>4</sup> This project investigates a further simple categorization – of Quakers as a religious movement which condemned fiction as lying in this period – in order better to appreciate how Opie's slow progression towards the Quakers (joining them officially in 1825) affected her significant contribution to literature from 1790 into the 1840s. Her republications of early works in the 1840s continued to emphasise her beliefs in the value of fiction (especially the novel form) as a moral and educational tool. This thesis presents an argument against received wisdom that Opie's decision to join the Quakers was simple, and that this move meant assuming a more socially conservative standpoint than she had adopted earlier in life.

The 1840s republications and Opie's spiritual struggles have received very little critical attention, and that only from Opie specialists.<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons Opie's struggles have generally been ignored is because Opie's first biographer chose to ignore them. Cecilia Lucy Brightwell – a friend of Opie's and the daughter of her executor – published Memorials of the life of Amelia Opie, selected and arranged

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth R. Johnston, "Whose History? My Place or Yours?: Republican Assumptions and Romantic Traditions," Romanticism, History, Historicism, ed. Damian Walford Davies (New York and London: Routledge, 2009) 97. It is possible that Opie published Adeline Mowbray very late in 1804, but since most criticism considers it an 1805 text – with the scant references to textual revisions in the 1840s citing an 1805 and an 1810 edition – I also date it 1805 for ease of reference.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for an outline of Opie's long literary career.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Eliot MacGregor, Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend (Menasha (WI): The Collegiate Press, 1933); Clive Jones, "The life and prose works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)," diss., OU, 2001; Patricia Howell Michaelson, Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002); Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, The Father and Daughter, with Dangers of Coquetry, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003); Roxanne Eberle, ed., Women and Romanticism, 1790-1830 (London: Routledge, 2006); Anne McWhir, ed., Adeline Mowbray, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2010).

from her Letters, Diaries, and other Manuscripts in May 1854, within 6 months of Opie's death. She followed that account with a Memoir of Amelia Opie (1855), which tended even more emphatically towards the 'renewal of Christian life-laundering' that has become indicative of Victorian biography.<sup>6</sup> Despite widespread knowledge of Victorian tendencies to portray subjects as blemish-free in biography, Brightwell's accounts remain relevant to Opie scholarship mainly because many original documents (or versions of them) now exist only in this work, and discrepancies between Brightwell and many archives have been unexplored. The 'white lies' my project title evokes are partly those of Brightwell, whose biographies of Opie still encourage hasty assumptions about how easy it was for her to join the Quakers and, apparently, abandon fiction for ever. Almost anyone who has ever written anything about Opie has cited Brightwell. Harriet Guest's recent use of Brightwell (which does not make clear whether Guest relied on the Memorials or the Memoir) indicates the degree to which scholarship still depends on these biographical accounts.<sup>7</sup> Only Roxanne Eberle has mentioned exactly why Brightwell is not a trustworthy source.<sup>8</sup> But Brightwell's approach and methods – her omissions, alterations, and scoring out on original manuscript documents – have not been examined in any detail. I devote my first chapter to examining Brightwell's approach in order to establish how much a reliance on her biographical accounts might have distorted readings of Opie's literary career as a whole, especially with regard to her relationship to the Quakers and to fiction.

MacGregor's Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend (1933) was, until 2014, the only scholarly book-length biography of Opie. It addressed some of what Brightwell covered up, but very politely, and not in enough depth. Jacobine Menzies-Wilson and Helen Lloyd's Amelia: The Tale of a Plain Friend (1937) is an unscholarly

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<sup>6</sup> Nigel Hamilton, Biography: A Brief History (Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard UP, 2007) 111. Juliette Atkinson examines the 'broad consensus that ... Victorian biographies are wordy hagiographical tomes penned by whitewashing amateurs' (Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives (Oxford: OUP, 2010) 1-2). I will present more about the particularities of Victorian Biography in Chapter 1 as I examine Brightwell's accounts.

<sup>7</sup> Harriet Guest, Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Roxanne Eberle, Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002) 107.

source which fails to reference anything it cites, so I discount it.<sup>9</sup> The approach adopted by Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd was particularly unfortunate since they were the last to have access to the Carr Collection, which contained Opie's diary and journals, as well as other manuscripts and correspondence on which Brightwell and MacGregor depended, and which has since disappeared. A more recent unpublished PhD thesis – Clive Jones's "The life and prose works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)", 2001 – goes some way to tackling Brightwell's pious narrative and to placing Opie's works in the context of her life. But Opie's dilemma between her Quaker beliefs and her commitment to fiction is not explored in enough depth, and Opie's authorship of two novels has also come to light since Clive Jones wrote his dissertation. Garside, Raven and Schöwerling correctly attributed Opie's anonymous novels of the 1820s – The Only Child of 1821 (522) and Much to Blame of 1824 (586) – but only Eberle and Paula R. Feldman have made any reference otherwise to these works, which came out at a time when Opie was most seriously considering joining the Quakers officially.<sup>10</sup> Eberle has offered a critical reading of The Only Child, but Much to Blame has yet to receive detailed scholarly attention; I analyse it in Chapter 5. A new biography came out in 2014, too late to be properly considered in this project, but it neither addresses Brightwell's white-washing, nor acknowledges Opie's anonymous novels.<sup>11</sup>

This project relies heavily on archival sources, most of which have never been examined in any detail before. There is a huge wealth of archival information about Opie scattered in numerous repositories in England and America, the vast majority of which remains unpublished. Letter extracts have been published by Brightwell, MacGregor and Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd as part of their biographical studies: only MacGregor, of these three, was reliable. King and Pierce have more recently

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<sup>9</sup> Jacobine Menzies-Wilson and Helen Lloyd, Amelia: the Tale of a Plain Friend (London, New York and Toronto: OUP, 1937).

<sup>10</sup> With reference to both these works, Garside et al. cite a letter in Paula R. Feldman's possession: Amelia Opie, letter to Sir John Gurney, Baron of the Exchequer, 21 June 1839, ms, Paula R. Feldman, University of South Carolina. See also Paula R. Feldman, "Amelia Opie", British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1997) 522-529, and "Women Poets and Anonymity in the Romantic Era", New Literary History (33.2 (Spring 2002)) 279-289; Roxanne Eberle, ed., Women and Romanticism, 1790-1830 (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Ann Farrant, Amelia Opie: The Quaker Celebrity (Hindringham: JG Publishing, 2014).

published short letter extracts pertaining to Opie's literary career, which I analyse and build on here.<sup>12</sup>

One very significant archive is missing. The Carr Collection, last documented in 1937, was used by both Brightwell and MacGregor to inform their biographical accounts. It contained Opie's diary and journals, several manuscripts (Adelaide, three unnamed plays, her incomplete novel The Painter and His Wife), and many letters (MacGregor 129). David Chandler has done the most extensive research on the whereabouts of this collection.<sup>13</sup> It seems that the Huntington Library and the New York Public Library acquired some of the letters through at least one Sotheby's auction in the 1950s, since the Huntington Library has the twenty-six letters from David to Opie, and Godwin's 'criticism of a comedy of Amelia Alderson's' that MacGregor cites in her summary of the Carr Collection (129). Chandler concludes that if the rest of the archive be not lost, 'it seems possible that Miss Carr sold or gave them away before her death, and that they are still in private hands' (Chandler 13 Nov. 2012).

In order to fill these gaps in scholarly knowledge, this thesis is in some ways a "life and works" of Opie, but my points of focus are particular. Although Opie wrote in almost all genres, it is her novels in which I am most interested, as these presented the greatest challenges to Quaker beliefs. I also explore the shift for Opie from novel-writing to her Quaker works of non-fiction. Opie's early Unitarianism is important to acknowledge, in order to investigate what the shift from the Unitarians to the Quakers meant for Opie's writing career. I use a biographical framework here, depending on extensive archival research, to present Opie's novel-writing career alongside her growing interest in and final acceptance by the Quakers, examining in turn the Quaker works which brought her writing of long prose works to an end (chapters 2-5). I do not consider Opie's poetry, and some tales and short prose pieces are only cursorily treated to support my findings. The first detailed examination of Opie's republications in the 1840s is presented (in chapter 6) in the context of her letters to publisher friends Josiah Fletcher and Simon Wilkin, with the

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<sup>12</sup> King and Pierce, eds, The Father and Daughter, 257-262. There are also occasional letter extracts in their introduction to their recent Opie poetry collection: King and Pierce, eds, The Collected Poems of Amelia Alderson Opie (Oxford: OUP, 2009). For a list of the Opie archives and what they contain, see Appendix B here.

<sup>13</sup> David Chandler, email to the author, 13 Nov. 2012.

first complete transcription of Opie's letter to her Quaker mentor Joseph John Gurney in which she defended these republications.

The previously unexplored Fletcher archive was put together (by Fletcher) in a way that suggests further 'white lies' in the same vein as Brightwell's hagiography. Its place in the wider context of correspondence surrounding Opie's republications therefore allows for some in-depth analysis of other places where Opie's image has been whitewashed in the past. By looking at the whole of Opie's novel-writing career (including the previously unexamined Much to Blame and the little-treated The Only Child), and at Opie's decision to switch to Quaker works of non-fiction (alongside a detailed examination of the specific Quaker prohibitions Opie was facing regarding the writing of fiction), this project offers a much more nuanced understanding of the career choices of this eminent early nineteenth-century writer and her ongoing commitment to fiction than has previously been attempted. By approaching Opie's literary career through a Quaker lens, Opie's interest in promoting female autonomy and female agency is shown to be in line with the reform interests of this Dissenting group, instead of Opie's joining the Quakers being viewed as a socially conservative move.

With these aims in mind, it is necessary first of all to situate Opie accurately within the context of late eighteenth-century Dissent in Norwich, especially owing to the close connections between Dissent and the literary scene in Norwich at the time. It is also important to consider that Rational Dissent had social and political engagement at this time beyond its theological relevance. Amelia Alderson Opie was born into a strong tradition of Dissent in Norwich in 1769.<sup>14</sup> She was baptised in the Presbyterian (later Unitarian) Octagon Chapel where her father practised; although there are no attendance records, Opie can be supposed from her connections and friendship groups to have participated. (Her mother came from a Wesleyan Methodist background.) Opie's access to a vibrant literary community was provided through the Octagon Chapel and William Enfield, the minister from 1785 to 1797.<sup>15</sup> Enfield was the focal point of intellectual culture in Norwich, partly owing no doubt to his former appointment as tutor of *belles lettres* at the Warrington academy, and

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<sup>14</sup> Amelia Alderson Opie will hereafter be described as Opie throughout for ease of reference, even though the early part of this project considers her life and work before marrying John Opie in 1798. None of her literary works ever appeared under the name 'Amelia Alderson'.

<sup>15</sup> R. K. Webb, 'Enfield, William (1741–1797)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004).

Opie was part of the group which formed ‘the cream of Norwich’s late 1700s literary culture’.<sup>16</sup> It seems that many of the Norwich intellectuals were more politically than religiously motivated at this time: the Catholic John Pitchford stood out because of his commitment to religion in addition to political interests (Chandler “Athens” 178).

Keeping house for her father after her mother’s early death in December 1784 (when Opie was only 15), Opie was introduced to the radical company her father entertained.<sup>17</sup> Such company included William Godwin, author of the ‘highly subversive’ Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793), who became a close friend of Opie’s and advised her on her work.<sup>18</sup> It was not simply out of the French Revolution that questions of reform arose, and many concerns were already being debated.<sup>19</sup> The Society for Constitutional Information (SCI) was formed in 1780, and attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts were made from 1787.<sup>20</sup> Once the French Revolution started, women in Norwich, ‘young and old, held *salons*, read everything, entertained at one and the same time French *émigrés* and republican opinions, and set their own pens busily to paper in outpourings of prose and verse.

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<sup>16</sup> David Chandler, ““The Athens of England”: Norwich as a Literary Center in the Late Eighteenth Century,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 43.2 (Winter 2010) 173, 176.

<sup>17</sup> I am using the term ‘radical’ here to denote people and attitudes that were pro-reform, initially pushing for the reform of rights for Dissenters, then enthusiastic about the possibilities of improvements in civil liberties that the French Revolution heralded, including constitutional reform. Since some reform questions (Abolition or universal education, for example) were advocated and pushed through by people who were not radical in this sense, I am aware that this use of ‘radical’ can only really apply for quite a small time period and with specific issues in mind. The concept of radicalism in relation to reform is difficult when dealing with groups like the Quakers, who were reformist, but not necessarily pro French-revolutionary politics. See, for example, Camilla Leach and Joyce Goodman, “Educating the Women of the Nation: Priscilla Wakefield and the Construction of National Identity, 1798,” Quaker Studies 5.2 (2001) 165-182.

<sup>18</sup> David McCracken, ed., Caleb Williams, by William Godwin (Oxford: OUP, 1982) viii. Godwin’s diaries prove to be a very valuable archival source: The Diary of William Godwin, eds Victoria Myers, David O’Shaughnessy, and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Marilyn Butler, Romantics, rebels and reactionaries: English literature and its background, 1760-1830 (Oxford: OUP, 1981); Kevin Gilmartin, Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832 (Cambridge: CUP, 2007) and “Counter-revolutionary culture,” The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: CUP, 2011) 129-144; Jon Mee, “Popular Radical Culture,” The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: CUP, 2011) 118.

<sup>20</sup> William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, eds, Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002) 486.

Norwich was the “Athens of England”.<sup>21</sup> It is Opie’s relationship with Godwin and Wollstonecraft that has attracted most critical attention. I argue that Opie was flirting with literary radicalism, not committing herself to publications, although I think her correspondence demonstrates that her friendships were sincere. The religious side of her early life requires equal attention.

Opie was surrounded by a culture of reform and Dissent from the beginning and she initially welcomed the French Revolution along with the prospect of reform in England. In her mid-twenties, Opie found herself in the centre of things political in Norwich – also called “The Jacobin City” or “The City of Seditious” – with her father, a leading Norwich Dissenter, bringing her to London in 1794 (Johnston 97). Opie’s early Unitarianism must be viewed in this light, but in order to understand the kind of shift it was for Opie from the Unitarians to the Quakers, the beliefs of these two strands of Dissent at this time require brief consideration, bearing in mind, first of all, that Unitarians were only allowed to describe themselves thus following the passing of the Doctrine of the Trinity Act (or Unitarian Relief Act) in 1813.

Unitarianism did not have a strict doctrine, but fundamental to its theology was the principle of God as a unity and not a Trinity, with Unitarians therefore rejecting the Divinity of Jesus.<sup>22</sup> Unitarians were much less interested in dogma than in questions of humanity and human decency, and they ‘historically remain early models of needful tolerance and modesty’ (Alistair Mason 731-2). Mark Knight and Emma Mason identify Unitarianism as ‘New Dissent’, which used a religious basis on which to found political ideals.<sup>23</sup> Unitarians formed part of Rational Dissent in the early nineteenth century, which argued for the rationality of religion and against mysticism.

Quakers were also non-Trinitarian Dissenters without a strict doctrine, and some principles – tolerance (especially religious tolerance) for instance – were similar to those of the Unitarians. Like the Unitarians, the Quakers ‘could not share the pessimism of Calvinism as to the power of the devil or the hopelessness of

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<sup>21</sup> Janet Whitney, *Elizabeth Fry: Quaker Heroine* (London: G. Harrap, 1938) 35.

<sup>22</sup> Alistair Mason, “Unitarianism,” *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, eds Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 730.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2006) 54.

man'.<sup>24</sup> But unlike the Unitarians, the Quakers came from a great mystical tradition. No 'institution, person or book' could provide religious authority, which Quakers found instead inside each individual's own spiritual experience (Russell 48).<sup>25</sup> The Unitarians were good biblical scholars, whereas Quakers, who held the Bible in high esteem and valued study of the Scriptures, nevertheless considered 'the emotional experience of faith' to be of greater importance (Knight and Emma Mason 61). Quakers used both "the Inner Light" and "the Truth" to refer to the source from within of their faith and religious life, styling themselves "publishers of Truth" (Russell 46). The Quakers had a particularly strong attachment to the idea of "Truth", which I examine in relation to fiction in this Introduction.

These brief summaries of theology, however, cannot go very far to explain the complexities of the place of both these strands of Dissent – especially since both rejected concepts of a rigid doctrine – in the wider sphere of cultural Dissent in which Opie grew up. John Seed asks a very important question in this regard: 'how far can we subjectively inhabit the categories of a particular religious faith in a specific place and time?', concluding that some scholars consider themselves 'necessarily excluded from entering the realms of the private, of individual belief and inner conviction'.<sup>26</sup> This study indeed attempts, through the use of archival correspondence, to probe into the realms of Opie's personal spiritual journey, but bearing always in mind the impossibility of making conclusive statements about such an intimate aspect of lived experience.

In terms of trying to determine what it meant to be Unitarian (or Presbyterian) at this time, it is important to consider that the turn of the nineteenth century saw Rational Dissent at, perhaps, its most defensive:

There was a long tradition, fading but not dead – and galvanized into disturbing life in the 1790s – of regarding Dissenters collectively as threats to the state because some of their sectarian ancestors in the mid-seventeenth century had led a revolution against Church and King. (McCarthy and Kraft, eds, 15-16)

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<sup>24</sup> Elbert Russell, *The History of Quakerism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943) 47.

<sup>25</sup> Russell adds a footnote to explain that mysticism in his book 'means a religion of first-hand experience, of personal relations with God, known within the soul' (48).

<sup>26</sup> John Seed, "'Secular" and "Religious"': historical perspectives," *Social History* 39.1 (2014): 4.

The attempts to repeal the Corporation Act (1661) and Test Act (1673) – whereby Dissenters (Protestant or Catholic) were excluded from ‘elective offices in towns (corporations) and appointive offices under the Crown’, and Unitarians were not permitted to meet for worship – had made very good headway just before the French Revolution (McCarthy and Kraft, eds, 486). But thereafter, fears of something similar threatening the Established Church and the Monarchy in England meant that a 1790 repeal was easily quashed. Anna Letitia Barbauld – a Unitarian with a strong family history in Presbyterianism – wrote and published “An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts” within the month. Although later debates with Joseph Priestley regarding the role of sentiment in faith attest to Barbauld’s strong Unitarian faith, this 1790 “Address” was merely signed ‘A Dissenter’, since the cause affected many more than the Unitarians.<sup>27</sup> As for Priestley, many Dissenters considered him the founder of modern Unitarianism, but he provides a salient example of how difficult it is to declare, for instance, what Unitarians believed or professed at the turn of the nineteenth century. When Priestley’s chapel, house, library and laboratory were burned down on 14 July 1791, his walls were marked with statements condemning Presbyterianism, but ‘while Priestley had publicly defended Presbyterianism, he was himself at first an Arian and then a Socinian, religious positions which confused his graffiti-scrawling opponents as much as they do many twenty-first-century readers’ (Knight and Mason 17).

Regarding Opie’s early Unitarianism, my aim is not to explain or define exactly what religious beliefs she might have held at the turn of the nineteenth century. But we do need to keep in mind that her upbringing – surrounded by a fervour for equality, for reform, accompanied by republican ardour – was still in evidence in Opie in the 1820s and 1830s, and that Quaker thought shared many of these principles. The term ‘radical’ has been defined earlier here as one that does not necessarily refer to the Quakers in every respect: they did not tend to share French-revolutionary sympathies, for instance. But there are many regards in which they have been termed ‘radical’. Quakerism has even been considered the most radical organised religious movement to appear in England, owing largely to its focus on

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<sup>27</sup> See R. K. Webb’s “Rational Piety,” *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 287-311 regarding Barbauld and Priestley’s disagreements.

gender equality.<sup>28</sup> The founder of the Quakers, George Fox, believed that men and women were equal before God, since the Holy Spirit made no distinction between the sexes. This focus on gender equality had a huge impact on Quaker women, who were far more literate than their non-Quaker counterparts, and enjoyed their own ministry as well as full consent in marriage.<sup>29</sup> The effect of this focus on gender equality can be seen in the way Quaker women spoke in the eighteenth century, and how this speech was received. Quaker women did not tend to gossip, or use the ‘stereotypical exaggerations’ associated with women’s language at the time, but adopted a form of ‘manly sincerity’ without being considered masculinized (Michaelson 83). This equality became a problem during the rise of evangelical Quakerism in the 1820s, as I discuss in chapter 6, and this backdrop of Quaker equality for women remains a focus throughout this project.

To return, in the meantime, to Norwich in the wake of the French Revolution: ‘such was the spirit of tolerance that Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Unitarians, Quakers, and other Dissenters mixed comfortably in the same social circles’ (Whitney 35). Opie had Quaker friends from childhood in the very prominent Gurney family, as works on the Gurneys make clear.<sup>30</sup> But there is little record of her early relations with them in literature about Opie, mainly because Brightwell preferred to introduce them dramatically into her narrative from 1814, when Opie started to be drawn most particularly to Quakerism. Since a very important underlying focus of my project is so-called ‘Quaker prohibitions’ of fiction, it is necessary to investigate these prohibitions here.<sup>31</sup> In that context I can examine Opie’s later novels and the particular difficulties the novel form posed for the Quaker belief system into which she began to be drawn from 1814. Opie’s writing choices and focuses of interest throughout her entire career can thereby be better appreciated.

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Mullett, “Radical Sects and Dissenting Churches 1600-1750,” *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, eds S. Gilley and W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 201. Quoted in Knight and Mason, 60.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, 25-26; Knight and Mason, 60-61. Knight and Mason reference Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society 1655-1725* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) 118-120.

<sup>30</sup> Augustus J. C. Hare, *The Gurneys of Earlham* (London: George Allen, 1895) 1.27. Whitney’s *Elizabeth Fry* is also useful on this point. Elizabeth Gurney Fry was only born in 1780, and Joseph John Gurney in 1788, which explains the absence of reference to them in particular in this period of Opie’s life, but she mixed with their older brothers and sisters.

<sup>31</sup> King and Pierce, eds, *The Father and Daughter, with Dangers of Coquetry*, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 55.

Where the novel is concerned, Quakers were not the only Christian group to distrust its moral efficacy. In Zachary Macaulay's review for the Christian Observer of Maria Edgeworth's Tales of Fashionable Life – hardly a radical publication – he stated that 'every novel by an author of reputation is an object of solicitude to the guardian of morals. It is a work likely to pass through the hands of nine-tenths of the reading part of the community'.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the novel had many critics from all quarters from its very inception, and later Jacobin / anti-Jacobin debate was influenced greatly, perhaps to a surprising degree, by the question of how novel-reading affected female emotions:

For moralists warning against women's novel-reading, the form dangerously entails mechanisms of automatic replication and recapitulation: the fascinated woman reading of the seduction and fall of a fictitious female character is drawn inexorably to repeat the fate of that character in her own real life.<sup>33</sup>

But in the case of the Quakers, fiction appeared more generally to pose a problem. It is difficult to determine what Quaker prohibitions to fiction were between 1790 and the 1840s, and how far they stretched. First of all, there is the question of whether it was owing to the notion of 'fiction as lying' that plays, romances and novels were frowned upon. The importance to Quakers of honesty was very well-known and well documented: Fox was very insistent on truthfulness always (Russell 25). The earliest Friends called themselves the "Publishers of Truth", but they were also 'suspicious of any form of intellectualisation'.<sup>34</sup> The late eighteenth-century Quaker educationalist Priscilla Wakefield, a great-granddaughter of the prominent Quaker Robert Barclay, opposed novel-reading for the following reasons:

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<sup>32</sup> Christian Observer 8 (Dec. 1809) 781. Quoted in Garside (60).

<sup>33</sup> Jill Campbell, "Women writers and the woman's novel: the trope of maternal transmission," The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period, eds Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: CUP, 2008) 161.

<sup>34</sup> Michele Lise Tarter, "Reading a Quakers' Book: Elizabeth Ashbridge's Testimony of Quaker Literary Theory," Quaker Studies 9.2 (2005) 181.

The necessity of adhering to the Truth in all situations extended for many Quakers to the rejection of the arts on the grounds that emotions engendered by music, a play, or the reading of a novel were second-hand emotions, created by the imagination and hence not 'true' feelings.<sup>35</sup>

But Thomas Clarkson insisted in 1806 that the honesty principle was not why Quakers disapproved these works.<sup>36</sup> He argued that, although some Quakers had rejected novels 'on account of the fictitious nature of their contents' (1.123), this attitude was 'by no means generally adopted by the Society' (1.123). Clarkson went on to explain that this argument would not be sound, offering the use of fables, and of parables by Jesus as further reasons why fiction was not condemned outright, specifying that:

The arguments against novels, in which the Quakers agree as a body, are taken from the pernicious influence that they have upon the minds of those, who read them.

The Quakers do not say that all novels have this influence, but that they have it generally. (1.124)

This argument would tend to be supported by the Quaker 'book of discipline'.<sup>37</sup> In "What Should Eighteenth Century Quakers Have Read?", David J.

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<sup>35</sup> Camilla Leach and Joyce Goodman, "Educating the Women of the Nation: Priscilla Wakefield and the Construction of National Identity, 1798", *Quaker Studies* 5.2 (2001) 176.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *A Portraiture of Quakerism, taken from a View of the Moral Education, Discipline, Peculiar Customs, Religious Principles and Civil Oeconomy, and Character, of the Society of Friends* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807 (1806)). Clarkson had been introduced to the anti-slavery movement by a Quaker (Brogan, n.p.) and, although he never became a Quaker, he declared himself in 1815 'nine parts in ten of their way of thinking' (Wilson, 145; quoted in Brogan, n.p.). He wrote his *Portraiture of Quakerism* in defence of this misunderstood religious movement.

<sup>37</sup> The 'book of discipline' is now entitled *Quaker Faith & Practice: The book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*, but the practice of recording notes from each Yearly Meeting to be copied and distributed dates back to 1738. For information, see David J. Hall, "How We Got Our Book of Discipline: The Story to 1863," *The Friends' Quarterly* 25.1 (Jan. 1988) 32-39, and "What Should Eighteenth Century Quakers Have Read?," *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society* 62.2 (2010) 108-109.

Hall charts the developments in Quaker attitudes towards the novel and other frivolous reading throughout the eighteenth century in this 'book of discipline', and shows that the emphasis was most often on the corrupting potential for young people and servants of reading any texts that led them away from the reading of Holy Scripture. Advice in 1723 on the subject is much the same as that given in 1789, and Hall notes that the frequent reminders in the intervening years suggest 'a serious and continuing worry on the subject' ("What Should?" 104):

This meeting being sorrowfully affected, under a consideration of the hurtful tendency of reading plays, romances, novels, and other pernicious books, it is earnestly recommended to every member of our society, to discourage and suppress the same ... And friends are desired to be careful of the choice of all books, in which their children read, feeling that there are many, under the specious titles of the promotion of religion and morality, containing sentiments repugnant to the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus.<sup>38</sup>

It is perhaps owing to these sorts of references to 'the truth' (or "the Truth") that people have adopted the simple categorisation that Quakers condemned fiction as lying.<sup>39</sup> But the quotation above (and the afore-cited quotation from Leach and Goodman (176)) demonstrate that the Quaker stance was more complex. The worry concerning truthfulness was about the potential for these 'pernicious books' to give false teaching incompatible with Quaker interpretations of Holy Scripture, rather than the nature of fiction as a medium in itself. Although the distinction is subtle, it is an important one to maintain, considering Quaker prohibitions and objections in the context of the corrupting nature of any works which did not teach the same as Quaker religious texts, rather than an outright rejection of fiction. Clarkson maintained this distinction, arguing that 'if novels contain no evil within themselves, or have no evil tendency, the mere circumstance of the subject, names, or characters, being feigned will not stamp them as censurable' (1.123).

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<sup>38</sup> Society of Friends: London Yearly Meeting, Extracts from the minutes and advices of the yearly meeting of Friends held in London, from its first institution ([London]: James Phillips, 1783) 16.

<sup>39</sup> Many critics have taken this opinion with reference to Opie: Clive Jones, 297; King and Pierce, eds, Collected Poems, lii; Kelly, "Opie, Amelia", n.p.; McWhir, Introduction, 33; Michaelson, 65.

The fact that Clarkson could state, even in the same work, that there is an element of distrust of the fictitious among the Quakers (3.282-283), and that a 21<sup>st</sup>-century Quaker scholar can resort to an ‘intentionally uncomplicated’ explanation of Opie’s difficulties – ‘fiction was regarded as a form of lying and therefore unacceptable’ – demonstrates the need at times for simple categorisation.<sup>40</sup> But this is the kind of simple categorisation that has led, in the case of the appreciation of Opie’s literary career as a whole, to unfortunate misunderstandings which have impeded a nuanced appreciation of Opie’s ongoing commitment to fiction.

Further complications are added to this discussion when “gay” and “strict” distinctions among Quakers are considered, at the same time as Quakerism was going through a period affected by many upheavals in its theology and practical workings. When Opie was growing up, there were so many Quakers in Norwich that the city ‘could support two meeting-houses ... the ‘plain Quakers’ by their principles were debarred from easy mingling with general society, but the ‘gay Quakers’ were just like other people, except for a stern barrier against inter-marriage with the ‘world’” (Whitney 35). Russell explains:

In spite of the earnest exhortation of travelling ministers and the disciplinary efforts of monthly meetings, there were large numbers of members in England who did not conform to the Friends’ customs in “dress and address” and in other ways. When their lives were otherwise exemplary, they were not disowned. They attended the meetings for worship but were not usually admitted to business meetings nor appointed on committees nor chosen to serve as elders or overseers. Such Friends were called “gay” Friends. (329)

These categories were not clear cut, however; nor could one assume that “gay” Quakers had more relaxed principles across the board. Although Priscilla Wakefield opposed novel reading, for example, she ‘loved theatre and dancing’ and

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<sup>40</sup> Betty Hagglund, email to the author, 4 Apr. 2014. Betty Hagglund, rev. of The Collected Poems of Amelia Alderson Opie, eds Shelley King and John B. Pierce, Quaker Studies 16.2 (Mar. 2012) 235.

was not a plain Quaker (Leach and Goodman 166).<sup>41</sup> The Gurney family provide very good examples of movement between “gay” and “strict” adherence to the Quaker faith, and they are of particular importance to this project owing to the close relationships to Opie of many of their members.

The Gurney family were “gay” Quakers when Opie was growing up, and Opie took the opportunity of much socialising with them. As I have mentioned, Elizabeth Gurney Fry and Joseph John Gurney were too young to be friends to Opie in her childhood, but Hare explains Opie’s early connection with the Gurney family. Mrs Catherine Bell Gurney (like Wakefield, a great-granddaughter of Barclay) was no plain Quaker, ‘not limiting her acquaintance to members of the Society of Friends, but making cultivated or pleasant Unitarians, Roman Catholics, or Churchmen, equally welcome’ (Hare 1.26). Opie and her father are noted as intimate family friends (1.27). Catherine’s husband, John Gurney, was descended from a long line of prosperous merchants, first in wool, and then in banking. The commitments to business made strict commitments to the Quakers difficult, leading to a relaxed attitude to religion, where Catherine Gurney believed the children should decide with which Christian denomination they chose to worship.<sup>42</sup> Russell notes that ‘the older girls were at one time quite inclined to skepticism as to religion; Rousseau’s works being favourite reading’ (330).

Elizabeth (Betsy) Gurney, one of the younger sisters, was a Quaker, and decided to become a strict Quaker in 1798. Her younger brother, Joseph John, followed suit in 1812. Joseph John Gurney’s later prohibitions of novels and other amusements are interesting since his siblings were ‘in the vanguard of those who pushed against such prohibitions, enjoying music and dancing at Earlham Hall’.<sup>43</sup> Joseph John Gurney was Opie’s Quaker mentor from at least 1814, or his influence in letters is traceable from this particular point. Joseph John Gurney became so

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<sup>41</sup> Ann B. Shteir, “Wakefield, Priscilla (1750-1832),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004; May 2011) n.p. Leach and Goodman cite an earlier version of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography here (OUP: 1973) 455-6, for which no author’s name is given.

<sup>42</sup> David E. Swift, Joseph John Gurney: Banker, Reformer, and Quaker (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1962) 8-10.

<sup>43</sup> Ben Pink Dandelion, email to the author, 9 Oct. 2012. Ben Pink Dandelion is a lecturer at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, and his publications include Introduction to Quakerism (Cambridge: CUP, 2007); The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford: OUP, 2008), and, with Stephen W. Angell, eds, The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

important to the development of Quakerism at this time that Russell devotes an entire chapter of The History of Quakerism to 'The Gurney Influence among Friends' (329-341), arguing that, 'after the founders of the Society, he was the most influential Quaker character, and did more to shape modern Quakerism than any other single person' (331-332). He was one of the founders of what became an Evangelical strand of the Society, which devoted much more importance to the Holy Scriptures than had thus far been habitual, with Quakers more generally setting the Holy Spirit and the Inner Light at the forefront of their religious attitudes. Gurney presented his Evangelical understanding of the doctrine of Scripture in his Essays on the Evidence, Doctrines and Practical Observation of Christianity (1825), having already presented the particularly Quaker elements in Observations on the Religious Peculiarities of the Society of Friends in 1824, but seeming never to have synthesised the two (Russell 338). It was at precisely this time of Gurney's growing theological involvement in Quakerism that he advised Opie on the sort of attitude she should be adopting with regard to her literary career and her interaction with "the World", so Opie's career decisions at this time must be considered in this light.

A close examination of Opie's case reveals a great deal about the struggles that any novel-writer (especially female) may have faced in establishing and maintaining a successful literary career in the first half of the nineteenth century. Opie's varied literary output has been mentioned, but her publishing decisions need to be put in the wider literary context of the period. Opie's began her career in the tradition of sentiment and sensibility with Dangers of Coquetry (1790). Samuel Richardson was one of the most influential figures within this tradition, writing pivotal novels – Pamela (1740-1) and Clarissa (1747-8) in particular – that dramatically affected the way novels about women were written and interpreted. In the preface to his later Sir Charles Grandison (1753-4), Richardson stated that *Clarissa* had been 'a truly *Christian Heroine*', the model of whom Opie employed as late as 1816 in her novel Valentine's Eve, but Opie's indebtedness to sentimental fiction had many other facets.<sup>44</sup> One of those was seduction, a theme central to Clarissa itself and to many post-Richardsonian novels, including Henry Fielding's Amelia (1751), Frances Sheridan's Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph (1761) and Elizabeth Griffith's The History of Lady Barton (1761). Stories concerning seduction explored women's roles,

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<sup>44</sup> Janet Todd, Sensibility: An Introduction (London and New York: Methuen, 1986) 71.

rights, and sexuality. Opie launched her career with a type of seduction narrative, investigating the possible seduction of a married woman in her anonymous Dangers of Coquetry. Her second novel – The Father and Daughter (1801) – revisited the theme of seduction, but from a climate that was becoming increasingly political in the aftermath of the turbulent 1790s.<sup>45</sup>

The literary tradition of the ‘Man of Feeling’ – exemplified by Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy (1759-67) and A Sentimental Journey (1768); Henry Brooke’s The Fool of Quality (1766-70); Tobias Smollett’s Humphry Clinker (1771), and Henry Mackenzie’s The Man of Feeling (1771) – influenced Opie regarding the excesses of sensibility in male characters.<sup>46</sup> Oliver Goldsmith – a writer Opie quoted in Dangers of Coquetry – also wrote popular novels in the 1760s and 1770s satirizing the inability of ‘the oversensitized man’ to interact with “the world”.<sup>47</sup> But Opie was also influenced on the other hand by the cultivation of a new male ideal in sentimental fiction: since the more sensitive man was caring and compassionate, he would be a better partner in marriage. This ‘masculine ideal’ can be traced through Frances Burney’s Lord Orville in Evelina (1778) into the nineteenth century and Edgeworth’s John Percival in Belinda (1801) (Barker-Benfield 247-248).

These last two works also highlight the focus throughout this period on the courtship novel. In Pamela (1740), Richardson offered a redefinition of the novel form as one that traced a woman’s chaste courtship, and saw virtue triumph at the end in marriage. Many female writers of Opie’s era decided to build on this tradition, rather than exploring tales of ‘amorous intrigue’ that their eighteenth-century female forebears – Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood – had presented (Campbell 160).<sup>48</sup> One of the most important female writers in this period of the courtship novel’s development is Burney, who, like Opie after her, examined the proving ground of the marriageable woman. Opie’s first novel touched on a part of

<sup>45</sup> Katherine Binhammer, The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800 (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) 20.

<sup>46</sup> Alex Wetmore, Men of Feeling in Eighteenth-Century Literature: Touching Fiction (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> G. J. Barker-Benfield, The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1992) 142.

<sup>48</sup> The emergence of reputable, professional female novelists at this time relied, indeed, on their decision not to follow the novelistic path offered by some of these early eighteenth-century female writers: Jane Spencer, “Women writers and the eighteenth-century novel,” The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 215.

that proving ground that Burney avoided, with heroines ‘proper, decorous, and innocent, yet preternaturally aware of social danger’.<sup>49</sup> Opie evoked another literary tradition: that of the coquette.

Eliza Haywood had presented a coquette in The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless (1751), and the treatment of Opie’s coquette (also married) in her first anonymous novel shows a development towards a more cautionary mode as Opie presented the Dangers of Coquetry (1790). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, another very influential figure in the literature of sentiment, was strongly attacked by Wollstonecraft in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) for declaring that a woman ‘should be made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a *sweeter* companion to man, whenever he choose to relax himself’.<sup>50</sup> Opie started publishing (anonymously) with a similarly critical view of Rousseau’s attitude towards coquetry. Her heroine was not the stock character of ridicule offered by the anonymous Memoirs of a Coquet: or the History of Miss Harriot Airy (1765), for instance, but a much more sympathetic and victimised coquettish character.<sup>51</sup>

One feature of novel-writing and novel-reading that was very important to Richardson, and remained a pressing concern for many novel-writers, readers and critics (including Opie) was the concept of the novel as either instruction or entertainment. This debate took on particularly clear political significance in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The French Revolutionary debate – from the Dissenting Richard Price’s A Discourse on the Love of our Country (1789), to Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), then to Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) and Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man (1791) – quickly gathered speed. With a royal proclamation against sedition in 1792, followed by the Seditious Meetings Act and the Treason Act in 1795 (known also as the “Gagging Acts”), the polarization of “Jacobin” and “anti-Jacobin”

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<sup>49</sup> Julia Epstein, “Marginality in Frances Burney’s novels,” The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 198.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792, ed. Miriam Brody (London: Penguin, 1992) 108.

<sup>51</sup> Shelley King and John B. Pierce, Introduction, The Father and Daughter, with Dangers of Coquetry, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 43-44.

soon took hold. In The English Jacobin Novel, Gary Kelly focusses on Robert Bage, Inchbald, Thomas Holcroft and Godwin as Jacobin writers, and Nancy E. Johnson more recently added Charlotte Smith, Hays, Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth to this group.<sup>52</sup> The writers Matthew Grenby focusses on in The Anti-Jacobin Novel (2001) are too numerous to mention, but more recent criticism, even from Grenby himself, has started to question the usefulness of the terms “Jacobin” and “anti-Jacobin”. Grenby argues in “Novels of Opinion” that the Jacobin / anti-Jacobin distinction was not particularly helpful, nor really a distinction that readers made at the time.<sup>53</sup> With these terms still commonly used, however, it is necessary to have some working definitions of them.

It was easier to categorise anti-Jacobins:

The supporters of the *status quo* in Church and State, those who joined the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers in 1793, those who saw the French Revolution as a repetition of the bloody English Civil War and detested it as a revival of Presbyterianism in politics – it was they who singled out the enemy and attempted to smear them with the mud of French politics. (Kelly English Jacobin 1-2)

Anti-Jacobin novels, by extension, were openly conservative, or included clearly conservative elements which opposed French-Revolutionary principles (Grenby Anti-Jacobin 1). Jacobinism, on the other hand, was a more fluid concept: ‘a state of mind, a cluster of indignant sensibilities, a faith in reason, a vision of the future’.<sup>54</sup> Although John Thelwall has been identified as a central Jacobin figure, even he admitted that there was no unifying idea of exactly how much change was needed, nor how it might be achieved (Cone iii). More recent scholarship has offered the concepts of ‘anti-anti-Jacobin’ and ‘Post-Jacobin novel’ to describe the

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<sup>52</sup> Gary Kelly, The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Nancy E. Johnson, The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property, and the Law: Critiquing the Contract (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>53</sup> Matthew Grenby, “Novels of Opinion,” The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: CUP, 2011) 172.

<sup>54</sup> Carl B. Cone, The English Jacobins: Reformers in late 18<sup>th</sup> century England (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968) iii. Quoted in Kelly, English Jacobin, 2.

complexities of Opie's Adeline Mowbray (1805), for instance, recognizing some of the shared ground between Jacobins and anti-Jacobins that this binary does not acknowledge.<sup>55</sup> I follow a similar approach in my assessments of how Opie joined the debate with The Father and Daughter (1801) and Adeline Mowbray (1805).

Both sides of the Revolutionary Debate presented an interest in better education, especially once the Terreur had taken hold in France and French Revolutionary ardour had cooled in England. Hannah More's Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799) argued for many of the same reforms as Wollstonecraft had done in her Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787) and even her Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), but from the other end of the political spectrum. Edgeworth, a very prolific novelist in the early nineteenth century (and in between Wollstonecraft and More politically), was also a great educationalist, as evidenced not only in Essays on Practical Education (1811, although an ongoing project with her father from 1798), but also in her collections of tales. The moral tale was a very prominent literary mode in the period, and Edgeworth, More and Opie can be singled out as the most significant tale-writers of the early nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> The religious novel also developed dramatically as a genre at this time. More's only novel, Coelebs in Search of a Wife (1808), was highly influential, and it encouraged the development of the 'moral evangelical' novel in the years that immediately followed (Garside 58-59). Opie's Temper (1812) features in Garside's list – as do Mary Brunton's Self-Control (1811) and Discipline (1814) – owing partly to their 'deliberately unadorned titles' (59) – although I argue that Opie's Valentine's Eve (1816) and Madeline (1822) are much more religious in aim and tone, which is a focus in Chapter 4.

Temper's subtitle – 'Domestic Scenes' – also illustrates a trend in fiction at this time, and the smaller, English, parochial canvases of Jane Austen's novels were very popular, for instance. At the same time, Edgeworth was writing similar novels of courtship, but her Irish connection and the rising popularity of Walter Scott and his

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<sup>55</sup> Laura Mandell, "Bad Marriages, Bad Novels: The 'Philosophical Romance'," Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780-1830, Eds Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool: LUP, 2008) 68; Peter Knox-Shaw, Jane Austen and the Enlightenment (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) 131; Andrew McInnes, "Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period," diss., U of Exeter, 2012, 27-28.

<sup>56</sup> Tim Killick, British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century: the Rise of the Tale (Aldershot, Hants, and Burlington (VT): Ashgate, 2008) 3.

historical novels extended readers' interest beyond English borders, somewhere where Gothic fiction had previously excited them.<sup>57</sup> As the novel developed, Opie did not seem to engage with the surge of historical novels after Scott's Waverley (1814) but her decision to set her acknowledged novel Madeline (1822) in Scotland may have been owing to Scott's popularity, although Susan Ferrier's Marriage (1818) might provide a useful parallel too. A comparison between the afore-mentioned cautionary review of Edgeworth's Tales of Fashionable Life in the Christian Observer of 1809 with an essay by the reviewer's son in the Christian Observer of 1816 entitled "Observations on Novel Reading" indicates the effect of Scott on some of the changing attitudes towards fiction at this time. Moral novels and religious novels ought to be read; bad novels ought to be thrown into the fire, and the 'harmless and entertaining' variety, like Scott's Waverley, might be read 'but occasionally'.<sup>58</sup> One incident that appeared to provide evidence of Opie's interest in promoting always the moral instructiveness of fiction (and in maintaining her good reputation) was her decision not to indulge in the 'silver-fork' novel, or other novels of the passions, and to remain 'outside the Minerva circle' (Garside 65). Or, at least, so it seemed: the second of Opie's 1820s anonymous novels (Much to Blame) is the closest Opie comes to writing in this genre.

Silver-fork novels were fashionable novels which focused on life in high society, either to enable the privileged to laugh at themselves, or to give the less fortunate a glimpse into the sort of lives to which they might aspire.<sup>59</sup> The recent edition of Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841 – including Thomas Henry Lister's Granby: A Novel (1826); Letitia Landon's Romance and Reality (1831); Edward Bulwer Lytton's Godolphin: A Novel (1833); Marguerite, Countess of Blessington's The Victims of Society (1837); Rosanna Bulwer Lytton's Cheveley: A Man of Honour (1839), and Catherine Gore's Cecil; Or, The Adventures of a Coxcomb (1841) – focusses on the main proponents of the genre, investigating their novelistic forays into the frivolous scandals of the upper classes. Opie's decision to experiment with the genre in 1824 with Much to Blame indicates her interest in being part of an up-

<sup>57</sup> Deirdre Shauna Lynch, "Gothic fiction," The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period, eds Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: CUP, 2008) 49.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Observations on Novel Reading," Christian Observer, 15 (Dec. 1816) 784-5. Quoted in Garside, 60.

<sup>59</sup> Harriet Devine Jump, ed., Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005) ix-x.

and-coming literary sensation, although, in her case, Opie seems to have explored the fashionable world as an end in itself, and not to political ends. When the silver-fork novel really came into its own in the 1830s, it took on ‘a political colouring’, swept along by the increasingly urgent political murmurings of the Reform era.<sup>60</sup>

By the time Opie republished early works in the mid-1840s, novel-writing traditions had changed quite considerably from the sentimental works she was reprinting. Domestic realism had developed into a common feature of the novel of the first few decades of the nineteenth century, and the early Victorian era built on this taste for realism, adding more ambitious elements.<sup>61</sup> Yet, on Victoria’s ascension to the throne in 1837, ‘the novel was still widely regarded as an idle amusement which inflamed evangelical mistrust of vain and ungodly indulgences’.<sup>62</sup> These attitudes only gradually changed, as did Quaker attitudes both to fiction and the Arts as a whole, but Opie’s position as a fiction-writer over almost sixty years of this volatile period makes her an important subject for discussion in the contexts both of the development of the novel and of Quaker theology.

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Opie was a very significant figure on the literary landscape of the first half of the nineteenth century, yet her importance has often been understated owing to hasty conclusions about what it meant to her reputation (especially her literary reputation) to join the Quakers officially. This project examines not only the particular Quaker attitudes to the novel – as evidenced also by Quaker readers and writers – but most especially the impact that these opinions and influences had on Opie’s literary career. It removes a need for clear-cut Jacobin / anti-Jacobin distinctions in Opie’s literature, and views Opie’s whole career instead through a religious lens. The importance of reform concerns – to which Opie demonstrated a life-long commitment – thereby takes on a new relevance as Opie juggled her interests in fiction with her

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<sup>60</sup> Devine Jump, ed., xiii; Edward Copeland, The Silver Fork Novel: Fashionable Fiction in the Age of Reform (Cambridge: CUP, 2012) 2.

<sup>61</sup> Deirdre David, ed., The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel (Cambridge: CUP, 2012) 3.

<sup>62</sup> Adams, James Eli, “A History of Criticism of the Victorian Novel,” The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel, ed. Deirdre David (Cambridge: CUP, 2012) 62.

interests first in Unitarian ideas, then in Quaker beliefs. Opie's literary voice became quite fractured as she struggled to conform to Joseph John Gurney's ideals for the use of fiction, but she nevertheless emerged as a defender of fiction and the novel as she justified her 1840s republications. My focus on Opie's ongoing commitment to fiction – at the same time as she used the supportive context of Quaker belonging to forward her reform interests – provides a new and valuable perspective to the narrative of this prominent writer's position in both the literary canon and the development of Quaker attitudes to the Arts, enriching in turn our appreciation of the position of female writers, of the Quakers, and of fiction itself at this time.

## Chapter 1

### Brightwell's 'white lies'

In May 1854, within 6 months of Opie's death (aged 84), her friend Cecilia Lucy Brightwell published Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie, selected and arranged from her Letters, Diaries and Other Manuscripts. Since her father was Opie's executor, Brightwell had a very large amount of documents at her disposal and, as Opie had composed no autobiography, Brightwell included many overlong letter, diary or journal excerpts in order that her subject might, essentially, speak for herself. In the very next year, Brightwell published a Memoir of Amelia Opie (1855) with the Religious Tract Society, which, in contrast to Memorials, had 'for its object more particularly the record of Mrs. Opie's religious history' (Memoir iii): that is, as far as Brightwell was concerned, Opie's life after her official acceptance by the Religious Society of Friends in 1825.

This chapter investigates Brightwell's works and the degree to which they belong to the tradition of Victorian biography, but nevertheless remain essential to Opie scholarship today. Brief indications are provided of the ways in which Brightwell mishandled Opie documents as she compiled her accounts, from unreliability (at best) to manuscript vandalism (at worst). Comparison between extant manuscripts with Brightwell's versions of them allows us better to appreciate Brightwell's distorted impressions of three main topics: Opie's early radicalism; Opie's early Unitarianism, and Opie's doubts as she decided to join the Religious Society of Friends and relinquish novel-writing.

The discussion here therefore brings to light the way Brightwell's accounts distorted Opie's relationship both to Quakerism and to novel-writing, encouraging a simplistic reading of Opie's negotiation of her literary career alongside her burgeoning faith that does not stand up to close analysis. My examination of Brightwell's 'white lies' concludes with a short investigation of Brightwell's possible methodology in her editing, considering questions of scandal and taboo which may have changed since the mid-nineteenth century. This investigation provides a better understanding of what Brightwell was interested in suppressing, and how that knowledge may better equip scholars to continue to deal with Brightwell documents.

Brightwell was not a professional biographer when she wrote Memorials, but she went on to produce over twenty works – mainly biographical – from Memorials

onwards.<sup>63</sup> Brightwell was the niece of Simon Wilkin, the prominent Norwich publisher and printer.<sup>64</sup> His sister, Mary Snell Wilkin, married Thomas Brightwell, who was Opie's executor upon her death, and oversaw his daughter Cecilia's biographical accounts of Opie. The family was nonconformist and had close ties with many branches of the social and intellectual scenes in Norwich (Watt n.p.). The enthusiastic way in which Brightwell related Opie's attachment to and official acceptance by the Quakers might have suggested to her readers that Brightwell herself was a Quaker.<sup>65</sup> But her burial in the Rosary Cemetery in Norwich – the first cemetery in England assigned to no specific denomination – in 1875, rather than the Gildencroft Quaker cemetery, indicates rather that she was probably a non-Quaker nonconformist.<sup>66</sup> Brightwell was clearly a very religious woman, which is evident from her Opie works, most especially the Memoir.

It is unclear exactly when she met and befriended Opie, but Brightwell states at the beginning of the Memoir that, of the time before Opie became a Quaker, 'I cannot speak from personal knowledge; my acquaintance with her dates from a far later time, when she had long retired from the gay circles of the world' (3-4). To some degree, of course, Opie never retired completely from gay circles. Even in the Memoir, Brightwell writes of Opie's attendance at the Great Exhibition in 1851 (220), although she omits here the reference she had made in the Memorials to Opie meeting Mary Berry, also in a wheelchair, 'on which Mrs. O. playfully proposed a chair race!' (389). But it is clear in both of Brightwell's accounts, and the Memoir in particular, that her emphasis was on presenting a two-part narrative of Opie's life: the part before she became attracted to the Quakers, and the part thereafter, as though these two can (and should) be kept completely distinct. A closer look at these two works is necessary to begin to examine Brightwell's approach.

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<sup>63</sup> Norma Watt, "Brightwell, (Cecilia) Lucy (1811–1875)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004) n.p.

<sup>64</sup> Letters from Opie to Simon Wilkin regarding her 1840s republications of early works are examined in chapter 6. Wilkin was a Norwich Baptist.

<sup>65</sup> Watt does not express a view about any such suggestions ("Brightwell" n.p.).

<sup>66</sup> Nick Williams, "Rosary Cemetery," Norwich HEART: Heritage Economic & Regeneration Trust 2007: n.p. There is also no evidence at the Quaker Meeting House in Norwich of Brightwell ever having attended Quaker meetings (of which strict attendance was kept); Thomas Brightwell was a solicitor and he advised the Meeting House, but never worshipped there.

The preface to Memorials was written by Brightwell's father and Opie's executor, Thomas Brightwell, which gave Brightwell's account a useful patriarchal backing and blessing. Thomas Brightwell laments the fact that Opie did not manage to write an autobiography, but writes of her request in her dying days that they write her life's account, 'adding, that she had confidence in our judgment, and believed that we should "do everything for the best"' (iv). It is made clear that the Brightwells have made a selection (from a wealth of documents and information) which they think gives most credit (and dignity) to their subject:

It would have been no difficult task, to have greatly extended these Memoirs, had it been deemed expedient to make a free use of the Letters received by her, and of which a very large number were found among her papers; but we have not felt ourselves at liberty to adopt such a course, and we trust there will be found in this Volume few (may we say we hope *no*) violations of private and confidential communications. (iv)

The final third of the preface focuses on a depiction of Opie's religion, and provides useful information about how the Brightwells perceived Opie's faith. Thomas Brightwell writes that 'the great leading feature of Mrs. Opie's character was pure, christian benevolence; charity in its highest sense' (vi). But in saying in this preface that 'of her religion, the latter part of this Memoir will best speak' (vi), the indication is correctly given that the Brightwells considered Opie religious only after joining the Friends.

Thomas Brightwell also states here that 'Mrs. Opie had no liking for religious controversy, and seemed to me always desirous of avoiding it' (vi). This comment correctly indicates to a knowledgeable reader that Opie's 1840s republications of early works will not be mentioned in this work, given the religious controversy that they did indeed cause with Opie's Quaker mentor, Joseph John Gurney. The whole of this preface makes it clear to readers that Memorials was written very much in line with the style of the day, and that they are not to expect daring revelations which might compromise the subject. With my particular focuses in mind, it indicates already that little room will be given for an acceptance of Opie as a radical; for any

religious faith in Opie before she joined the Quakers, or for any problems reconciling her faith with her fiction writing thereafter.

The two-part nature of Memorials is achieved partly by Brightwell waiting to mention the Gurney family until Opie is poised to move towards the Quakers in 1814, when Opie had actually grown up in their society and had renewed her acquaintance with them after returning to Norwich following John Opie's death in 1807. The inaccurate idea that Opie moved to the Quakers, relinquishing novel-writing, and never looked back is also reinforced by Brightwells's failure to mention Opie's republications of early works in the 1840s, even though she would have been aware of them: not only did her uncle, Simon Wilkin, advise Opie on the project, but so did Brightwell's Norwich-based publisher for Memorials, Josiah Fletcher.

Brightwell's focus on "Opie the Quaker" rather than "Opie the writer" is also evidenced by how she divides up Memorials: 193 pages are devoted to the first 55 years of Opie's life before she officially joined the Quakers (and to which almost her entire writing career belongs), with 206 pages covering the final 29 years of Opie's life. In the Memoir, however, this focus is taken to an extreme. This later work – published by the Religious Tract Society – concerns 'the record of Mrs. Opie's religious history' (Memoir iii), and Brightwell makes it evident that this religious history belongs exclusively to Opie's life following her official acceptance by the Friends in 1825. The first 55 years of Opie's life are consigned to a mere 34 pages of the 244-page work, but Brightwell's tone and phraseology are also very clearly aimed at a devout Christian audience. As such, the Memoir is of little use to discuss Opie's early radicalism, but it becomes increasingly relevant as I present manuscript evidence to support Opie's early Unitarian faith, and as I refute the idea of Opie's "simple" shift to the Quakers. Throughout this chapter as a whole, though, the focus will be on Memorials, being the longer, more in depth, more widely read, and less relentlessly pious of the two works.

Although Opie was considered in 1830 one of the top three female novelists of the day – alongside Edgeworth and Austen – by the *Edinburgh Review*, the Brightwells' emphasis on Opie's Quakerism left a legacy later in the century which tended not only to depreciate her writings but also the strength and importance of

her political interests.<sup>67</sup> I consider it no coincidence that, while Brightwell's story of Opie's life has remained largely uncontested, there has been no detailed investigation until now into the complicated relationship between Opie's Quakerism and her commitment to fiction.<sup>68</sup> I think that being forced to read (as the only source) documents that have been misleadingly contextualised and even altered to fit an agenda – with Opie's life once she joined the Quakers in 1825 portrayed as changed almost beyond recognition with regard to her writing career – cannot but distort an appreciation of Opie's literary career as a whole. 'The fact is that biographical untruths are accepted by audiences if they have been said two or three times and fit in with expectations': when the untruths have been unexplored and repeated over and over again for more than 150 years, distorted interpretations of the biographer's subject are only to be expected.<sup>69</sup>

Brightwell's accounts are typical in many ways of Victorian biography. Although the Victorian era has been closely associated with the development of the novel, it is also apt to consider it 'the Age of Biography'.<sup>70</sup> Lytton Strachey lamented Victorian biographies' 'ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design', and Brightwell's accounts are instantly recognisable from this description.<sup>71</sup> Strachey was criticising the particular two-volume formula that became ridiculed, but Brightwell's works also belonged in style – 'part-biography, part-autobiography, part-memoir' – to an earlier trend associated with the written lives of the recently-departed Romantic greats (Atkinson 17). A turning point towards more prominent

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<sup>67</sup> Kenneth R. Johnston, "Whose History? My Place or Yours?: Republican Assumptions and Romantic Traditions," *Romanticism, History, Historicism*, ed. Damian Walford Davies (New York and London: Routledge, 2009) 97. Johnston must mean both the Brightwells here: there is no other 19<sup>th</sup>-century book-length biography of Opie.

<sup>68</sup> Roxanne Eberle has pointed out that Brightwell altered Opie documents, even defacing manuscripts, in a footnote to her discussion of how Opie's political position is still being disputed, but this comment is the closest recent scholarship has come to examining the unreliability of Brightwell's accounts: Roxanne Eberle, *Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792 – 1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002) 107, n249.

<sup>69</sup> Norman White, "Pieties and Literary Biography," *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. John Batchelor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 216.

<sup>70</sup> Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: OUP, 2010) 14.

<sup>71</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 1918 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1921) viii.

hagiography can be found in Arthur Penrhyn Stanley's Life of Arnold (1844) (Atkinson 18), and Brightwell clearly contributed to the 'renewal of Christian life-laundering' that has more generally become indicative of Victorian biography.<sup>72</sup>

Yet Jenny Uglow indicates, with regard to Elizabeth Gaskell's highly-acclaimed Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857), that it was difficult not to bow to Victorian audience expectation of a "clean" life.<sup>73</sup> Even in the hands of a greatly-esteemed and conscientious professional writer like Gaskell, the biographer is 'occasionally oddly evasive' (Uglow 433), and suppressed certain events completely in order to protect her subject. In the hands of Brightwell, an inexperienced family friend with a strong sense of religious duty, the misuse of Opie manuscripts may fall well beyond any typical practices of Victorian life-writing. But Brightwell's works certainly demonstrate the kind of hagiographical panegyric that many associate with Victorian biography.

Comparison with extant documents reveals Memorials and Memoir to be whitewashed 'sinner-to-saint' conversion narratives: one might normally claim that they were simply of their time and that scholarship could (and should) move on without them. If Brightwell's biographical accounts prove so unreliable, why is it still relevant to engage with them? There are four main aspects that make Brightwell's accounts useful, sometimes indispensable, to scholarship, the first of which has already been mentioned: many documents (or versions of documents) now exist only in Brightwell's work owing to the disappearance of a significant private archive. I discussed this archive – the Carr Collection – in the Introduction: last documented in 1937, the Carr Collection included amongst other documents Opie's diary and journal, which Brightwell mentioned in the longer title of Memorials, and which are a predominant feature of Brightwell's works.<sup>74</sup>

Secondly, the very recent Opie biography does not question Brightwell, and, apart from an unpublished PhD thesis that has received very little critical attention,

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<sup>72</sup> Nigel Hamilton, Biography: A Brief History (Cambridge (MA) and London, England: Harvard UP, 2007) 111.

<sup>73</sup> Jenny Uglow, Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories (London and New York: Faber and Faber, 1999) 432.

<sup>74</sup> Jacobine Menzies-Wilson and Helen Lloyd, Amelia: The Tale of a Plain Friend, (London, New York and Toronto: OUP, 1937) vi. Since Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd do not reference anything they cite in this work, I am inclined to discount it as a scholarly source.

there has been no book-length biography otherwise since the 1930s.<sup>75</sup> Margaret Eliot MacGregor's Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend was published in 1933, and relied not only on Brightwell's account but also on the missing Carr Collection for many of its sources. Thirdly, changes in biographical styles meant that the very lengthy passages of transcription in Brightwell were shortened dramatically by MacGregor. This later, more balanced portrayal of Opie's life therefore did not signal the possibility of inconsistencies between Brightwell's accounts and original documents to which MacGregor had access, many of which no longer exist, or which have not been located. Finally, the Brightwell biographies are by far the most accessible source, being out of copyright and therefore consultable in their entirety online.<sup>76</sup>

Memorials is still, and must remain, the major source for all subsequent biographies of Opie. As I stated in the Introduction to this project, almost anyone who has ever written anything about Opie has cited Brightwell.<sup>77</sup> Brightwell's biographies are still very valuable sources, but ones which need to be used with great caution. Comparison between extant documents and Brightwell's versions of them reveals the alarming lengths to which Brightwell went to avoid sullyng the reputation of her friend, leading not only to untrustworthy reproductions but also to doctored archives. An investigation of Brightwell's possible methodology for her editing – focussing on Memorials, as the more significant text – is therefore essential to determine how these sources are to be approached.

To some extent, Brightwell engaged in an editorial practice that was necessary for the type of document she was composing. She had a huge amount of material at her disposal: there was much she simply needed to omit. It is almost more appropriate to criticise Brightwell for her inability to select the most salient points from letter, journal and diary extracts, the latter sometimes spanning more

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<sup>75</sup> Ann Farrant, Amelia Opie: The Quaker Celebrity (Hindringham: JJG Publishing, 2014); Clive Jones, "The life and prose works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)," diss., OU, 2001. Clive Jones also discusses the disappearance of the Carr Collection (12-13). The Farrant biography appeared too late to be given in-depth treatment in this project.

<sup>76</sup> Memorials and Memoir were digitized as Google ebooks in 2008.

<sup>77</sup> The only critic I have found who cites the Memoir instead of Memorials is Ann Frank Wake: "Indirect Dissent: "Landscaping" Female Agency in Amelia Alderson Opie's Poems of the 1790s," Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers, eds Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 261-289.

than ten pages in her account. Yet extant manuscripts reveal both the clumsiness of her approach, and a tendency to disregard documents (or events) that were not consistent with her desired narrative.

Brightwell's clumsy transcriptions are unsurprising given the haste with which she produced the book and the sheer length of many extracts: a thirteen-page quotation from Opie's diary is not out of place, for instance, with only two very short passages of contextualisation (199-211). Opie died in December 1853 and Memorials was published in May 1854, with a second edition only two months later which mainly corrected glaring printing errors.<sup>78</sup> The biography frequently fails to preserve Opie's original punctuation, to convey her emphases through italics or underlinings, and to be consistent in the transcription of Opie's spellings. Brightwell at times changed word order for no discernible reason, rendering, for example, Opie's 'on this I hope however at all events we are resolved' as 'on this, at least, I hope we are at all events resolved' (Memorials 45).<sup>79</sup>

Brightwell's alterations sometimes result in far more dramatic changes in tone than mere word-order clumsiness; she omits, contextualises in suggestive ways, and alters words or phrases as she attempts to make Opie's documents fit her narrative. Brightwell also presents edited documents as though verbatim. Extant documents often reveal the removal of very long passages, yet Brightwell's transcriptions often show no ellipses. Some other shorter omissions also significantly change the tone of Opie's original letters, especially where her spiritual deliberations are concerned.

At her worst, Brightwell may be guilty of manuscript vandalism. Some original Opie manuscripts have been defaced with very dense, black ink, mostly in loops, but occasionally in the form of words which do not correspond to the originals underneath, and in handwriting which definitely appears not to be Opie's own. Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd implied that it was Brightwell who edited the manuscripts in this way (v); Eberle made the same suggestion much more recently (Chastity 249), and I also suspect Brightwell. Opie died a childless widow, leaving her documents to the Brightwells, not to members of her extended family. She outlived

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<sup>78</sup> I quote from the second edition throughout this thesis.

<sup>79</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to Susanna Taylor, [1794], Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP59, Huntington Lib., San Marino. The square brackets here (and later, with Opie's letter to Susanna Taylor of [23 March] [1801]) are cataloguer supplied and indicate that the manuscript is undated or incompletely dated.

many of her correspondents and therefore had many of her letters returned to her before her own death, but it is unlikely that she herself defaced them. The following remarks to William Hayley (a much older writer who became a regular correspondent in 1814) suggest Opie's preferred way of treating confidential material:

I always always burnt confidential letters ... Believe me, I know the nature of men, and women high and low, too well, to treat even gentry generally speaking with unopened letters ... I daily receive letters fit only for my eye, which are either under lock, and key, or burnt – but burnt usually – that should I die, no one might be compromised in any way, by my unexpected death. This has been a principle of action with me always – <sup>80</sup>

Opie was only 46 when she wrote this letter. When she died, aged 84, her death was far from sudden, and she would have had ample opportunity to dispose of compromising documents if she had felt the need. This letter suggests that, while Opie had in mind the possible impact of correspondence on the reputation of others, she was not necessarily thinking of her own, or she did not believe that she was leaving any documents that might compromise her.<sup>81</sup>

In many of the cases I present here, Brightwell appears to be attempting a “cleaning up” of Opie's image through her editing. As stated, I focus here on three areas in which Brightwell attempted this purification: Opie's early radicalism; Opie's early Unitarianism, and Opie's doubts as she prepared to join the Friends and relinquish novel-writing.<sup>82</sup> Since the diary and journal extracts in Brightwell cannot be verified, my analysis relies on extant Opie correspondence – to a Norwich Unitarian, Susanna Taylor, and the Quaker philanthropist Elizabeth Fry in particular – to demonstrate how Brightwell used this material in misleading ways.

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<sup>80</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 7 January 1816, Hayley Archive, ms, XXVII 14, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University. Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

<sup>81</sup> Opie's habit of burning letters might also explain why the overwhelming majority of extant Opie correspondence now consists of letters she herself composed, not letters she received.

<sup>82</sup> Opie's early radicalism and early Unitarianism go hand in hand to a certain extent, but need to be addressed as separate topics in terms of how Brightwell treats them, since her issues with them are not the same: she is prepared to acknowledge aspects of Opie's radicalism as youthful folly, where she refuses categorically to acknowledge Opie's Unitarian faith.

### Opie's early radicalism

It is clear from Brightwell's account that she wished to draw a fine line between acknowledging early radicalism in Opie (which would fit into the conversion story Brightwell was telling) and urging the reader to believe that Opie was too young or too inexperienced to know any better than to be swept along in French Revolutionary enthusiasm. Brightwell confines Opie's early radicalism to youthful enthusiasm about new political ideas, failing to recognise therefore how Opie's radicalism stretched not only to direct political involvement, but also to ideas of women's rights and sexual liberation. In this way, Brightwell can be seen to misunderstand Opie's relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft in particular at this point, and to misrepresent some of Opie's more accommodating opinions regarding extramarital relations. These more liberal opinions extended even into the 1800s, after the publication of William Godwin's damaging Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798) and the immediate backlash.

Brightwell describes how, after Opie's mother's death in 1784, her father kept her his constant companion: 'hence, at a time when girls are usually confined to the school room, she was presiding as mistress of his household, and mingling in the very gay society of that day' (Memorials 31). The scene is set – the eve of the French Revolution – with Norwich 'a thriving and prosperous city ... [which] ... abounded in gaiety and amusements of various sorts' (31). In this context, Brightwell introduces Susanna Taylor to the story as a protector figure for Opie:

A young girl placed in such circumstances must have greatly needed the counsel and friendship of a wise female friend; and such an [sic.] one Miss Alderson happily found in Mrs. John Taylor, a lady distinguished for her extensive knowledge and many excellencies. (31)

Greater mention is made of Taylor later in this chapter, since an important detail that Brightwell does not mention anywhere in the Memorials is that Taylor was a very prominent Unitarian. She was the wife of a Unitarian deacon, John Taylor: there is a plaque in the Octagon Chapel in Norwich commemorating them both. Brightwell focuses on Taylor as 'mild and unassuming, quiet and meek' (32), where a

more scholarly (and more recent) account states that ‘she was a woman of much force of character, who shared the liberal opinions of her husband, and is said to have danced ‘round the tree of liberty at Norwich on the receipt of news of the taking of the Bastille’’.<sup>83</sup> When Brightwell includes letters from Opie to Taylor whilst the former was attending the 1794 Treason Trials, a disclaimer is required so that Opie’s attitudes might be properly placed: Brightwell makes clear that Opie’s views ‘were naturally to a great degree formed after those of her father and his companions’ (Memorials 39). Dr Alderson is exposed as someone who welcomed the French Revolution, ‘though he afterwards saw cause to moderate his expectations as to the results of that movement’ (39), but this disclaimer is not deemed enough by Brightwell, and she provides another before presenting Opie’s letters:

It is evident that a fellowship in political opinions was the only bond which united her to many with whom, at this time, she associated. Her own good sense and firm rectitude of principle, happily preserved her from the follies and errors into which not a few around her were led, by their extravagant zeal for a liberty which speedily degenerated into license. She too, was enthusiastic, ardent, perhaps imprudent, at least so she seems to have judged in cooler moments; but there was too much of the purely womanly in her, to suffer her ever to sympathize with the assertors of “woman’s rights,” (so called;) and she was not to be spoiled even though exposed to the influence of Horace Walpole’s philosophising serpents, the Paines, the Tookes, and the Wollstonecrofts [sic.]” (41)

Opie did indeed sympathise with such people and their ideologies, as Chapter 2 examines in more detail. Brightwell allows Opie to be interested in politics, transcribing Opie’s political commentary as she writes ‘what a pass are things come to, when even dissenters lick the hand that oppresses them! Hang these politics! how they haunt me. Would it not be better, think you, to hang the *framers* of them?’ (46). But Brightwell wants to keep Opie’s interest in radical politics general, and fails

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<sup>83</sup> Charlotte Fell-Smith, “Taylor, John (1750–1826),” rev. M. Clare Loughlin-Chow, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004). This *ODNB* entry includes the *ODNB* entry for Susanna Taylor.

to transcribe Opie's personal attachment to figures, as evidenced by this extant letter:

We hope soon to see Marsh and Firth – When I think on the former, my heart bleeds for him – I am sure his first impressions were bad, and vanity is now his stimulus to action ... Who knows but that his Sun will set in Aristocracy, and be extinguished by the guillotine? (Alderson Opie to Taylor [1794])<sup>84</sup>

Brightwell quotes from a letter (no longer extant) to Taylor (Memorials 44-5) in which Opie relays a discussion she had with Charles Sinclair regarding the standing member of parliament for Norwich, William Windham, but not Opie's active role in opposing him.<sup>85</sup> In 1794, Windham crossed the floor to become Secretary of War in Pitt's cabinet, much to the disgust of Norwich radicals who opposed the government's oppressive regime.<sup>86</sup> Penelope J. Corfield has argued that Opie made a public speech against Windham during the 1794 election in Norwich. At a mass meeting, Sarah Scott reported that:

A young woman of uncommon talents of about 25 years of age, made a long speech in the Town Hall to about 1,500 of the Jacobins assembled against Mr Windham, and two daughters of a late Doctor of

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<sup>84</sup> Godwin's diary lists Charles Marsh as a barrister and a politician: William Godwin, The Diary of William Godwin, eds Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy, and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010), entry for "Charles Marsh," "Biographical Details"; Chandler writes that Marsh was a member of the radical Norwich Tusculan Society, as well as 'an Octagon worshipper' who ran the radical Norwich periodical The Cabinet with others: David Chandler, "'The Athens of England': Norwich as a Literary Center in the Late Eighteenth Century", Eighteenth-Century Studies 43.2 (Winter 2010): 178. C. B. Jewson includes William Firth, 'a considerable manufacturer' (29), in a list of members of the Tusculan Society: C. B. Jewson, A Portrait of Norwich in its Reaction to the French Revolution, 1788-1802 (Glasgow and London: Blackie & Son, 1975) 54; William Firth was 'a member of the Norwich Revolution Society': Godwin, Diary, entry for "William Firth," "Biographical Details".

<sup>85</sup> Sinclair had been 'indicted for sedition, but agreed to turn King's evidence': Godwin, Diary, entry for "Charles Sinclair".

<sup>86</sup> Clive Jones cites the Norfolk Chronicle, 12 July 1794, 2 (50).

Divinity stood one on each side of her to encourage her in her proceeding.<sup>87</sup>

Where Clive Jones had only speculated (50-51), Corfield confidently asserts that the main figure was Opie, accompanied by her friends, the Plumptre sisters. Opie 'made no later claims to having given Britain's first-ever political oration from the hustings by a woman', indicating a disinclination to promote herself as a political presence, or at least a lack of interest in drawing particular attention to her position as a woman joining a political debate at this stage.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the incident suggests the extent of Opie's political commitment (Clive Jones 51), and Brightwell duly ignores it.

It is perhaps owing to the presence of the Plumptre sisters at Opie's side in this political intervention that Brightwell removes almost every trace of them from Memorials, with only two references to Anne and no mentions of Annabella ('Bel'), where comparison with extant letters to Taylor shows that Brightwell simply lifted out their names.<sup>89</sup> Both sisters, like Opie, benefitted from the supportive environment of the Enfield circle to start their writing careers in the early 1790s, and the literary group centred around the Octagon Chapel – the Speculative Society – counted the Plumptre family (as well as Opie and her father) among its members.<sup>90</sup>

The Plumptre sisters were born into an Anglican family: their father, Robert Plumptre, was the prebendary of Norwich from September 1756 and the president of Queen's College Cambridge from November 1760. But so liberal were the ideals he

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<sup>87</sup> Sarah Scott, Millenium Hall, 1762, ed. Jane Spencer (London : Virago, 1986) ix-x. Spencer quotes a letter from Scott first published in Reginald Blunt, ed., Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues: Her Letters and Friendships (London: Constable & Co., 1923. Vol. 2) 304.

<sup>88</sup> I am grateful to Penelope J. Corfield (Royal Holloway, London University) for drawing this to my attention, arising from her research into Women in Norwich Radicalism. This text is not yet published.

<sup>89</sup> Opie mentions Anne firstly in a letter to Susanna Taylor regarding a possible trip to Drury Lane to 'see a new tragedy' (77): Amelia Opie, letter to Susanna Taylor, 12 December 1800, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP60, Huntington Lib. San Marino; then as one of the people who accompanied Opie and John Opie on their trip to Paris in 1802 (97). She mentions Annabella in the following letters: Opie to Taylor, 12 December 1800; Amelia Opie, letter to Susanna Taylor, [23 March] [1801], Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP61, Huntington Lib., San Marino; Amelia Opie, letter to Susanna Taylor, [17 May] [1802], Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP64, Huntington Lib. San Marino.

<sup>90</sup> Elinor Shaffer, "Plumptre, Anne (1760-1818)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004) n.p.; Clive Jones, 8.

shared with his wife, Anne and Annabella, that these latter decided to leave the Church of England.<sup>91</sup> It is perhaps owing to their connection with Unitarianism and the Octagon Chapel that Brightwell chose to omit them, but possibly also owing to other evidences of their literary radicalism. Out of a politically-engaged woman, with close radical friends and a much wider radical acquaintance, Brightwell carefully constructed the tale of Opie as a young and naïve victim to radical circumstance in Memorials.

It is, however, also in terms of sexual politics that Brightwell was not prepared for Opie to appear radical, or even liberal. Brightwell's treatment of Opie's connection with Wollstonecraft and Godwin is a prominent example of her reluctance to acknowledge liberal attitudes in Opie, but this treatment also demonstrates Brightwell's misunderstanding of this connection. Wollstonecraft is cited as one of those 'assertors of "woman's rights"' (41) with whom Opie did not sympathise, which we know (from extant correspondence with both Wollstonecraft and Godwin) was not the case. Opie's letter to Godwin to offer condolence after Wollstonecraft's death most particularly states Opie's sympathy for the "women's rights" cause. She lauds Wollstonecraft as 'a woman, who nobly, & incomparably fought for the violated rights of her sex, but died alas! before she could see the victory which she so well deserved to obtain'.<sup>92</sup>

The way Brightwell contextualises correspondence around the time of Godwin and Wollstonecraft's wedding evidences how powerful the voice of the narrator can be:

In the spring of 1797 we find her [Opie] again in town, accompanying her friend Mrs. Inchbald ... Some unexpected changes too had occurred amongst her acquaintances, since she left them, twelve or fourteen months before. The philosophic Godwin had justified her opinion of him, and proved that his heart was not so wise as his head; he had married Mrs. Wollstonecraft [sic.], a strange incomprehensible

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<sup>91</sup> David Chandler, "Plumptre, Robert (1723-1788)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004) n.p.

<sup>92</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to William Godwin, 11 October 1797, MS Abinger, ms, c.3. Fols. 99-100, Bodleian Lib., Oxford.

woman, whose unhappy existence terminated shortly after this marriage. (59)

Nowhere else has Brightwell presented any evidence of Opie's negative opinion of Godwin, which is here relied upon. Brightwell was clearly confused regarding 'Mrs. Wollstonecraft's' former relationship, and does not seem to have made the connection between the person she mentions here and 'Mrs. Imlay', quoted just before in a letter from Opie to Taylor.<sup>93</sup> Brightwell's opinion of Wollstonecraft is clear, and she includes a letter from Wollstonecraft to Opie 'as it is of painful interest, and curious in more respects than one' (59). Since this letter now only exists in Brightwell's account, the reader cannot verify its authenticity.<sup>94</sup> But as presented, it reveals Wollstonecraft's opinion on Elizabeth Inchbald's 'very rude' conduct; her sadness at the necessity of resigning the acquaintance of the Twisses – 'but my conduct in life must be directed by my own moral principles' – and her desire to remain independent though now married to Godwin (60).<sup>95</sup> Wollstonecraft's letter is clearly meant to shock and dismay readers of Memorials, as she describes being 'conscious of my own purity and integrity' whilst writing about resigning 'a name which seemed to disgrace me', and about her temptation to commit suicide owing to 'an indignant contempt for the forms of a world I should have bade a long good night to, had I not been a mother' (60).<sup>96</sup> Brightwell then saw a need to lift the reader out of the gloomy mood of this letter, writing that 'from this letter, it is cheering to turn to the bright joyous spirit, evinced in the following, which contains the first announcement of the important event to which we alluded just now' (Wollstonecraft and Godwin's wedding) (61).

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<sup>93</sup> The first edition of Memorials included this undated letter (no longer extant) with Opie's correspondence to Taylor from the Treason Trials (48-9), but in the second edition, owing to the subject matter, Brightwell quite rightly moved it to later on in the account. In the second edition this letter therefore immediately precedes the above quotation regarding Opie's visit to London of spring 1797 (57-9).

<sup>94</sup> Ralph M. Wardle, ed., Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1979) 390.

<sup>95</sup> Inchbald had been awkward about securing a box in the theatre for a performance on 19 April 1797, at which she publically confronted Wollstonecraft.

<sup>96</sup> One can only suppose that, at this point (ie. before Godwin's Memoirs of Wollstonecraft revealed the information) that Wollstonecraft had not spoken widely of her two suicide attempts of 1795.

Brightwell's misunderstanding of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Opie is demonstrated by the way she presents both Wollstonecraft's letter to Opie here, and Opie's subsequent letter to Taylor about Wollstonecraft and Godwin's marriage. Wollstonecraft's letter certainly does not portray the female philosopher in her best light or her finest hour, but Brightwell seems to miss the significance of Wollstonecraft's choice of Opie to 'set the matter right' (60) with Inchbald. The way in which Wollstonecraft opened her heart to Opie in this letter suggests a confidence in Opie's continued allegiance, where she cited examples of others whose allegiance she had lost owing to the unconventional nature of her romantic (and sexual) relations. By placing Opie alongside Inchbald in her preface to this letter, on the other hand, Brightwell demonstrates how she wants Opie's allegiances to be interpreted, and attempts to distance her from Wollstonecraft.

Opie's letter to Taylor that follows in Memorials certainly evinces a 'bright joyous spirit', but, since Opie wrote about 'that wonder-creating event' of this marriage in light-hearted terms, she did not provide the condemnation that Brightwell suggested would be appropriate. Opie concluded instead, 'Heigho! what charming things would sublime theories be, if one could make one's practice to keep up with them; but I am convinced it is impossible, and am resolved to make the best of every-day nature' (Memorials 61). This ability in Opie to accept the unconventional relations between the two philosophers (even though she may not wish to emulate them) has a significance that Brightwell does not appear to recognise. When a similar liberality of mind was expressed to Taylor regarding Helen Maria Williams (and Anne Plumptre) in 1801, Brightwell simply censors it (Opie to Taylor [23 March] [1801]).

In this letter, Opie wrote to Taylor in anticipation of the latter's forthcoming visit. According to Brightwell, Opie described herself and Taylor as 'two merry wives' (83), but her actual words were 'two jolly dogs (not to say b—s)' (Opie to Taylor [23 March] [1801]). Brightwell quotes at length from this manuscript letter (82-5), but comparison with the original reveals how much Brightwell has removed. Early in the letter, Brightwell omits a reference to the Plumptre sisters. When they are mentioned again, she omits the whole of the passage presented below, yet gives no indication of any omission: there is not even a line break to indicate the shift in subject matter between the preceding sentence and the one which follows the omitted passage. In this long, indecorous paragraph, Opie also discusses two contemporary writers,

Helen Maria Williams and Anna Letitia Barbauld, before considering the recent launch of her own career with The Father and Daughter (1801):

But to return to Anne P: [Plumptre] - She, and Mr Barthelemi have had (entre nous,) a literary concern together, and this gentleman is about 36, very clever, and in Anne's eyes very like her two old flames Mr Lambert, and Merry – and Mrs Barthelemi is, Anne says, in a consumption. ----- Here is a situation for fair hopes, and young desires! All this I learn from Bell, who, you know, piques herself on her penetration, and chuckles at Anne's entanglement – But Bell says Mr B is not to her taste at all – I have not seen him yet – Ham, is 8 miles from Town, yet the fair pedestrian walks thither and back, untired. – Even the wanton Weavers is forgotten – a left ton lamented to the fair, perfidious Helen Maria [Williams], whom, Mrs Barbauld persists to think immaculate in her virgin purity – and on no other ground than that she writes word that she is still a virgin, and writes like a simple, ingenuous, candid young woman == Ergo, if she were not a virgin, I suppose that Mrs B: concludes she would be so sincere as to say so ----

Anne P: has just been here – but not a word did she say to me about my book – nor ever will I dare say – but she was very friendly, pitying me I dare say for having exposed myself so egregiously – and quite saw now that I am nobody --- -----

(Opie to Taylor [23 March] [1801])<sup>97</sup>

There is a sense here of some taboo which requires censorship, as with the afore-mentioned 'two jolly dogs' alteration. Williams and Barbauld had supported the French Revolution, and were two of the nine female published authors whom Reverend Richard Polwhele dismissed in 'one of the most concerted critiques of late eighteenth-century feminist writers': The Unsex'd Females (1798).<sup>98</sup> Brightwell might have avoided much discussion of them in the Memorials for these reasons, so her omission of a passage where Opie openly – 'and cynically' (Eberle Chastity 249) –

<sup>97</sup> Reproduced with permission from the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz, Brilliant Women: 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Bluestockings (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008) 108, 113.

discussed Williams' virginity is unsurprising. Williams' cohabitation with John Hurford Stone was widely known about, but it seems that Barbauld was not interested in supporting unkind gossip about a fellow female intellectual.<sup>99</sup> Opie entertains such gossip in this letter and expresses with some glee the prospect of a woman's death to make way for the romantic aspirations of a young friend; Brightwell censors accordingly.

The passage referring to Williams' virginity may have been omitted for the reasons mentioned, but Brightwell may also have made her omissions from this letter because of what it already included about Opie's literary works (Opie to Taylor [23 March] [1801]). In Brightwell's transcription (as in the original letter) there are references to Opie's anonymous 1790 novel Dangers of Coquetry, which argues very strongly against lack of virtue in women and provides the pointed moral after the death of the innocent heroine that '*indiscretions* may produce as fatal effects as ACTUAL GUILT, and that even the appearance of *impropriety* cannot be too carefully avoided'.<sup>100</sup> Brightwell also retains nearly all of Opie's references in the letter to the work that had just launched her career, The Father and Daughter, which (like Dangers of Coquetry) concludes with a very pointed moral about female virtue after the death of the heroine (156-157).<sup>101</sup> Although generally uninterested in Opie's works of literature, Brightwell's omissions might suggest some awareness of perceived contradictions in Opie's private and public principles regarding female virtue, and a desire not to juxtapose them as they appear in the manuscript original.

It is precisely this contradiction between Opie's private and public principles which provides the context for interesting and valuable discussions about Opie's early works, and more generally about the contested space in which female writers composed their works at this time. But if we depend on Brightwell's portrayal of an

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<sup>99</sup> William McCarthy, Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 2008) 359.

<sup>100</sup> Amelia Opie, The Father and Daughter, with Dangers of Coquetry, 1801 and 1790, eds Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 256.

<sup>101</sup> Neither of these two works is simple to categorise, in spite of the very pointed concluding morals in both. Dangers of Coquetry has a 'double aspect', and The Father and Daughter was identified even in 1801 as a middle ground between William Godwin's and Hannah More's sexual politics: Shelley King and John B. Pierce, Introduction, The Father and Daughter, with Dangers of Coquetry, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 43, 18. The complexities and ambiguities of both these novels are discussed in Chapter 2.

Opie who was not politically active, who showed no affiliation to her nonconformist surroundings beyond those of 'youthful enthusiasm', and for whom female virtue had to remain paramount, these discussions will be very limited in their scope.

### Opie's early Unitarianism

Much of Opie's early Unitarianism may belong together with her early radicalism, but Brightwell's blanket dismissal of Unitarian faith in Opie encourages misconceptions about Opie's conversion to the Friends. There is indeed evidence to support Opie's early Unitarian faith, which did not fit in with Brightwell's strategy of constructing two-part narratives of Opie's life: Opie relinquished worldly things (including fiction) and adopted religion as though something entirely new in Brightwell's versions.

In the Memoir, Brightwell most pointedly refused to acknowledge the possibility of early Unitarian faith in Opie. When Brightwell considers in the Memoir what may have led Opie to the Quakers, she refers to Opie's mother's influence, without any acknowledgement of the possibility of her father's influence on her faith:

Mrs. Opie has been heard to say, that many of her "relations on the mother's side had been united for generations past to the Wesleyan Methodists;" and I mention this circumstance, because it is delightful to indulge the thought, that the promises of God, made to the children of the righteous, "even to the third and fourth generations," were fulfilled in the present instance. (Memoir 5)

Brightwell reinforces this idea by stating that 'happy, indeed, would it have been for both mother and child, had the seeds of early piety been sown in that tender and susceptible heart; but there is no evidence that such was the case' (5), adding that 'no mention is made of the religious training of her child' (6).

In both the Memoir and Memorials, Brightwell includes what Opie had written to her in 1847, the year Joseph John Gurney died: 'in 1814, I left the Unitarians' (Memorials 173; Memoir 21). Brightwell provides in both accounts a very similar contextualising statement stating that 'it does not appear, indeed, that she was ever

in actual communion with that body' (Memoir 21).<sup>102</sup> Brightwell is right that it is difficult to provide concrete proof of Opie's faith, as it is difficult simply to refute Brightwell's inference that Opie 'had no very fixed opinions on religious subjects, and that the mere circumstances of her birth and education had occasioned her connexion with the Unitarians' (173). John Seed reminds us that 'active participation in a particular ritual tells us little or nothing about the participant's 'belief' or inner state'.<sup>103</sup> Brightwell shows from what she omits, nevertheless, the degree to which she was constructing an account of a Unitarian-free Opie, drawing attention herself to this objective as significant to the way she portrays Opie's religious life in general.

Firstly, the failure to mention at any point that Taylor was a prominent Unitarian clouds Brightwell's portrayal of Opie's early faith. Taylor is such an important character in Brightwell's narrative (and such a close friend of Opie's) that an acknowledgment of her strong Unitarian faith would have immediately supported the idea of Unitarian faith in Opie. In the letter to Taylor from the Treason Trials in which she mentions emigration to America, Brightwell quotes Opie declaring to Taylor 'How changed I am! How I sicken at the recollection of past follies and past connexions, and wish from the bottom of my soul, that I had never associated but with you and others like you' (Alderson Opie to Taylor [1794]; Memorials 45). What these past follies and connections were is unclear – although I speculate about the nature of them in Chapter 2 – but the very notion of this closeness to Taylor indicates a sharing of her belief system.

An omission in an Opie letter to Taylor of 1800 further suggests that Brightwell wanted to prevent the association of Opie with Unitarianism (Opie to Taylor 12 Dec. 1800). Opie indicated that the most important matter she wished to discuss with Taylor was the recent death (and last moments) of Mrs Martineau, but Brightwell transcribed only the more trivial topics. The Martineaus were a prominent Unitarian family and, in omitting from her transcription the very subject that Opie considered

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<sup>102</sup> Both accounts acknowledge that Opie attended the Octagon Chapel (Memorials 173; Memoir 22), but neither connect her chapel-going with any sign of religious belief.

<sup>103</sup> John Seed, "'Secular' and 'Religious'": historical perspectives," Social History 39.1 (2014): 6.

the most important in her letter, Brightwell indicates her willingness to distance Opie from Unitarianism.<sup>104</sup>

When Brightwell writes of Opie's massive conversion revelation in 1814, the biographer carefully orchestrates her narrative to imply that Opie had no significant faith before. She cites letters from Joseph John Gurney (169-70; 171-2) encouraging Opie to think about the welfare of her soul amid the temptations of the London summer season, but Opie's replies are not included, which show a well-established Christian faith and practice. Opie states in the first of these replies that 'no dissipation has yet had power to make me neglect to read the Scriptures every day, or fail to take advantage of every opportunity that has offered itself of religious conversation with a view to instruction'.<sup>105</sup> Opie provides evidence elsewhere of the religious identification that led her to claim 'in 1814, I left the Unitarians'. A letter of April 1815 to William Hayley clearly states where Opie sees her religious affiliation as influenced by the Quaker minister William Forster, but also that her earlier chapel attendance was a question of the heart, not merely a social habit:

Dear W: Forster! how I love him! & I have loved my name ever since he called me 'Amelia' . . . he is *indeed* a person to *make converts* . . . but I remain as I was at present – or rather tho I have left in my heart my *own* chapel, I have *not* yet gained in thought any other.<sup>106</sup>

Brightwell had a dilemma in Memorials in particular. In the later Memoir, the lack of evidence of a significant faith in Opie before she found the Quakers served to reinforce the concept of this miraculous conversion, something with which her devout Christian audience could identify. But to the more general readership of Memorials, Brightwell could not afford to claim that Opie had not previously had any Christian faith at all, since such a suggestion would have alienated her Victorian audience. Brightwell includes in Memorials parts of a letter to Taylor in which Opie asked for

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<sup>104</sup> As I have noted, a further indication may be Brightwell's almost complete excision from her account of references to the Plumptre sisters, who moved from the Anglican Church to worship at the Octagon Chapel.

<sup>105</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 13 June 1814, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/325a, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>106</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 28 April 1815, Povey MS 11. Quoted in MacGregor, 73.

advice in dealing with a dishonest maid (93-95), concluding what the letter demonstrates about Opie's morals (Opie to Taylor [17 May] [1802]):

How well this letter illustrates some of her most strongly marked characteristics! that earnest desire "to reconcile pity with justice;" that readiness to take to herself any blame she might possibly have incurred, as an extenuation of the fault of another, and the lingering hope that the delinquent might be reclaimed. These are traits which those who knew her well will recognize as her very own. (95)

When it is taken into consideration that Opie was writing to a very prominent Unitarian to ask for this advice, the Unitarian tenor of her deliberations seems obvious. The letter (especially in its unedited version) reads like an examination of conscience for Opie, questioning her possible faults or temptations, and what she should do. A most direct plea to Taylor – omitted by Brightwell – at the end of Opie's recounting of this episode demonstrates the importance Opie gives to Taylor's opinion:

I protest that I wonder at my own folly in troubling you on this subject, as my [way] is, I doubt, too clear, and the object I [wish] to save only too unworthy, still, if any loophole for me strike your better judgment, I would willingly [abide] by it – (Opie to Taylor [17 May] [1802])<sup>107</sup>

Brightwell needed to refute the idea of an active Unitarian faith in Opie because she wanted to show how religion came to her suddenly in 1814 when she started attending Quaker meetings. Perhaps Brightwell also felt that if she acknowledged active Unitarian faith in Opie, it would imply a more significant involvement in Dissenting radicalism than the "youthful enthusiasm" Brightwell suggested. Opie wrote on numerous occasions about going to religious services: Brightwell includes, for example, a reference to the Opies going 'church and meeting hunting' (Memorials 73), or Opie's Catholic friend Richard taking her 'to the Catholic

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<sup>107</sup> The square brackets in the text here indicate missing or incomplete words owing to gaps in the manuscript paper from the wax seal.

chapel in King Street' (77). But Brightwell uses this interest as a strike against Opie's possible Unitarian belonging, writing that 'when in London, it is evident, from her letters, that Mrs. Opie went to church, and did not act as a conscientious Unitarian would, under the circumstances, have done' (Memorials 173). Since a very important aspect of Unitarianism is religious tolerance, Brightwell may not have been correct in her assumptions here about how a 'conscientious Unitarian' might behave. She may have been using these assumptions in order simultaneously to acknowledge some slight (required) religious commitment in Opie, and to reject the idea that it was Unitarian. In this way, Brightwell could set the scene for her tale of Opie's complete volte-face from Worldling to Quaker in 1825.

Brightwell's account of John Opie's death in 1807 provides an example of how categorically the Memoir depicts Opie's religious life:

Alas! she [Opie] could not point the eye of the sufferer to the only true source of hope – to the Saviour of sinners. She did not know the only refuge of the soul in the hour of calamity; she had not learned the lesson of believing confidence in Jesus as the way of safety, of holiness, and of peace. (15-16)

Brightwell is correct that the Unitarians would not have referred to Jesus as the Saviour – a point I discuss in Chapter 4 – but that does not mean Opie felt no refuge or comfort from her existing religious beliefs. In a letter Opie wrote to James Northcote on the death of John Opie (his friend and colleague), the resigned widow concluded 'whatever is, is right', quoting Pope's Essay on Man.<sup>108</sup> Years after her official acceptance to the Quakers, Opie would use the same quotation to console with her cousin Eliza Perronet Briggs on the death of a sick child, but she also used this expression to Joseph John Gurney during her religious deliberations in 1815.<sup>109</sup> The Memoir insists that, following Opie's eleven-year process of discernment (1814-1825), 'an entire change in her principles and conduct eventually ensued' (22).

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<sup>108</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to James Northcote, 5 June 1807, Literary File OA-OR, ms, HM1840, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

<sup>109</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Eliza [Alderson] Perronet Briggs, 6 October 1831, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP268, Huntington Lib., San Marino. Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 9 July 1815, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/328, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Extant documentation (including ‘whatever is, is right’) demonstrates, however, that this ‘entire change’ cannot be viewed so categorically, and the insistence that it can impedes a balanced appreciation of how Opie negotiated her Quaker faith alongside her love of fiction. Opie’s attraction to the Quakers stemmed not only from her connections with the Gurney family and other Quakers, but also from an existing Unitarian commitment which was not vastly dissimilar to Quaker principles in many ways.

If this earlier commitment is recognised, the contexts of Opie’s works of the period up to 1825 – which is most of her literary career – can be appreciated in much more meaningful ways, with the shift from Unitarian to Quaker traced in particular in the novels which straddle Opie’s decision to move towards the Quakers in 1814.<sup>110</sup> But if Opie’s Unitarian commitment is ignored as Brightwell ignored it, these contexts lose a lot of their meaning, because the faith of the author (and the way this faith is translated into her characters) cannot be explored.

#### Opie’s doubts preparing to join the Friends and relinquish novels

It is in this regard that Brightwell’s omissions and ‘white lies’ have been most misleading regarding the literary reputation of Opie. Brightwell’s selectivity has encouraged a very narrow reading of this reputation, and her general lack of interest in Opie as a writer (favouring “Opie the Quaker”) has also encouraged misunderstandings about Opie’s commitment to fiction.

Brightwell includes, as though verbatim, parts of a letter of 6 December 1823 to Elizabeth Fry, where Opie discusses the novel in progress she is abandoning in order to join the Quakers officially.<sup>111</sup> After reassuring Fry that she is certainly not intending to complete and publish the work, Opie owns that ‘I have *felt* the sacrifice, but I do not *repent* of it’ (Memorials 190). In the original, Opie continues ‘I must, however, also own, that here I stick – advance I do not – but then I trust, I do not go

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<sup>110</sup> These novels are Temper (1812) and Valentine’s Eve (1816). I discuss them – alongside Unitarian and Quaker belief systems – in Chapter 4.

<sup>111</sup> This novel was The Painter and his Wife, which is no longer extant. The nature of the novel is discussed briefly in Chapter 5.



**Correspondence of Amelia Opie. MS. OP48. Huntington Lib., San Marino.<sup>113</sup>**

In her account, Brightwell initially paraphrases two one-sentence excerpts from this letter (Memorials 191): the first side of the manuscript letter (pictured here) is represented only by these two short quotations, and the rest of this side is not transcribed by Brightwell. In spite of the dense black editing on the original, it is possible to decipher some of Opie's doubts (halfway down the page): '#####go [ago] – for I feel no progress towards taking #up (on this path)##### I have repeatedly, and daily spread my case before Him who can alone help me, humbly praying for direction, I #####'.<sup>114</sup> When Opie's writing is again decipherable – after three lines of dense black editing – the train of thought shifts abruptly to 'join another sect of worshippers'. But close analysis of the second half of those three lines of black editing reveals that the words written over Opie's do not correspond to the originals. The final words over Opie's script here – 'I am very sure' – lead directly on to 'join another sect of worshippers' in Opie's hand. Such alterations demonstrate little effort on the editor's part to fool any potential reader of the manuscript that the objective is anything other than obscuring the original meaning.

The evidence points to Brightwell as the manuscript vandal. The scored-out material and the sentences which immediately surround it do not appear in Brightwell's account, and the simple omission of the defaced material does not leave a coherent thread. The presence of the same style of black editing in letters from Opie to correspondents from different friendship groups in different time periods (Susanna Taylor in 1801 and Elizabeth Fry in 1824, for example) would suggest the availability to the editor of a variety of manuscripts. Where the words written over Opie's are decipherable, they are in line with the portrayal of a whitewashed image of Opie: the final black words in this image, for instance, speak of 'plain duty', and in the middle line of the black editing (ending 'I am very sure'), the word 'glad' can be made out.

The two letters from Opie to Fry cited here provide evidence of how much Brightwell wanted to acknowledge that Opie was only experiencing an acceptable

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<sup>113</sup> Reproduced with permission from the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

<sup>114</sup> I use ##### here to indicate black editing on the original letter.

degree of doubt as she moved towards full acceptance to the Quakers, “explaining” all of Opie’s doubts away as though they were a case merely of “cold feet”. Brightwell’s different treatments in Memorials and the Memoir of the January 1824 letter to Fry illustrate how the biographer viewed this acceptable degree of doubt for, initially, a general audience, and then a more devoutly Christian one. In the former, Brightwell includes Opie’s reticence about whether she even wants to join any particular sect which would take her away from using her God-given talents (Memorials 192). In the Memoir, Brightwell chooses instead to give more of a commentary about the natural feelings Opie is displaying faced with a conversion moment Brightwell likens to St Paul’s (29).

The evidence supporting Opie’s long period of doubts abounds, however: many letters to William Hayley and to Joseph John Gurney show the depths of Opie’s deliberations, but Brightwell does not include them.<sup>115</sup> Only one unremarkable letter to Hayley is featured in Memorials (179-80), and no letters from Opie to Gurney appear within the text. Two letters from the sculptor Pierre-Jean David d’Angers (David) to Brightwell after Opie’s death indicate that Brightwell actively sought collections of letters to inform the biography, so she might have procured correspondence with Hayley or Gurney if this material was not immediately available to her.<sup>116</sup> But the manner in which Brightwell very briefly glosses over Opie’s doubts in Memorials (191-3) – rendered even more succinctly, and less in terms of doubts than ‘trials, hopes and fears’ (29) in the Memoir (28-9) – demonstrates Brightwell’s disinclination to indicate by the inclusion of such letters any significant or drawn-out difficulties Opie might have been having with her conversion.

In the afore-mentioned letter to Fry of 6 December 1823, Brightwell shows a desire to downplay Opie’s doubts about officially joining the Society of Friends, but a

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<sup>115</sup> Hayley Archive, University of Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum. MacGregor refers to Opie’s deliberations in letters to Hayley in her account (72-7); those letters were then the ‘Povey MSS’ which have since been amalgamated into the Fitzwilliam Museum’s collection. The letter I cite here (Opie 1816) is part of the former ‘Povey MSS’. Gurney MSS, Library of the Society of Friends, London. MacGregor refers to Opie’s deliberations in letters to Gurney in her account (72-9; 82-3). I discuss them in Chapter 4.

<sup>116</sup> I speculate, owing to the subject matter and the dates, that these letters in French (catalogued ‘to ?’) are to Brightwell (‘Mademoiselle’): Pierre-Jean David, Letter to ?, 12 April 1854, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP35, Huntington Lib., San Marino; Pierre-Jean David, letter to ?, 12 July 1854, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP36, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

need also to stress that Opie's Quaker commitment was strong enough for her willingly to give up the writing of fiction. Brightwell's failure later to mention Opie's 1840s republications of some earlier works of fiction (and the resulting disapproval of her Quaker mentor Joseph John Gurney) evidences further the biographer's interest in representing Opie's unwavering commitment to the Quaker belief system to which she had subscribed. Yet Opie's reaction to Gurney's letter of disapproval constitutes the clearest indication of Opie's continuing commitment to fiction in spite of her move to the Quakers. Her reply has been aptly described as a 'spirited defence' of her actions (MacGregor 120), and 'an impassioned defence not only of her own work but of fiction in general'.<sup>117</sup> Opie writes:

I never said, because I never thought that works of fiction were never to be read – on the contrary, I believe simple moral tales the very best mode of instructing the young and the poor = else why do the pious of all sects and beliefs, spread tracts in stories over the world – And why did the blessed Saviour teach in parables? -----<sup>118</sup>

Brightwell's refusal to acknowledge this episode of Opie's life may be the reason why Opie's struggles between her Quaker faith and her commitment to fiction have either been simply unknown or ignored. With an acknowledgment of these struggles, it is possible to reinterpret the subtleties and ambiguities of Opie's literary career, and to gain more of an understanding of its significance to literary criticism of women's writing of this period.

### Interpreting Brightwell's Methodology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

When approaching and selecting archival evidence, a biographer must 'look at the particular audiences that the individual was addressing or at the needs of a particular moment which made one kind of representation more appropriate than

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<sup>117</sup> King and Pierce, Introduction, Father, 49.

<sup>118</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 23 February 1844, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/380, Library of the Society of Friends, London. Reproduced with permission from the Library of the Society of Friends, London. I provide the first transcription of this letter in its entirety in Chapter 6.

another'.<sup>119</sup> This reflection seems just as relevant to the appreciation of any resulting biography as to the practical approach to archival material that a biographer might adopt in its composition. Brightwell's Memorials reminds us that it is crucial to heed the particular interests and incentives of a biographer, and to remain aware of how the specific timing of a biography will affect the ideological work it is setting out to do. New biographical interest in Opie has been long overdue, but the prospect of such publications also brings into sharper focus the elements of Brightwell's account that do not fit a modern biographical style.<sup>120</sup> In many respects, Memorials is not a biography at all, but a collection of lengthy extracts from personal documents, more or less accurately transcribed, which would have no place (even corrected) in a modern biography. In posing as a manuscript collection, Brightwell's account makes it all too easy to ignore the powerful voice of the biographer. In failing to notice the biographer, the reader risks forgetting the degree to which any biography is interpretation rather than hard fact, and the wide-reaching impact of such knowledge.<sup>121</sup>

It is necessary to engage with Brightwell's texts in order to study Opie. But that means being as aware as possible of how Brightwell tended to treat her material, and the various incentives she may have had. If Brightwell's editorial tactics aimed merely to clean up Opie's image, however, her methodology is not always clear, and some difficulties may come from a shift for modern-day readers in perceptions of scandal or taboo. The omitted 'literary concern' and 'Williams' passage quoted here may appear salacious to readers now, but, although it does not warrant inclusion in Brightwell's biography, it was not deemed scandalous enough to require the dense black editing employed elsewhere. On the other hand, readers may now consider doubts regarding a religious conversion perfectly normal, especially when the person in question was required to give up the career on which her entire reputation and livelihood were based. Yet Brightwell was desirous to include only the most fleeting reference to Opie's spiritual deliberations in Memorials

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<sup>119</sup> Barbara Caine, Biography and History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 98.

<sup>120</sup> The most recent Opie biography (by Farrant) does not mention any of Brightwell's treatment of archival material on Opie. Roxanne Eberle is currently completing a 'cultural biography' of Opie, but my project promises a more analytical approach to the relationship between Opie's literary career and her Quaker faith.

<sup>121</sup> Paula R. Backscheider, Reflections on Biography (Oxford: OUP, 2001) 3.

(191-3) and the Memoir (28-9), and seems to have subjected Opie's manuscript letters, where such topics occur, to the dense, black defacing seen above.

If this black editing were only employed for such topics, the editor's methodology might seem straightforward. But there are examples of black editing in letters which seem otherwise completely unexceptional. A further letter from Opie to Taylor receives similar treatment to the one to Fry pictured in Figure 1: the original is edited with black ink, sometimes with decipherable words over Opie's (including 'I was very glad').<sup>122</sup> Almost an entire page is omitted in Brightwell's transcription (Memorials 85-6), with no indication of any ellipsis. There is some suggestion in the manuscript letter of information that the editor might be desirous to suppress, but nothing that provides any detail:

Of your motives for telling ##### can possibly  
##### but the expediency of such #doing [daring?] has not  
been# proved by the event, and adds I think to the strength of my former  
convictions on the subject – (22 June 1801)

In this letter, the short but frequent bursts of black editing obscure any understanding of what Opie was conveying on the whole of the first page, where the remainder of the letter appears to cover a very wide range of unremarkable topics in a light, conversational manner.

What is particularly perplexing is why these defaced letters still remain in existence. Why did Brightwell not simply dispose of those letters she saw a need to deface? In defacing them and keeping them, she was not only destroying parts of the letters, but she was leaving the evidence of her transgressions. Perhaps, through a distorted understanding of scholarship, Brightwell saw the need to retain any letters she had quoted from, but was urged by a sense of propriety to protect Opie's reputation by blacking out unflattering content. If this was indeed Brightwell's methodology, how many letters might she have destroyed, having considered them either of no benefit to her biographical account or too damaging to the reputation of its subject to remain even in a private collection?

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<sup>122</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Susanna Taylor, 22 June 1801, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP62, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

## Conclusion

Opie has been a neglected author. With a focus for decades merely on her 1805 novel Adeline Mowbray, owing to its possible connection to the lives and philosophies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, some critical attention has now started to turn to her first novel, The Father and Daughter (1801). Eberle has also recently given some attention to Opie's anonymous novels, after they had been identified as early as 1997.<sup>123</sup> But with a current biography that does not question Brightwell, and no sign yet of any published or digitised letter collections, scholars who are new to Opie will naturally turn to Brightwell's accounts. The wealth of manuscript material in Memorials in particular, especially the only remaining diary and journal excerpts, is too tempting to ignore. Researchers therefore need to know the degree to which (and in what ways) they are not reading a balanced account, yet also why scholarship needs to continue to consult these works. A Brightwell transcription is (arguably) better than no document at all. Memorials and Memoir clearly need to be used delicately, alongside extant materials, and with many caveats, but they necessarily remain useful for Opie criticism. With regard to the doctored archives themselves it may be possible through advanced technologies to uncover buried layers of ink. But my work suggests that it may be more fruitful in the interim to investigate more thoroughly the reasons behind Brightwell's editing. By going back to the archives, scholars can attain (according to the particular correspondent, topics covered, habitual letter lengths, for instance) an idea of what Brightwell tended to omit or alter and in what ways.

Where the sheer amount of manuscripts included has made Brightwell's accounts appealing, closer analysis now encourages caution about the reliability of the information when so much material is being presented. The formation of cultural memory can be distorted when, as with Brightwell's accounts, there is a much

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<sup>123</sup> Roxanne Eberle, ed, The Only Child, by Amelia Opie, Women and Romanticism, 1790-1830, vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 2006). Eberle also mentions Opie's anonymous novel Much to Blame (1824) here. Paula R. Feldman mentioned these novels in 1997: "Amelia Opie," British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1997) 527.

greater focus on forgetting than on remembering.<sup>124</sup> Through this focus on forgetting, Brightwell 'is perhaps most responsible for Opie's reputation of Victorian "respectability"' (Eberle Chastity 249). It is time for that reputation to change.

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<sup>124</sup> Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, eds Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) 97-99.

## Chapter 2

### Opie's Early Works: Flirting with Radicalism

In a word, I do, from my heart & soul, abjure & detest coquetry. If by rivers of tears I could wash it out of your character, I would shed them. But it lies too deep for that. You must get rid of much vanity & much restlessness, or rather perhaps direct these useful propensities to noble projects, before you can effect this change.<sup>125</sup>

A wounded William Godwin made these comments in his response to Opie's letter of condolence following Mary Wollstonecraft's death, a letter which the younger, aspiring author had sent Godwin (after seeking permission from Thomas Holcroft, a mutual friend) a whole month after the tragic event.<sup>126</sup> The perception of Opie herself as a coquette provides a valuable lens through which to analyse her early works, in the context of the political turbulence of the decade they span. This chapter investigates how Opie moved in this decade from a sentimental flirtation narrative to a radical short story and then to a reformist seduction narrative which launched her career: Dangers of Coquetry (1790) and "The Nun" (1795) (both anonymous), then The Father and Daughter (1801). It demonstrates Opie flirting with radicalism as she mixed with all sorts of people in different social groups, experimented with all sorts of literary genres, and became known as a social flirt. It shows that Opie's social flirting was mirrored in her refusal to commit herself to radical action or principles in the 1790s – only publishing anonymously until 1801, for example, and very little – which would have contributed to Godwin's criticism of her coquetry.<sup>127</sup>

There is a wealth of critical works written on the literature of the 1790s and, more recently, specifically on the works of female authors of the period. Yet Opie is rarely a main figure as far as her early works are concerned, and sometimes mentioned only very fleetingly with regard to her radical connections or only with

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<sup>125</sup> William Godwin, letter to Amelia Alderson (Opie), 23 October 1797, The Letters of William Godwin: Volume 1, 1778-1797, ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford: OUP, 2011) 259.

<sup>126</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to William Godwin, 11 October 1797, MS Abinger c.3, fols 99-100, Bodleian Lib., Oxford.

<sup>127</sup> Harriet Guest has argued along these lines: I build on her argument here. I do not agree with all of her analysis or conclusions. Harriet Guest, Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution (Oxford: OUP, 2013) 137.

regard to Adeline Mowbray (1805).<sup>128</sup> One important reason for this omission could be that Opie actually did not publish any prose fiction except “The Nun” (1795) between Dangers of Coquetry in 1790 and The Father and Daughter in 1801. Opie was more interested in poetry and plays in this period. She published some poems anonymously (signed ‘N’) for the radical Norwich periodical The Cabinet, and she wrote at least six plays in the 1790s, but none of them survived.<sup>129</sup> From what we know of Opie’s plays – and it is not much – none of them seem fuelled by a particular urgency to further the radical cause.<sup>130</sup>

Recent criticism has seen more of an acknowledgment of Opie’s The Father and Daughter, but not the anonymous works. Opie’s literary silence in the turbulent 1790s and the general critical focus on Adeline Mowbray (1805) as a *roman à clef* about Wollstonecraft and Godwin have tended to limit discussions of these three earlier works in the context of the 1790s.<sup>131</sup> Dangers of Coquetry has also received little critical attention because it was only recently republished in a new edition with The Father and Daughter.<sup>132</sup> Where the later novel went into nine editions in the nineteenth century, there was only one edition of Dangers of Coquetry, anonymously, in 1790. Both of Opie’s early novels sit firmly within the cult of

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<sup>128</sup> Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke devote a chapter to Opie in their recent collection, but it is owing to Opie’s poetry of the 1790s, and her works of prose fiction are not mentioned in this work: Ann Frank Wake, “Indirect Dissent: “Landscaping” Female Agency in Amelia Alderson Opie’s Poems of the 1790s,” Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution, eds Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 261-289. Amy Garnai, Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2009). Eleanor Ty, Unsex’d Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s (Toronto, Buffalo and London: U of Toronto P, 1993).

<sup>129</sup> David Chandler, ““The Athens of England”: Norwich as a Literary Center in the Late Eighteenth Century.” Eighteenth-Century Studies 43.2 (Winter 2010): 181-182.

<sup>130</sup> Chandler, “Athens”, 181-182. David Chandler, email to the author, 13 November 2012. Opie’s friends, the Plumptre family, hosted a private production of her play “Adelaide” in 1791, with Opie playing the leading role, Anne and Annabella Plumptre further roles, and their brother Robert writing a prologue. No trace remains of the manuscript, which is part of the missing Carr Collection. Clive Jones, “The Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853),” diss., OU, 2001, 12-13.

<sup>131</sup> Susan Staves, “British Seduced Maidens,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 14.2 (1980-1981): 109-134; Eleanor Ty, Empowering the feminine: the narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812 (Toronto and London: U of Toronto P, 1998) 133-144; Katherine Binhammer, The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800 (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) 138-175.

<sup>132</sup> Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, The Father and Daughter, with Dangers of Coquetry, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003). I quote from this edition throughout.

sentiment and sensibility, but they also diverge from certain characteristics, especially since Opie's heroines have not been affected in their sensibility by any particular reading.

This chapter places Opie's early fiction in its 1790s context, examining her choices through the lens of 'Opie the coquette', misogynistic terminology used of Opie that she challenged in her own work. I briefly look at the young, flirtatious Opie, and then examine Dangers of Coquetry (1790), her feminist criticism of coquetry as a misogynistic concept of learned and encouraged behaviour in women, although it concludes with a conventionally socially conservative moral about its dangers. I chart Opie's progression to a radical short story in 1795, as she moved in radical social (including literary) circles, to a reformist novel in 1801 which is being read increasingly as a feminist novel.<sup>133</sup> Opie's literary development in this period is considered in the context of the sentimental tradition in which she planted her narratives; her personal flirtation; her social radicalism; her Quaker friends – especially Elizabeth (Gurney) Fry – and her marriage to John Opie (in 1798). Opie flirted with radicalism in this decade, moving in radical circles, but not committing herself to radical causes through her publications. She did not see as urgent a need (as Wollstonecraft or Mary Hays, for example) for dramatic changes in a society which is responsible for all evils, but presented her radicalism with lighter brush strokes on a smaller canvas, aware all the while of literary conventions and her own reputation. She found a middle ground, acting as a reformist, not a reactionary in The Father and Daughter.

#### Background in Norwich Dissent: *Dangers of Coquetry*

Opie's connections with radical Dissent through the Octagon Chapel and its minister William Enfield in particular formed the background to her early career. She published her first novel anonymously from within the supportive environment of Enfield's literary circle. When Opie was 15, her mother died, and Opie became mistress of her father's household. She was always at his side and, through him,

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<sup>133</sup> Ty, Empowering, 133-144; Binhammer, 138-175.

mixed with the liberal Norwich society of the day.<sup>134</sup> The privileged place Opie held as a young, protected woman in society in the mid-1790s, and the liberties thereby afforded her have not gone unnoticed, and I build on Guest's analysis in particular after examining Dangers of Coquetry.<sup>135</sup> Opie experienced the fun of being admired and flattered – she was known as the 'Belle of Norwich' – and fell in love at 16, we do not know with whom.<sup>136</sup> Her heroine in Dangers of Coquetry shares some of Opie's own traits: she is a motherless heroine who is easily flattered. The sort of self-examination that Louisa regularly puts herself through (188), and which does not last, is mirrored in a letter from Opie to her friend Susanna Taylor about her earlier behaviour, as Opie wrote 'How changed I am! How I sicken at the recollection of past follies and past connexions, and wish from the bottom of my soul, that I had never associated but with you and others like you'.<sup>137</sup> These principles do not seem to have lasted in Opie either. I think that one of Opie's points in this novel is that light flirtation is not something that actually should matter overly much, and that society's encouragement of coquettes is more of a problem than the actual coquettish behaviour.

Opie's anonymous Dangers of Coquetry has excited very little critical interest; Brian Corman's remark that Opie 'wrote her novels after the excesses of the French Revolution were well known' is typical of how criticism has neglected this work.<sup>138</sup> Dangers of Coquetry only came out in one edition, with what would become the Minerva Press in 1790. Opie's decision to publish with W. Lane's popular press indicates her awareness of where a young author might successfully place an

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<sup>134</sup> Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie, selected and arranged from her Letters, Diaries and Other Manuscripts, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander; London: Longman, Brown, & Co., 1854) 31.

<sup>135</sup> Kenneth R. Johnston, "Whose History? My Place or Yours?: Republican Assumptions and Romantic Traditions," Romanticism, History, Historicism, ed. Damian Walford Davies (New York and London: Routledge, 2009) 97; Guest, 124-125; Clive Jones, 17.

<sup>136</sup> Margaret Eliot MacGregor, Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend (Menasha (WI): The Collegiate Press, 1933) 9. King and Pierce, eds, Collected Poems, xliii.

<sup>137</sup> Amelia (Alderson) Opie, letter to Susanna Taylor, [1794], Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP59, Huntington Lib., San Marino. Guest argues that this letter indicates Opie's lack of political commitment (137), but I think the context more likely refers to Opie's earlier coquetry.

<sup>138</sup> Brian Corman, Women Novelists Before Jane Austen: The Critics and Their Canons (Toronto, Buffalo and London: U of Toronto P, 2008) 227. Opie had acknowledged the work as hers after the success of The Father and Daughter.

anonymous sentimental novel.<sup>139</sup> Her very conscious decision to publish Dangers of Coquetry: A Novel, and not to shy away from the term which she would very clearly refrain from using in The Father and Daughter, also indicates how criticism of the novel as a form would thrive in the 1790s.

Dangers of Coquetry concerns a wife, Louisa Conolly (then Mortimer), who remains innocent of actual sexual transgression, but whose coquetry (encouraged by a bitter female “mentor” Mrs Belmour) leads to misunderstanding. Her husband’s death in a duel is the result, swiftly followed by her own death. Opie’s quotation from Catherine J. Gemmat’s 1762 poem ‘A Lady’s Resolve’ on the frontispiece of the novel amply indicates her condemnation of that standard target of eighteenth-century satire, the coquette:

On each fond fool bestowing some kind glance,  
Each conquest owing to some loose advance:  
Thus vain COQUETTES affect to be pursued,  
And think they’re virtuous, if not grossly lewd. (185)<sup>140</sup>

Joseph Addison and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were typical proponents of the misogynistic coquette theme.<sup>141</sup> Rousseau had argued that ‘woman is a coquette by profession’ (Emile 329) and, since ‘woman is specially made for man’s delight’ (Emile 322), coquettishness was therefore a law of nature.<sup>142</sup> The most recent critical commentary of Dangers of Coquetry acknowledges that the novel does not follow the traditional late eighteenth-century criticism of the coquette (King and Pierce Introduction Father 42-48). Where the anonymous Memoirs of a Coquet: or the History of Miss Harriot Airy (1765) presented the coquette as a stock figure with

<sup>139</sup> The Minerva Press became increasingly ill reputed, being connected for many with the trash of circulating libraries, but it did not yet have this slur when Opie published Dangers of Coquetry. King and Pierce note that ‘as the Minerva Press, Lane’s printing house became a by-word in some circles for less than stellar literary products’ (eds, Father 42).

<sup>140</sup> King and Pierce quote Catherine J. Gemmat’s poem in its entirety in an appendix (eds, Father, 332-333).

<sup>141</sup> Joseph Addison, The Spectator 281 (22 Jan. 1712): n.p. Quoted in King and Pierce, eds, Father, 330-332; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile, 1762, ed. P. D. Jimack, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, and Rutland (VT): Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1992) 329.

<sup>142</sup> Gillian Brown, “Consent, Coquetry, and Consequences,” American Literary History 9.4 (Winter 1997): 628.

whom the reader could not sympathise and who could not be redeemed, Opie presented complexities in her novel through the sympathetic portrayal of the heroine (45). This representation of a sympathetic coquette is similar to Eliza Haywood's heroine in The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless (1751), but Opie's novel stands on the cusp of a change in liberal representations of female sexuality, as French Revolutionary literary debates threatened such representations. Opie seems to be evoking her own 'dormant inclinations to coquetry' (227) when she writes about Louisa, but Opie's deft treatment of the theme in the novel would indicate that she considered herself (as I do) more of a social flirt than a coquette. In this novel, Opie pointed out that the term 'coquette' was one used too freely to condemn female behaviour. She criticised the misogynistic concept of coquetry, with its double standards, where 'innocent flirtation' from a woman (as one review considered it) could have such drastic consequences.<sup>143</sup>

Another target for Opie in this novel was overly sentimental characters. The rich and attractive Louisa is established in chapter one as 'a finished coquette' (187), but 'still, however, Louisa had sensibility' (187), and Opie quotes Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" in order to emphasise Louisa's kindness and fellow feeling. Opie was critical of excesses of sensibility in both men and women, as Wollstonecraft was in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), and in her review of Charlotte Smith's Emmeline.<sup>144</sup> Indications of the cult of sensibility abound in Dangers of Coquetry in the language and syntax, but most especially in the weeping, swooning, and fits of nerves. Sensibility exists in both the women and the men. It is a positive attribute where benevolence and compassion are concerned, as well as frequent religious reflections from the heroine, Louisa, but a negative force which impedes successful communication and leads to rash actions. The narrator highlights Louisa's habit of regularly reviewing her conduct and resolving to improve her behaviour (188), and the early death of her mother is indicated as the reason Louisa does not have the protection and advice she needs to curb her coquettish behaviour (188). Although Opie would, most likely, not have wanted to invite parallels between Louisa and herself, there is a similarity with Opie here. Louisa's regrets that she would enter

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<sup>143</sup> Rev. of Dangers of Coquetry, The European Magazine, and London Review 17 (May 1790): 352. Quoted in King and Pierce, eds, Father, 263.

<sup>144</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, rev. of Emmeline, by Charlotte Smith, Analytical Review 1 (July 1788): 327-333.

the metropolis already a married woman (209) echo Opie's comments that marrying John Opie would unfortunately mean her privileged position in society and wide social circle might be compromised (*Brightwell Memorials* 62).

Desire for admiration wins over Louisa's reflections on her conduct, reflections which are not expressed in religious terms early on (188), but which become increasingly religious, with comments regarding the guidance of Heaven becoming ever more frequent. Under the malicious influence of Mrs Belmour, Louisa continues to lavish attention on Lord Ormington, but no more than he lavishes attention on her. Louisa does not reflect before she acts on the possible consequences of her behaviour, but she is given no positive guidance in this matter. Borrowing money threatens her reputation, until it is revealed that she used the money to philanthropic ends, which means that any threat to her reputation is swiftly forgotten (236).

When Mortimer is called away, Louisa promises him she will not attend a party at Almack's, but after many attempts, Mrs Belmour convinces her to go. Louisa's insight at this point is revelatory, with the narrator commenting that 'she began to dress, talking incessantly all the time, lest silence should lead her to think, and thought prove an enemy to the pleasures she anticipated' (244). At Almack's, the narrator observes again that 'Louisa forgot reserve was more necessary in the absence of her husband', and that she was 'too lively to think' (245). But when Lord Bertie describes her as an 'infernal coquette' within earshot, pointedly looking at her with indignation, Louisa finally realises her errors, saying to herself 'mean, despicable Louisa! to seduce a lover from his intended bride, and then glory in a conquest that disgraces me!' (245). Since someone has finally named her behaviour so negatively, she recognises it for its destructive potential, where she had previously seen it for the innocent flirtation it might have remained if she had been guided more appropriately.

Haywood's Betsy Thoughtless was a sympathetic coquettish heroine who ended well, and Betsy makes a similar observation to Louisa's. Betsy had considered marriage an infatuation, 'as if it were not a greater pleasure to be courted, complimented, admired, and addressed by a number, than be confined to

one, who from a slave becomes a master'.<sup>145</sup> But she then rationally considered her own shortcomings in behaving coquettishly as a married woman:

“Good God!” cried she, “what infatuation possess’d me! – Am I not married? ... The vanities of my virgin state ... might plead some excuse; – but nothing now can be urged in my defence for persevering in them. – The pride of subduing hearts is mine no more; – no man can now pretend to love me but with the basest and most shameful views ... I knew the character of a coquet both silly and insignificant, yet did everything in my power to acquire it.” (557-558)

Louisa only finally understands that these men ‘with the basest and most shameful views’ are the only ones in whom she might spark interest, but previously she has considered her behaviour to be ‘innocent’, as did the reviewer in The European Magazine (352). This belief in her innocence is partly sustained owing to Mrs Belmour’s encouragement, but also because it is made very clear in the novel that Louisa has no intention of being unfaithful to Mortimer, something that even Mrs Belmour understands (227-228). Where Louisa considers her behaviour wrong, it is with regard to hurting or insulting Lady Jane Bertie, Lord Ormington’s intended bride, not to teasing Lord Ormington. Louisa believes that her behaviour towards Lord Ormington is merely vain mutual appreciation, nothing more than recognition by the other that their attractiveness is something to be acknowledged. Louisa is happily married and well aware of Mortimer’s opinions of coquetry, so since no one (Mortimer, most especially) tells her that her behaviour is wrong, she continues oblivious to the gravity of what she is doing. Mortimer’s failings on this score are shortly discussed, especially how he compares to a contemporary hero – Dorriforth in Inchbald’s A Simple Story – in his lover / mentor role.

After Mortimer's death in the fateful duel, Louisa's repeated perusal of his final letter reveals this heroine’s habitual religious practices. Opie writes that, ‘forgetting the firm but humble hope which had till then, distinguished her devotions, she persisted in thinking herself hateful in the sight of heaven’ (254-5). Despite Caroline's

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<sup>145</sup> Eliza Haywood, The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless, 1751, ed. Christine Blouch (Peterborough: Broadview, 1998) 488.

attempts to make Louisa aware of her many good actions, ‘despair had possession of her soul, and her prayers ended in expressions of terror’ (255). It is Mrs Nelson, whom Louisa had saved from destitution, who then attempts to reassure her that ‘you are so good Heaven will spare you to administer comfort to the unfortunate’ (256). Louisa knows, however, that she is to die, and the narration of her death is steeped in religious significance:

Louisa herself said her last agony was approaching, then supporting herself upon the arm of Caroline, and begging she would comfort her poor father, she raised herself up in an attitude of prayer, and extending her hand towards Mrs. Nelson and her child, while a gleam of satisfaction was visible in her countenance, “Father of Mercies, let *these* plead for me,” she exclaimed, then sunk back exhausted on her pillow, and expired. (256)

Louisa’s close friend Caroline Egerton is hailed as a ‘prudent, truly generous’ figure whom, the narrator suggests, Louisa would be well advised to emulate (189). Caroline’s absence from most of the narrative means that Louisa has to negotiate the metropolis without the guide and example of her good friend. But, in spite of Caroline’s virtue, the novel does not always portray her favourably. An important subplot concerns Caroline, who cannot marry her beloved (Fitzaubrey) because her father is ruined. This subplot leads to comparisons being implied between Louisa’s (possibly excessive) sensibility, and Caroline’s lack of it, or lack of a sufficient amount of it, as Caroline sees only obstacles when Fitzaubrey wants to marry her despite her financial ruin (215). Caroline may be virtuous, but she also appears unfeeling, which makes it even more difficult to view her as a character who is clearly superior to Louisa.

But it is in comparison to Mrs Belmour that Louisa’s positive qualities can really be seen. Louisa meets Mrs Belmour in London. Since she is a former neighbour of Louisa’s family, and Louisa ‘had a great deal to learn’ in the new London environment (218), she does not see Mrs Belmour’s manipulative character. The latter is now ‘a fashionable character’ (219): ‘in short, she, Proteus like, assumed all characters, while she kept her own concealed from every one’ (221). Mrs Belmour uses Louisa to entice Lord Ormington away from Lady Jane Bertie:

'she marked her as the future tool of her malice and revenge' (225). The narrator shows Louisa's better judgement, but Mrs Belmour's deft manipulation is too powerful (243-244), and it fuels Louisa's demise.

Although Louisa is not seduced, the shift in representations of seduced women in literature of the 1780s and 1790s demonstrates why Opie could not redeem her coquettish heroine. In Emmeline (1788), Smith had, like Haywood, depicted a fallen woman – Lady Adelina Trelawny, a minor character – who would be redeemed. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, there was a perceptible shift towards more sympathetic portrayals of seduced women and clearer recognition of women's rights to erotic agency (Binhammer 107). Emmeline is a product of a very particular point in time: Smith shows through Lady Adelina that distinctions between good and evil in women were much more complicated than the issue simply of sexual chastity (Ty Unsex'd 123). In the 1780s, some writers were allowing their seduced heroines to be redeemed – Clara Reeve's Sukey Jones (The Two Mentors (1783)) and Robert Bage's Kitty Ross (Barham Downs (1784)) are cited examples (Staves 113) – and the high praise for Emmeline at the time demonstrates a certain 1780s liberalism.<sup>146</sup> But this expression of liberalism was something that Smith was not willing to repeat in Celestina (1791) only three years later, which may indicate how attitudes were already changing. Placed in between the two, Dangers of Coquetry might be considered to be on the cusp of a change in literature in the degrees of passion that a heroine might be allowed to demonstrate and yet be redeemed.

Opie cannot redeem Louisa, but this heroine is drawn as a sympathetic victim rather than a manipulator of others. Louisa's coquetry is put into context on the one hand by the constant virtue of Caroline Egerton, and by the vicious manipulations of Mrs Belmour on the other. This latter character is the irredeemable coquette that Louisa never becomes, and the reader is aware from all of Louisa's positive qualities that she would never become such a character. Where the coquette had invariably been painted as a victimizer of others, Opie carefully makes her coquettish heroine a victim of the culture that has encouraged her behaviour, as Opie draws a distinction

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<sup>146</sup> Jane Spencer, The Rise of the Woman Novelist: from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 128.

between the innocent flirtation of Louisa and the self-centred social manouvering of the experienced coquette, Mrs Belmour (King and Pierce Introduction Father 45-47).

Part of this culture also comes from the over-sentimental hero who is a completely unreliable mentor for Louisa. She meets him very early on in the novel as a possible suitor, but he has established views on coquettes, and Louisa knows her propensity for coquetry:

A coquette in your sex is, in my opinion, as detestable as a libertine in ours, and has certainly less excuse for her fault than the latter can boast. The libertine has passion for his excuse, and those who know the force of it, in the bosom of youth, should make some allowances for its effects; but in cool blood to take pains to destroy the happiness of others, to wound an inexperienced heart for the sake of wounding it, as an unwhip'd urchin torments a worm for the pleasure of seeing it writhe about in torture; to seduce lovers from their affianced brides, husbands from their wives, and all to gratify a thirst for admiration, and a despicable vanity, with but a grain of passion to plead her excuse; this is the conduct of a finished coquette, and this is the character tho' gilded over by beauty and accomplishments, which will ever deserve and ever meet my abhorrence! (197-8)<sup>147</sup>

Mortimer paints this picture in order that Louisa recognise herself and be humbled; he is successful, but then decides to marry her not only because he is wilfully blinded by her sensibility, but also because he arrogantly (and blindly) views the marriage as his triumph over her coquetry. This tendency in Mortimer to forget Louisa's coquetry whenever her sensibility distracts him from it is a frequent occurrence, and, after they are married, it leads him repeatedly to fail to check Louisa's coquettish behaviour.

Mortimer hopes Louisa can uphold her resolutions not to be influenced by the approbation of the ton, but he does not voice his concerns (218). Louisa misreads

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<sup>147</sup> In presenting a hero who believes that women do not feel passion as men do, Opie hinted towards (but did not overtly address) this double standard, which would be tackled by Inchbald in A Simple Story (1791) and by Hays in Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), for instance.

the behaviour both of Mortimer and Lord Ormington in society, but, although Mortimer is upset by her attitude, he does not check her on it. It is only through her own self-examination that she comes to see how unreasonable she has been (230). Again, Mortimer fails to comment, and his 'want of firmness' (232) and fear that she will lose affection for him prevent him from acting. When Louisa has got into debt, Mortimer is so moved by the poor man she helped (Mr Nelson), and the sensibility of all involved, that he fails, again, to act. The narrator reveals:

Had Mortimer then had the power to keep his resolution and tell Louisa of her faults, while her heart was softened, and exalted by the glow of self-approving virtue, he might have cured her of her indiscretions, perhaps for ever; but, delighted with her sensibility, and feeling his whole soul melted into tenderness, he could not bear the thoughts of giving her pain, when she had just been affording him such triumph and satisfaction. (240)

When Louisa has gone to Almack's, having sworn she would not, and Mortimer has committed himself to a duel, the two protagonists display extreme examples of sensibility, as neither can articulate what they have done (250). Their failure to communicate leads to Mortimer's death in the unnecessary duel (254), and then to Louisa's death (following a miscarriage) a few days later (256).

It is the surfeit of sensibility in the male characters in this novel, rather than the female, that leads to the tragic denouement, which comes about from Mortimer's inability to check Louisa's behaviour – finding her sensibility too enchanting – and to his haste (and over-exaggeration) in demanding a duel. Opie, like Goldsmith and many others, satirized the inability of the oversensitized man to cope with the problems presented by the "world".<sup>148</sup> Opie, in this novel, used the excessive sensibility in the men (and the attractiveness to men of sensibility in women) to illustrate the dangers of a combination of faulty female education with an ill-equipped and over-sentimental male mentor, which Smith and Inchbald addressed in contemporaneous works (Emmeline (1788) and A Simple Story (1791) respectively).

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<sup>148</sup> G. J. Barker-Benfield, The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1992) 142. See also Alex Wetmore, Men of Feeling in Eighteenth-Century Literature: Touching Fiction (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Frances Burney had struck the perfect balance with Orville in Evelina (1751) because he relinquished his position as moral guide for Evelina at just the right moment in that earlier novel (Spencer Rise 157). But Burney paints Evelina as a heroine who is unlikely to fall in any case, the character recognising herself after her initiation to London that 'I am too inexperienced and ignorant to conduct myself with propriety in this town, where everything is new to me, and many things are unaccountable and perplexing'.<sup>149</sup> Louisa, on the other hand, looks forward to the excitement of London and all that it might offer, in spite of her lack of experience. She expresses concern that she will 'make her first entrance into the dangerous scenes of high life' (216) without her virtuous friend Caroline, but unlike Evelina, it is clear that the later heroine will simply launch herself into society and hope for the best.

In naming her hero 'Mortimer', Opie would have put her readers in mind of Mortimer Delvile, the hero of a more recent Burney novel, Cecilia (1782). Cecilia has the misfortune to fall in love with Mortimer, a character who is too sentimental to act in her best interests, and the same can be said of Louisa in Opie's novel.<sup>150</sup> A clue to the devilish nature of Burney's Mortimer is in his surname, and, whilst Opie's Mortimer may not be that bad, he is not very good for Louisa either. Mortimer Delvile appears to have killed Monckton in a duel, leading Cecilia almost to death after a bout of insanity. Although the outcome of the duel is significantly different in Dangers of Coquetry, Opie invites parallels through the naming of her character with Burney's similarly ineffectual one, and through a similarly pointless duel.

Of contemporaneous writing, Dangers of Coquetry finds most similarities with Inchbald's A Simple Story (1791). Louisa shares 'the rather paradoxical combination of sensibility and pride' that Miss Milner displays, and Dorriforth fails Miss Milner in the later story in a very similar way to Mortimer in Opie's novel.<sup>151</sup> Opie brings her story to an abrupt tragic end without giving the next generation the opportunity that Inchbald provides to make up for the mistakes of their elders, or perhaps to dwell instead (with the ambiguous ending) on the impossibility of such a redemption with

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<sup>149</sup> Fanny Burney, Evelina, 1778, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1982) 48.

<sup>150</sup> Janice Farrar Thaddeus, Frances Burney: A Literary Life (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000) 69.

<sup>151</sup> Gary Kelly, The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805 (Oxford: OUP, 1976) 68.

society and societal values as they are. The similarities in the works indicate many of the ways in which Dangers of Coquetry is working with common themes: that of the motherless heroine with a faulty degree of education; the coquette; the damaging effects of adultery (or the suspicion of it); the failings of mentors and monitors, and London courtship themes, all couched in a sentimental style.<sup>152</sup> But Dangers of Coquetry only touches on many themes that A Simple Story would handle in more depth and more adeptly, especially where Miss Milner's scandalously inappropriate passion for Dorriforth is concerned. It also works in its second half with the popular father/daughter relationship that Opie would make the focus of her 1801 novel instead of extending her narrative in this earlier novel.

The ending of Opie's 1790 novel is much less ambiguous, although the message of the novel as a whole is unclear. Opie was criticising the misogynistic concept of the coquette, and the society double standard it invited, encouraging coquetry to be viewed as a rite of passage for women. Rousseau's concept of the coquette in Emile as a woman unable to tell the truth does not fit Louisa:

Woman here is imagined as always desiring and her resistance therefore understood as always feigned and, indeed, always provocative. For Rousseau, the truth about a woman can be determined, but a woman herself never tells the truth. (Brown 629)

Opie specifies, by having the narrator reveal that Louisa has no ideas whatever of being unfaithful to Mortimer (227-228) that Louisa is indeed being truthful. It is clear to her (and, she imagines, clear to Lord Ormington) that, as a married woman, she has no sexual interest in any man except her husband. By portraying Louisa as a sympathetic coquettish character, Opie writes in terms which

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<sup>152</sup> Miss Milner is sent to 'a Protestant boarding school', but leaves 'with merely such sentiments of religion, as young ladies of fashion mostly imbibe' (Inchbald 4); her father's concerns in his declining health are to improve her religious understanding only, and it is clear that her education has been no broader than the usual 'endless pursuits of personal accomplishments' (5) a girl can be presumed to possess. In her discussion of Smith's Celestina (1791), Loraine Fletcher comments that 'the duel and Celestina's alarms at Ranelagh resemble a dramatic scene at Vauxhall in Burney's Cecilia'; Louisa's visits to Ranelagh (225) and Almack's (244), leading directly to her husband's suspicions of infidelity, and his duel, indicate how Opie's contemporaneous novel incorporates these concepts. Loraine Fletcher, ed, Celestina, by Charlotte Smith, 1791 (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004) 11.

echo her contemporary Catherine Macaulay, agreeing that convention creates the coquette:

When the sex have been taught wisdom by education, they will be glad to give up indirect influence for rational privileges; and the precarious sovereignty of an hour enjoyed with the meanest and most infamous of the species, for those established rights which, independent of accidental circumstances, may afford protection of the whole sex.<sup>153</sup>

Louisa has not had the benefit of education, and Mortimer fails to address that deficiency, but Opie also implies in the novel that coquetry is a rite of passage for the uneducated woman. A wise family friend (and widow), Mrs Mordaunt, questions Mortimer on his ‘detestation’ of coquetry at the beginning of the novel, prompting him to launch into his scathing criticism (above) of the finished coquette. Her remarks point to society’s (and men’s) errors in encouraging the coquette in general, and indicate Opie’s inclination to portray coquettish behaviour as something to which young women are essentially coerced:

You are a strange young man ... your sex, in this age, seem to idolize coquetry, for when were they more attentive to ours? Search throughout the beau monde, and you will scarcely see a woman that is not versed in every art of it. Surely, then, you ought to excuse an error your indulgence has encouraged? (197)

At Ranelagh, everyone knows Louisa and Mortimer are married, and the handsomest couple, but, as far as Lord Ormington is concerned, ‘to attach such a woman as Louisa was described to be, and rival such a man as her husband, was a task worthy of him’ (226). Opie addresses massive double standards here, since no “worthiness” could ever be associated with a woman having such designs. But Louisa and Lord Ormington exchange looks of admiration and ‘this look awoke all her dormant inclinations to coquetry’ (227): they speak their own language in looks.

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<sup>153</sup> Catherine Macaulay, Letters on Education. With Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects (London: C. Dilly, 1790) 215. Quoted in Brown (632) and in King and Pierce, eds, Father, 338.

Yet the narrator reveals that even Mrs Belmour knows 'Louisa's heart was entirely in possession of her husband, and that a love of admiration, which she had too long indulged to be able to subdue it without great resolution, was the only feeling that could lead her to indulge the addresses of any man' (227-228). Where Mrs Belmour sees that Louisa's virtue is 'impregnable' (228), Lord Ormington clearly sees the possibility of an attachment.

Once Mortimer has fallen in the pointless duel, and Louisa has died, Opie provides a concluding moral:

For the perusal of the thoughtless and the young, is this tale given to the world – it teaches that *indiscretions* may produce as fatal effects as ACTUAL GUILT, and that even the appearance of *impropriety* cannot be too carefully avoided. (256)

Mortimer's speech against coquetry was hailed by one review as one of the novel's most important messages (European 352), and all three of the contemporary reviews suggested that this work fitted a socially conservative, sentimental model, citing the novel's closing moral to summarise the main message.<sup>154</sup> One of these reviews did, however, acknowledge a 'double aspect' in the work, since 'while it attributes the most mischievous and dreadful consequences to a little innocent coquetry in the character of a *wife*, it shews them to have proceeded from an idle, ridiculous, and unfounded jealousy on the part of her husband' (European 352). Opie was making the point that there had been no 'ACTUAL GUILT', and that Louisa's behaviour could indeed be considered as no more than 'innocent flirting'.

Opie was criticising the double standard here, where a libertine suffers no ignominy for the loss of his chastity, but a woman may not even appear to have approached the loss of hers. Even before meeting Wollstonecraft or Godwin, Opie's work was analogous to the reformist spirit literary radicals were embracing. In its sympathetic portrayal of coquetry, Opie, who would be considered a coquette

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<sup>154</sup> Rev. of Dangers of Coquetry, Critical Review 70 (Sept. 1790): 339. Quoted in King and Pierce, eds, Father, 263; Rev. of Dangers, European, 352; Rev. of Dangers, English, 234. King and Pierce note that Gary Kelly followed this interpretation (43): Gary Kelly, English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830 (Harlow: Longman, 1989) 29.

herself, tackled the abuse of power over women by society and by patriarchal values.

### The Radical Literary Scene, and Opie's "The Nun"

At the time when Opie was writing Adelaide (1791), and performing it in a private theatrical, other writers were really getting involved in the political (and radical) literary environment, as their liberties became steadily more limited. In 1792, Wollstonecraft published A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, the impact of which would most strongly be felt after her death, but which contributed to waves of Radical thought in the 1790s. Smith openly presented her radical principles and her support for the French Revolution in the same year with Desmond, but its publication was unfortunately timed, as the political shift towards the Terror followed shortly afterwards.<sup>155</sup> Also in 1792, a royal proclamation against sedition forced a clampdown on radical expression that was further encouraged by the Gagging Acts of 1795. Owing to William Pitt's enthusiastic involvement in trying to weed out freethinkers, this period has been referred to as Pitt's "Reign of Terror" (Johnston 81). It is in response to such a climate that Opie's guarded response to the French Revolution – yet her flirtation with the principles – might be gauged.

An example of the need for prudence at this time may be found in Inchbald's suppressed play The Massacre (1792), which would only be published after Inchbald's death. Inchbald found advisors in Godwin, Holcroft and George Hardinge (a lawyer) who counselled her that the political content of her play set in seventeenth-century France might be too provocative.<sup>156</sup> Opie's decision to publish "The Nun", a radical short story, in 1795 might be compared to Inchbald's decision to write but suppress The Massacre.

Opie was certainly interested in achieving literary fame from early on, but her decision to publish anonymously until 1801 indicates her reservations about possible notoriety. After the private showing of Opie's Adelaide (1791), Opie's dramatic aspirations continued. She wrote to Godwin on 12 February 1796 that it is the 'first

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<sup>156</sup> The same advisors did, however, accept Nature and Art for publication in 1796: Shawn Lisa Maurer, ed. Nature and Art, by Elizabeth Inchbald, 1796 (Peterborough: Broadview, 2005) 15.

wish of my heart to write a good play, and have it performed at either house', and Godwin's diary provides much evidence of him reading her plays, although no trace remains of any of them.<sup>157</sup> Opie's public political involvement and her attendance at the Treason Trials in 1794 has already been considered in Chapter 1, and the focus in this chapter is more on Opie's radical literary contacts. Godwin, whom Opie had met on 26 June 1794 at her father's house, was a very influential radical contact, and he advised her on her works, as did Holcroft. 1794 was a significant year for Opie, and the events on which "The Nun" may well have been based took place in that year.

"The Nun" is a short story that Opie published under the pseudonym 'N' in The Cabinet in 1795 which made her radical views very clear, although obviously only to those who were aware of Opie's identity as 'N'.<sup>158</sup> The content of "The Nun" would indicate that it was written in or after July 1794: both the narrator (an Englishman) and the French nun are fleeing Bruges as the French armies approach (Chandler "Athens" 181). It transpires that the nun sympathises with the French armies. Both characters express support for the French Revolution, and the reader is evidently expected to agree. The nun argues:

The tyranny of aristocracy and courts is hateful in the sight of God; for the groans of millions, victims to their power, rise up in evidence against them, and though this generation be doomed to suffer for the crimes of the last, the blood that is now shed will purchase the happiness of thousands yet unborn. – Well then, let me suffer in silence, and take refuge from selfish complaint, in the glow of universal benevolence. (142)

In her farewell to the Englishman, she urges him:

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<sup>157</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to William Godwin, 12 February 1796, MS Abinger c.3, fols 20-1, Bodleian Lib., Oxford. On 2 July 1794, Godwin was reading Opie's 'Tiberius Gracchus', and in 1796, there are two mentions to 'A A's comedy', on 30 March and 9 April. William Godwin, The Diary of William Godwin, eds Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy, and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010).

<sup>158</sup> All of Opie's poems in The Cabinet are published under this pseudonym, and Chandler speculates that readers in Norwich would probably have known the identities of the contributors. David Chandler, email to the author, 19 Nov. 2012.

Should you ever be tempted to execrate the French revolution on account of the partial misery which it has occasioned, think on the victim of that government which it destroyed, whose sorrows you yourself have witnessed, and forgive it for the sake of SISTER ANGELINA. (143)

The events that might have inspired this story took place on 17 July 1794, when fourteen Carmelite nuns from Compiègne (near Paris) and two servants from their nunnery were guillotined in Paris, after the convent had been attacked.<sup>159</sup> The idea that Opie was identifying with Catholic victims of the Terror at this point reveals her radical ideologies. At a time when it was completely appropriate to state that French Revolutionary ideas had gone too far, Opie instead had her heroine stress that she would never have been free from oppression if the French Revolution had not taken place. The tale also suggests that Opie was guilty of toning down the Terror, in which the real nuns died, where Opie's fictional nun merely flees, and somewhat implausibly praises the revolution that has displaced her. There is a hint of sensationalism here, evocative of Helen Maria Williams's Letters from France (1790) which made Williams, in England, 'an example of an English woman corrupted by the Revolution'.<sup>160</sup> Opie's contribution is clearly on a much smaller scale than Williams's sustained enthusiasm for the French Revolution, and anonymous too, but Opie, writing in 1795, was aware of the brutalities of the Terror and chose to write in support of the Revolution anyway.

Opie's decision to publish in the radical Cabinet indicates that she was enjoying the 'heady experience' of flirting both politically and with Godwin between 1794 and 1795 (King and Pierce eds Collected Poems xli). Opie was only in her mid-twenties, therefore younger than most of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin circle. Her youth possibly gave her more licence not to take matters so seriously, but it may also have led to her being infantilized by the others (Guest 125-126). I do not agree, though,

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<sup>159</sup> John Wainwright, "The Sixteen Blessed Teresian Martyrs of Compiègne," The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 14 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912) n.p.

<sup>160</sup> Steven Blakemore, Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution (Madison: Fairleigh UP; London: Associated UPs, 1997) 155.

that she did not take her political involvement seriously: Guest does not seem to know about Opie's speech at a Hustings in Norwich in 1794, which I discuss in Chapter 1. But Opie was indeed a flirt, not only socially but in terms of radical ideas and theories, and Guest comments on her 'apparent insouciance that Godwin found so hard to gauge, and that let him repeatedly to upbraid her for coquetry' (137).

"The Nun" made Opie's radical sentiments very clear, at a time when she was close with both Enfield's circle in Norwich and Godwin's group in London (Chandler "Athens" 181). Her radical literary interests are also clear from her correspondence with Godwin in particular. On 27 December 1795, Opie asked Godwin for his opinions 'of Mrs Macaulay's abilities – I am now in the second chapter of her history of England', but also gave the impression that Opie had been reading the manuscript of Hays's Memoirs of Emma Courtney, as this work was only published in November 1796.<sup>161</sup> Her comments give further indications of Opie's radical enthusiasm at this time:

Upon my word, General Godwin, you have a very skilful aide de camp in Captain Mary Hayes – I felt two or three almost irresistible impulses while reading Emma Courtenay [sic.] to take up my pen and send her my blessing directly – but I did not, for I thought it would seem conceited – (as if I thought my praise of consequence to her[]) – so I breathed "blessings not ?lived? but deep" – (27 Dec. 1795)<sup>162</sup>

It was in 1796 that Opie met Wollstonecraft, after being introduced by Godwin. A letter that Opie wrote to Wollstonecraft on 28 August [1796] shows the level of Opie's admiration, as she wrote, after a very flattering beginning to the letter, of Wollstonecraft's effect on her:

I remember the time where my desire of seeing you was repress'd by fear – but as soon as I read your letters from Norway, the cold awe which the philosopher had excited, was lost in the tender sympathy

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<sup>161</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to William Godwin, 27 December 1795, MS Abinger c.3, fol. 2, Bodleian Lib., Oxford.

<sup>162</sup> Opie often fails to close her parentheses, so the missing close bracket is as in the manuscript. Reproduced with permission from the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

call'd forth by the woman – I saw nothing but the interesting creature of feeling, & imagination, and I resolved if possible to become acquainted with the one who had alternately awakened my sensibility and gratified my judgement – I saw you, and you are one of the few objects of my curiosity who in gratifying have not disappointed it also – you & the Lakes of Cumberland have exceeded my expectations –<sup>163</sup>

Their friendship would grow, although letters from Opie to Godwin at this time show how Opie was very cautious in not wanting to offend Wollstonecraft in any way. Wollstonecraft remained a little distant at times because she was jealous of Opie's intimacy with Godwin, evidenced in letters from Wollstonecraft to Godwin.<sup>164</sup>

A further letter to Wollstonecraft provides even more enthusiastic praise for Hays's now newly-published Memoirs of Emma Courtney than Opie's aforementioned letter to Godwin of 27 December 1795. Opie wrote to Wollstonecraft 'I am delighted with Miss Hays's novel. I would give a great deal to have written it; tho', as society is, it is something to be capable of admiring it'.<sup>165</sup> In uttering such sentiments, Opie simultaneously expressed her desire to be getting actively involved in contemporary radicalism through literature, and her recognition of the dangers of even being seen to advocate such literature, let alone to produce it.

Another side of Opie's correspondence with Godwin at this time indicates that Godwin may have found Opie's radical commitment insincere, as he implies connections between Opie as a social flirt and her flirting with more serious ideas. Opie showed amusement in reporting that 'Mrs Inchbald says the report of the world is, that Mr Holcroft is in love with her, she with Mr Godwin, Mr Godwin with me, and I in love with Mr. Holcroft! A pretty story indeed!'.<sup>166</sup> Godwin frequently accused Opie

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<sup>163</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to Mary Wollstonecraft, 28 August [1796], MS Abinger c.41, fols 9-10, Bodleian Lib., Oxford. Reproduced with permission from the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>164</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, letter to Willam Godwin, 4 August 1796, MS Abinger c.40, fol. 10, Bodleian Lib., Oxford; Mary Wollstonecraft, letter to Willam Godwin, 6 August 1796, MS Abinger c.40, fol. 11, Bodleian Lib., Oxford.

<sup>165</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to Mary Wollstonecraft, 18 December 1796, MS Abinger c.41, fols 3-4, Bodleian Lib., Oxford.

<sup>166</sup> St. Clair, 152, quoted in Clive Jones, 67. Godwin's diary entry of 10 July 1796 which reads 'propose to Alderson' had been interpreted as a marriage proposal to Amelia, but the editors of the Godwin

of coquetry, but Opie indicated in a letter to him that she considered it ‘no more than an unattractive mannerism’ (Guest 139) as she wrote ‘I hate you for always throwing Coquette in my teeth – it is a bad habit ... you called me a bitch the last time I saw you – but no matter’.<sup>167</sup> Such accusations came to a head once Wollstonecraft had died.

In the same spring that Godwin and Wollstonecraft married, Amelia Alderson and John Opie met at an evening gathering in Norwich.<sup>168</sup> John Opie was divorced in December 1796 after his unhappy marriage of twelve years to Mary Bunn broke down: Bunn had eloped with an admirer in May 1795 (Earland 101, 107). When he met Alderson, it was ‘love at first sight’ for John Opie (Earland 124); Alderson wrote to Susanna Taylor that his willingness not to separate her from her father was a major incentive for her to agree to marry him (Brightwell Memorials 62).<sup>169</sup> The same letter to Taylor also supports Godwin’s idea of Opie as a social flirt. Opie wrote that, were she not sure her father would disagree to her marrying John Opie, ‘I could almost resolve to break all fetters, and relinquish too, the wide, and often aristocratic circle, in which I now move’ (Brightwell Memorials 62). Nevertheless, they were married in London on 8 May 1798. Opie actually enjoyed more of a social life, or a need for social engagement, than before, owing to John Opie’s prominent position in society, and his retiring nature (Guest 146).<sup>170</sup>

John Opie was intimate with both Wollstonecraft and Godwin.<sup>171</sup> Both he and Alderson are mentioned many times in Godwin’s diary following the wedding of the two philosophers on 29 March 1797, and Godwin visited John Opie with Alderson on

diary agree that this proposal was rather an idea put to James Alderson about how they might help Robert Merry out of a financial predicament. Godwin, Diary, entry for 10 July 1796: ‘Events’.

<sup>167</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to William Godwin, 1 November 1796, MS Abinger c.3, fols 40-1, Bodleian Lib., Oxford.

<sup>168</sup> Ada Earland, John Opie and His Circle (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1911) 128.

<sup>169</sup> Earland mentioned this too (128), as did Augustus Hare: The Gurneys of Earlham, 2 vols (London: George Allen, 1895) 1.95.

<sup>170</sup> Guest refers to Shelley King’s ‘fascinating essay on the Opies’ married life’ (146): Shelley King, “Portrait of a Marriage: John and Amelia Opie and the Sister Arts,” Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture 40 (2011): 27-62.

<sup>171</sup> Godwin’s diary first mentioned John Opie on 18 July 1788, then a couple of times in December 1795, and more frequently from 1796, until diary appearances became less frequent between 1801 and 1805. After the Opies’ marriage, they mostly appeared in the diary together. Godwin recorded John Opie’s death on 9 April 1807.

24 April 1797, before the latter couple married. Opie's pragmatic attitude to Godwin and Wollstonecraft's marriage has been mentioned in the preceding chapter: Opie appears to have taken the irregularities of their situation in her stride, and also seems to have considered John Opie's status as a divorcee of little significance (Earland 128-129).

Opie seems to have been more distant than John Opie when Wollstonecraft was dying, however, which may be further evidence that Opie was flirting with radicalism in this period, but not committing herself fully. John Opie called to see Wollstonecraft twice (on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September 1797) in her final illness following the birth of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (Earland 123), but Opie did not visit. The difference between Opie's and Inchbald's reactions to Wollstonecraft's marriage, and then her death – as discussed in Chapter 1 – has seemed flagrant, but, on closer analysis, Godwin may have felt no more supported by Opie than he was by Inchbald. Godwin and Inchbald had a heated dispute in letters on the very day of Wollstonecraft's death, and their harsh words continued until Inchbald stated, in a letter of 26 October 1797, that, though she forgave him, 'there must nevertheless be an end to our acquaintance *for ever*'.<sup>172</sup> As for Opie, only on 11 October 1797 did she send Godwin a letter of condolence, having waited to receive Holcroft's approval.

In this letter, which has a very measured and controlled tone, Opie aligned herself with Wollstonecraft's ideologies. She thanked Godwin for sending a lock of Wollstonecraft's hair that Opie would have pride in showing to a potential daughter 'as a memorial of a woman, who nobly, & incomparably fought for the violated rights of her sex, but died alas! before she could see the victory which she so well deserved to obtain' (11 Oct. 1797). Godwin may have felt that her lack of passion in the letter, and the long time it had taken her to send it, indicated a lack of true involvement not only with the radical philosophies that both he and Wollstonecraft espoused, but with their very friendship. In her letter, Opie indicated that Godwin had already expressed reservations about her character:

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<sup>172</sup> William Godwin, letter to Elizabeth Inchbald, 10 September 1797, MS Abinger c.22, fol. 40, Bodleian Lib., Oxford; Elizabeth Inchbald, letter to William Godwin, 10 September 1797, MS Abinger c.3, fol. 120, Bodleian Lib., Oxford. Clemit dated Inchbald's letter (ed. Letters of Godwin 238). Clemit ed. Letters of Godwin (264), quoting Charles Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries (London: Henry S. King and Co, 1876) 1.279.

I have been told that you say I have no heart – the severest of all assertions perhaps – but I shall not plead not guilty to the charge, as we should never, I believe, take pains to confute a calumny, unless we are con[vinced] it has some truth for its foundation – (11 Oct. 1797)

Godwin replied with the following comments, then adding this chapter's opening remarks on coquetry, and Opie's coquetry in particular:

To the best of my recollection I never said any such thing. I said indeed, you were a flirt. But that is no secret; every body knows that. I might say that a flirt, quod flirtation, has no heart. But I know several admirable women who put on & off the flirt, & consequently, according to my interpretation, put in & out a heart, as easily as they put on & take off their clothes. In this respect you resemble mrs Inchbald. (23 Oct. 1797)

Godwin's correspondence with Opie seems to have come to an end, but not as dramatically as did that with Inchbald. His diary shows that his social involvement with Opie dwindled dramatically from 1797 to 1798, but so did his interaction with Mary Hays at that time, perhaps Wollstonecraft's most loyal defender. Diary entries incorporating the Opies as a couple start not long after their wedding on 8 May 1798, but MacGregor writes that, around 1799, 'Godwin dropped out of the Opies' circle. There was not the link between them which there would have been had Mary Wollstonecraft lived' (30).

### *The Father and Daughter*

After a very turbulent decade of Jacobin / anti-Jacobin debate regarding fiction, Opie officially launched her career with The Father and Daughter in 1801.<sup>173</sup> She chose a more respectable publisher in Longman and Co. than she had for

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<sup>173</sup> Kelly, English Jacobin; Matthew Grenby, The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).

Dangers of Coquetry, and chose also quite explicitly in a short preface not to label the work a novel, but a 'simple moral tale' (63). The Father and Daughter already went into a second edition (also with Longman) in the year of its publication, and passed through 'at least nine editions ... in the first three decades of the nineteenth century', becoming 'a familiar contour on the literary landscape' (King and Pierce Introduction Father 11).

The Father and Daughter (1801) looks at the fates of Agnes Fitzhenry, a mother but not wife, who has been seduced by a libertine, Clifford, and the impact of this transgression on her relationship with her father. The sentimental plot is further complicated by the madness in the father, brought on by the heroine's elopement and supposed death. The novel has a retrospective time frame: it opens with the fallen Agnes returning to her father with her son, Edward. Opie therefore has the opportunity to present the heroine as a repentant being who can regain a certain status in society despite her transgression. In dedicating the work to her father – 'since, in describing a good father, I had only to delineate my own' (62) – Opie could hide behind the patriarchal protection that such a dedication provided. Yet the depiction of the insane father in many ways illustrates the dangers of excessive sensibility in men, and the strength of the father/daughter relationship can therefore be seen to rely rather on Agnes's fortitude and determination than on her father's.

In a moment of lucidity, finally, Fitzhenry recognises Agnes, forgives her, acknowledges all she has done for him, and dies. Agnes immediately falls into a state of stupefaction, and dies, 'and, at the same time, were borne to the same grave, the father and daughter' (151). By quite some coincidence, Clifford (now Lord Mountcarrol) appears to see the funeral procession. When he realises who has died, he whisks Edward up and drives away, and it is ultimately deemed more appropriate for Edward to stay with his father than with the friends of his fallen mother.

Apart from one contemporary review, which considered the novel 'the common history of every seduction in romance', the reviewers tended to focus on (and laud) Opie's use of pathos in her tale.<sup>174</sup> It may also have been the treatment of

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<sup>174</sup> Rev. of The Father and Daughter, and, Poems, by Amelia Opie, The Edinburgh Review 1 (Oct. 1802): 113-122. Quoted in King and Pierce, eds, Father, 266-268. Rev. of The Father and Daughter, by Amelia Opie, The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature 35 (May 1802): 114-117. King and Pierce, eds, 264-265; Rev. of The Father and Daughter, by Amelia Opie, in The Monthly Review; or

the father and daughter story that made Opie's tale so immensely popular (Ty Empowering 135): it was adapted into an opera, two plays, lauded in poetry and widely translated.<sup>175</sup>

My discussion of literary influences on The Father and Daughter draws on Smith's Emmeline (1788) and Celestina (1791), but focuses more particularly on Inchbald's Nature and Art (1796) and Hays's The Victim of Prejudice (1799), incorporating Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). I argue that The Father and Daughter is a well-developed version of the seduced maiden tale (Staves 111), wherein Opie's treatment of the breakdown of the family enables her to do something more radical with the conventional seduction narrative (Ty Empowering 135). I build on these arguments to show the unsatisfactory nature of the newly-created family at the end of the novel: the unrepentant Clifford, his second wife (whom he does not love), and his son by Agnes. The differentiation between the focus on excess of victimization in Wollstonecraft and Hays's narratives, and on excess of shame with Inchbald and Opie's is an essential one (Binhammer 162). But Opie intends the reader to reflect on Agnes's shame to a degree that surpasses this differentiation. In suggesting that Agnes is fully redeemed and reintegrated into society, both Ty and Binhammer ignore the important criticisms Opie is making of patriarchy in this novel, where Agnes cannot allow herself to be redeemed, and the seducer wins everything.

The Father and Daughter is clearly situated in the tradition of the 'pathetic seduced maiden', fitting the prevailing double standard where men normally suffered no penalties for their involvement in seduction, but women almost always faced severe censure and life-altering consequences (Staves 116). Not only did men destroy women's chastity, but they then delivered extra punishment on the women for its loss (Spencer Rise 130). Inchbald's Nature and Art is a clear example: William forgets his early love for Hannah Primose, a cottager's daughter, leaving her pregnant then destitute whilst he rises in the world to become a judge. He is the one, finally, to pass judgment on her, without even recognising her, and condemns her to death. Hays similarly shows how much women can be victimised following seduction

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Literary Journal 35 (May 1801): 163-166. King and Pierce, eds, 265-266; Rev. of The Father and Daughter, by Amelia Opie, The European Magazine 40 (Sept. 1801): 194. King and Pierce, eds, 266.

<sup>175</sup> King and Pierce, Introduction, Father, 11.

in The Victim of Prejudice. She piles upon Mary reasons to show prejudice against a woman, with seduction; prostitution; apparent criminal activity; illegitimacy; attempts to work; rape and, finally, debt. The most severe punishment for Agnes in The Father and Daughter comes from her seducer, ultimately, as he takes their son Edward away to live with him, although Agnes is no longer alive to bear this punishment. It is a punishment that greatly influences my reading of this novel as one that does not see Agnes fully redeemed.

Agnes and Inchbald's Hannah Primose (Nature and Art) demonstrate not only that seduced maidens had to possess all the sensibilities generally sought after in virtuous heroines, but also that women of all classes could fall prey to the seducer (Staves 117, 118). Olivia Primose (the seduced daughter in Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield (1766)) and Agnes support the prevalent idea that seduction brought about the breakdown of the family in these works:

Fathers mourned, daughters who embodied the beauty, simplicity, and affectionateness the eighteenth century most prized in young women died, and writers and readers alike shed tears not only for the death of innocence, but also for the death of an idealized older form of the family undisturbed by the free exercise of the wills of the inferior members. (Staves 134)

Parallel to Agnes and Fitzhenry's fractured filial bond in this novel, Opie portrays a very successful filial bond in Agnes's childhood friend, Caroline, and her father Mr Seymour.<sup>176</sup> Caroline convinces her father – a man very aware of the importance of reputation, repeating always 'what will the world say?' (109) – to help Agnes. He does, however, call Caroline naïve, saying that 'experience will teach you that no one can with impunity run counter to the opinions of the world' (117). The novel's denouement demonstrates, nevertheless, how a character like Clifford manages such a trajectory. Opie's implication in this novel is that *women* cannot.

Agnes's transgression demonstrates a testing of the filial bond, and Opie's dramatic portrayal of this fall allows for the testing of that filial bond to be rendered in more radical terms, moving towards a more feminist reading of the novel (Ty

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<sup>176</sup> Mr Seymour himself makes this parallel (117).

Empowering 138). Going yet further, and moving from the relationship between Fitzhenry and Agnes to that of Agnes and her son, the possibilities for a feminist reading increase. A successful filial bond – between Agnes and Edward – is substituted ultimately by a conventionally sound but emotionally disastrous filial bond between Clifford and Edward. The narrator is so successful in relating Clifford's misery – with a wife much more disagreeable than Agnes, and Clifford's regrets that she is not bearing him an heir – that the reader almost feels sympathy for him (131-136). Opie demonstrates here that, owing to Agnes's transgression, the filial bond between Clifford – however despicable and unrepentant – and Edward has the weight of patriarchal support, which Agnes and Edward's bond cannot be given. Opie duly indicates her lack of satisfaction.

It seems inevitable, given the events (political and literary) of the preceding decade, that Opie should kill off her seduced character in The Father and Daughter. As Nature and Art, The Father and Daughter, The Victim of Prejudice and Wollstonecraft's Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman (1798) show, there were to be no happy endings to the seduction narratives of the 1790s (Binhammer 139-140). The seduction narrative had reached a 'dead end': women who inevitably became victims of seduction should have known how to avoid it, and any knowledge of their own hearts women might claim would only compound their victimisation (Binhammer 141, 145). Opie's quotation from Nature and Art in The Father and Daughter indicates how aware these two writers were that women needed to learn to read their own hearts in order not to fall prey to the seducer:

Love, however rated by many as the chief passion of the heart, is but a poor dependant, a retainer on the other passions – admiration, gratitude, respect, esteem, pride in the object; – divest the boasted sensation of these, and it is no more than the impression of a twelve-month, by courtesy, or vulgar error, called love. (Nature 81)<sup>177</sup>

But all four novels indicate this 'dead end' for the seduction narrative by shifting the focus away from the seduction itself and towards a consideration of the problems faced by the heroine post-fall. These novels guide the narrative 'from the

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<sup>177</sup> Opie's quotation is slightly longer in The Father and Daughter (67).

truth of the heroine's inner heart to the world's refusal to recognize her heart and thus to recognize her virtue' (Binhammer 149-150). In The Father and Daughter, however, Opie somewhat shifts the focus. Agnes is encouraged that the world does indeed recognize her heart and her virtue, but she is unable to consider herself worthy of that redemption. Opie thereby illustrates the tragic impossibility as she sees it for a woman so shamed to start again, and laments this impossibility.

It is through her friend Caroline that the world's recognition of Agnes's virtue is most clearly articulated, even if Agnes will not acknowledge it. This possible redemption in religious terms is foregrounded as Caroline writes (in a letter shortly for discussion): 'Thy sins are forgiven thee!' (140). This novel is noticeably more religious than Dangers of Coquetry, and part of this shift may be owing to Opie's Quaker influences at the time of writing. She had been mixing with Quakers socially at the same time as she was engaging with the Godwin-Holcroft group, but a particular change took place in her Quaker circles in 1798. Elizabeth (Betsy) Gurney – hitherto considered the least plain or strict Quaker of the Gurney sisters (Hare 1.98) – would be so influenced by the preaching of the American Quaker William Savery at the Meeting on 4 February 1798 that she would turn to the life of a strict Quaker. She went to London to experience "the world" before committing herself officially, and visited the newly-married Opies. It seems that Betsy was as happy in Opie's decision to marry John Opie as Opie was in Betsy's decision to marry Joseph Fry in 1800 once she had become a strict Quaker (Whitney 61, 100).

I think the religiosity of Agnes (and quite a few of the other characters) demonstrates some of Fry's influence at this time. Agnes is seen in 'speechless prayer' as she considers how close she came to taking her own life early in the novel, swearing 'in the face of Heaven, never to repeat it: no – my only wish now is, to live and to suffer' (98). When she leaves the people who had taken her in on her journey back to her father, they 'prayed God to bless her' (102), and Fanny, the daughter of her childhood nurse, equates the celebration at her return with that of the prodigal son (105). Agnes later uses two Biblical references (identify King and Pierce (112n)) to demonstrate to the governors of the bedlam how she intends to support herself and earn enough money to look after her father. Prayers and wishes that God and Heaven will be merciful to Agnes continue, with Mr Seymour chastising the local gossips for their un-Christian attitudes (122) and Caroline telling Agnes, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee!' (140). In terms of Agnes's benevolence, she is more often a recipient

of others' generosity than a benefactor owing to her financial situation. Yet Agnes is shown to offer religious comfort to those in need, with the narrator commenting that 'she could watch the live-long night by the bed of the dying, join in the consoling prayer offered by the lips of another, or, in her own eloquent and impassioned language, speak peace and hope to the departing soul' (130). These touches are not specifically Quaker – they speak too of Opie's Unitarian heritage – but the shift from Dangers of Coquetry in religious emphasis is nevertheless marked.

Through Caroline's role as a supporting figure for Agnes, the fallen woman, Opie inversely mirrors the relationship between the main and minor characters in Smith's Emmeline and Celestina, placing the focus on the seduced heroine but pointing out the injustices of her "necessary" death. By moving the seduction story from the sub-plot of Emmeline to the main plot of The Father and Daughter, Opie places the Emmeline figure in Agnes's virtuous friend, Caroline, who, like Emmeline, gives emotional and practical support without worrying about her own reputation (Spencer Rise 128). But Caroline does more than that. It is through this character that Opie may be expressing her opinions on how women should be redeemed after their fall:

It is the *slang* of the present day, if I may be allowed this vulgar but forcible expression, to inveigh bitterly against society for excluding from its circle, with unrelenting rigour, the woman who has once transgressed the salutary laws of chastity; and some brilliant and persuasive, but, in my opinion, mistaken writers, of both sexes, have endeavoured to prove that many an amiable woman has been for ever lost to virtue and the world, and become the victim of prostitution, merely because her first fault was treated with ill-judging and criminal severity.

This assertion appears to me to be fraught with mischief; as it is calculated to deter the victim of seduction from penitence and amendment, by telling her that she would employ them in her favour in vain. And it is surely as false as it is dangerous. I know many instances; and it is fair to conclude that the experience of others is similar to mine, of women restored by perseverance in a life of

expiatory amendment, to that rank in society which they had forfeited by one false step, while their fault has been forgotten in their exemplary conduct, as wives and mothers.

But it is not to be expected that society should open its arms to receive its prodigal children till they have undergone a long and painful probation,— till they have practised the virtues of self-denial, patience, fortitude, and industry. And she whose penitence is not the mere result of wounded pride and caprice, will be capable of exerting all these virtues, in order to regain some portion of the esteem she has lost. What will difficulties and mortifications be to her? Keeping her eye steadily fixed on the end she has in view, she will bound lightly over them all; nor will she seek the smiles of the world, till, instead of receiving them as a favour, she can demand them as a right.

Agnes, my dear Agnes, do you not know the original of the above picture? You, by a life of self-denial, patience, fortitude, and industry, have endeavoured to atone for the crime you committed against society; and I hear her voice saying, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee!' and ill befall the hand that would uplift the sacred pall which penitence and amendment have thrown over departed guilt! (139-140)

This letter from Caroline to Agnes may seem to suggest that Agnes is fully redeemed in the world: a footnote from King and Pierce (quoting Wollstonecraft's Vindication) points out how differently the philosopher had portrayed the lot of the fallen woman (139n). But there are more similarities than may first appear in Opie's and Wollstonecraft's points of view. Agnes's reintegration is not complete, and the degree of penitence she has to perform also suggests the inadequacy of her situation. Many people rally to try to get Agnes work (124), and her childhood friend Fanny – with whom she has been living – openly supports her, having agreed to look after Edward should anything happen to Agnes (104). But at the same time, others refuse to send their children to Fanny's day school because of Agnes, showing that the heroine's reintegration is limited. Agnes finds solace in charity work (129) but dwells always on her guilt, even after this letter, reflecting on how she cannot offer Edward what his father would be able to. She says, 'I have given him life, indeed, but not one legal claim to what is necessary to the support of life, except the scanty

pittance I might, by a public avowal of my shame, wring from his father' (142). Agnes's reintegration into society may seem complete: when she goes out with her father and Edward in the evening, 'never, in the most prosperous hours, were they met with curtsies more low, or bows more respectful, than on these occasions'(149). But the narrator reveals that Agnes chooses not to be received where she had formerly been intimate because of her own sense of shame.

Both Ty and Binhammer miss this point. Ty argues that, instead of focussing on the oft-cited moral at the end of the tale which warns women to avoid the seducer (and which I analyse shortly here), this letter from Caroline encapsulates more precisely the message Opie wishes to convey in this work (Empowering 144). But I think that, by ignoring how Opie actually ends the tale, Ty attempts a reading of more reintegration into society for Agnes than Opie actually presents in the novel. Binhammer similarly argues that The Father and Daughter demonstrates a simple shift from the narrative of shame to one of redemption, which Inchbald, Hays and Wollstonecraft do not explore (165). But Agnes does not receive redemption, not considering herself worthy of recognition by society, and she does not seek it. Agnes merely desires rather to nurse her insane father, ideally back to health, regardless of what anyone else might think of her.

A brief examination of the different ways in which the heroines use their voices in The Victim of Prejudice, Nature and Art, and The Father and Daughter illustrates how Agnes does not consider herself a redeemable creature and further accentuates her strong sense of shame. It is not in Hays's polemical style for her heroines to lose their voices, and the conclusion of The Victim of Prejudice sees the younger Mary very clearly vent her frustration with the way her situation has been allowed to develop:

Almighty Nature, mysterious are thy decrees! – The vigorous promise of my youth has failed. The victim of a barbarous prejudice, society has cast me out from its bosom. The sensibilities of my heart have been turned to bitterness, the powers of my mind wasted, my projects rendered abortive, my virtues and my sufferings alike unrewarded, *I have lived in vain!* unless the story of my sorrows should kindle in the heart of man, in behalf of my oppressed sex, the sacred claim of humanity and justice. (174)

There is no doubt that the heroine here considers herself wronged and not wrong, that the whole of society is to blame for it, and that she has no qualms in stating it. Inchbald's heroine is not as forthright, but, instead of having no voice with which to defend herself (Maurer ed. 19), Hannah succeeds in communicating not only her wishes but her own sense of self-worth. She writes William letters, and, by consulting the prison calendar, she finds out that he will be the judge to try her case (Garnai 137). Hannah's letter to William before her execution demonstrates her belief in herself as a redeemable person as she writes 'if you would be so merciful as to spare my life, I promise to amend it for the future' (141).

Agnes, on the other hand, will not be convinced of her possibility for redemption and reintegration into society. At the beginning of the novel, when people help her on her way back home, Agnes already exclaims 'there is no joy for me!' (96); she is overcome with sadness and regret as she compares Fitzhenry's situation with Mr Seymour's (as Caroline gets married) (120); in the poor people she helps, 'I read evidences of my guilt – They looked up to me for aid, and I deserted them!' (129), and she reflects on how (and why) she cannot support Edward adequately (142). It is only when Fitzhenry finally recognises her and forgives her that Agnes can allow herself to say of the community that 'they pity, nay, they respect me, and we may yet be happy! as Heaven restores you to my prayers!' (151). But this moment is so short-lived: Fitzhenry dies immediately, and Agnes follows directly afterwards. In killing her heroine off here, Opie demonstrated what the narrator states in the final moral of the tale – 'for, though the victim of seduction may in time recover the approbation of others, she must always despair of recovering her own' (156) – which indicates how the heroine here will never be completely redeemed.

It is owing to the moment of recognition between Agnes and Fitzhenry, and then Clifford's recognition of how Agnes suffered, that The Father and Daughter has been considered 'Opie's optimistic novel', where virtue triumphs and the world's redemption is finally secured (Binhammer 150). The end of the novel does not bear out this optimism, however. The narrator uses the very last paragraph before the final moral to detail the degree to which Clifford was not repentant:

But, selfish to the last moment of his existence, it was a consciousness of his own misery, not of that which he had inflicted which prompted his

expressions of misery and regret; and he grudged and envied Agnes the comfort of having been able to despise and forget him. (156)

Dramatic adaptations of The Father and Daughter offered a more penitent seducer, with the degree of Clifford's insouciance in the original proving uncomfortable (King and Pierce eds Father 156n). Opie is very clear about Clifford's irredeemable nature, and she hardly presents an optimistic end to the novel otherwise (156). Just when it has seemed possible that Agnes might be redeemed, and when she might even consider herself redeemable, Opie kills her off, but she also allows Clifford to bestow a final insult on Agnes (or her memory) by removing Edward from her friends. The first thing Agnes did when she returned to her father and was reunited with her childhood friend, Fanny, was to ask her to look after Edward should anything happen to her (104). Yet when Clifford takes him away, it is Mr Seymour and Fanny's husband – thus far a completely irrelevant character to the narrative – who take pursuit, rather than Caroline and Fanny, and decide that Edward would have 'advantages both in education and fortune' (155) if he stayed with Clifford, evidenced immediately by Clifford bestowing a fortune on his heir (155). Edward is shown, therefore, not to have been redeemed from his mother's guilt by the community, and the patriarchal system wins again, which Opie reiterates in the final moral:

Peace to the memory of Agnes Fitzhenry! – And may the woman who, like her, has been the victim of artifice, self-confidence, and temptation, like her endeavour to regain the esteem of the world by patient suffering and virtuous exertion; and may she look forward to the attainment of it with confidence! But may she whose innocence is yet secure, and whose virtues still boast the stamp of chastity, which can alone make them current in the world, tremble with horror at the idea of listening to the voice of the seducer! – For, though the victim of seduction may in time recover the approbation of others, she must always despair of recovering her own.<sup>178</sup> – The image of a father, a

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<sup>178</sup> As King and Pierce note, this sentence was omitted from the second and subsequent editions (156), the implication of which I briefly discuss.

mother, a brother, a sister, or some other fellow-being, whose peace of mind has been injured by her deviation from virtue, will probably haunt her path through life; and she who might, perhaps, have contemplated with fortitude the wreck of her own happiness, is doomed to pine with fruitless remorse at the consciousness of having destroyed that of another. – For, where is the mortal who can venture to pronounce that his actions are of importance to no one, and that the consequences of his virtues or his vices will be confined to himself alone?

The first person who springs to mind here is Agnes's seducer, for his actions in the novel immediately preceding this lengthy moral demonstrate just how easy it indeed is for a man to act without concern for anyone else. Opie details at length here that women, on the other hand, must be ever mindful of the possible consequences of their every action. The stain of illegitimacy that is so central to Hays's novel is also not dwelt on at all by Opie: on the contrary, Opie's narrative removes part of the illegitimacy issue by the child being male, and the other by Clifford's sudden reappearance and his desire for an heir. The criticism that Opie seems to be making in this part of the narrative is on the patriarchy inherent in social institutions, by implying that the child's fate will be much better if he is brought up by his unprincipled and unrepentant father than by the friends of his seduced (yet redeemable) mother. I think it very relevant that, at the end of The Father and Daughter, the reader is left with a father/son relationship that has only just been created (or, rather, acknowledged) but is nevertheless swiftly considered the best solution. Opie's criticism of patriarchy – in the narrative's complete dismissal of Agnes's female friends as possible guardians, and a total reliance on men – is a further reason why I cannot consider this novel optimistic.

I consider Opie's use of "may" in the opening sentences of this final moral to be one that indicates a wish, not a statement of something that is already in place. She presents here a utopian future, where a woman may be able to be fully redeemed after her transgression, but indicates in the novel that that time has not yet arrived. Opie's decision to omit in subsequent editions the declaration that a woman could never regain her own self-respect further supports the idea that she is painting a picture of a utopian future here. Where Agnes has been the example of a woman

who could not recover her own approbation, Opie realises that, in her utopian vision, this recovery should be possible.

This idea of a utopian ideal also ties in with Caroline's letter quoted above. The first paragraph presents a distinction between Wollstonecraft's and Opie's feminisms, since the seduced woman is doubly victimized by Wollstonecraft, where Opie emphasises Agnes's exemplary penitence (Binhammer 167). But reading further into the letter, there is space for the two ideologies to find some common ground:

If, on the one hand, Opie's text critiques Wollstonecraft's insistence upon chronicling "wrongs", it also generates an imaginative script that represents the "fallen" woman's return to respectable society, thus fulfilling one of the subsidiary goals of the *Vindication*.<sup>179</sup>

Having focussed on the burden of excessive shame, Opie can meet Wollstonecraft in a utopian future where a seduced woman might not only build a secure future for herself, but regain her sense of dignity, self-worth, and achieve economic independence (Binhammer 167).

### Conclusion

In Dangers of Coquetry, Opie used the protection of anonymity to produce quite a radical critique of the way society forms the coquette and punishes her, while libertines remain unscathed. But she recognised that she was writing at a volatile time, and bowed to convention by making her heroine suffer disproportionately to her crimes. Opie was writing when the literature of sensibility was already meeting criticism, and she used many of its traits to excess in this novel, perhaps, one feels at the end, in order to avoid the need to play Louisa's punishment out in words. The novel still reads as more than a mere sentimental story, though, and Opie's radicalism is already in evidence.

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<sup>179</sup> Roxanne Eberle, Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792 – 1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002) 95.

“The Nun” is a much clearer indication of the social radicalism that Opie was experiencing in the mid-1790s. But, as her correspondence from that period reveals, she was not someone who was prepared to put her name to something that espoused French Revolutionary enthusiasm, even though she did not yet have any reputation to sully. Godwin’s angry criticism of her as a coquette after Wollstonecraft had died (23 Oct. 1797) suggests his recognition that she was flirting with radicalism in literary terms, but refusing to commit herself, just as she was a social flirt.

When Opie launched her career with The Father and Daughter, it was not a novel that promoted the radicalism of Godwin or Wollstonecraft or the ‘new philosophy’, although I have shown how Opie met Wollstonecraft on some points. It is certainly relevant, though, that Opie did not join with other writers openly to criticise Godwin and Wollstonecraft’s radical ideas. Hannah More’s Strictures on Female Education (1799) had come out as a direct attack on Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideas about female education, although, ironically, both writers ended up agreeing on the main principles. Elizabeth Hamilton’s Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (1800) attacked Hays by satirising her in the pathetic character of Brigetina Botherim, as well as repeatedly referring to Godwin’s Political Justice in order to undermine and criticise the work and its writer.<sup>180</sup> With comparison to Opie, it is not only relevant to think that Opie’s direct reaction to the ‘new philosophy’ would take her a few years to put together, and would only appear in 1805 with Adeline Mowbray, but that she resisted the temptation in Father and Daughter to attack Wollstonecraft or Godwin, or any of their radical ideas that had become prime targets.

Opie instead pointed towards her friendship with Wollstonecraft in The Father and Daughter: when Agnes needs help, it is other women who came to her aid, instead of her father, her seducer, or any other men. Kelly even suggests ‘that Caroline Seymour could be an idealized version of Opie herself, while Fanny could be a composite of Wollstonecraft’s youthful friend, Fanny Blood, and faithful servant, Marguerite’.<sup>181</sup> But Opie was actively choosing a middle ground out of principle: although she had accepted Godwin and Wollstonecraft’s personal arrangements

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<sup>180</sup> Paul Keen, “Intellectual history and political theory,” The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period, eds Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: CUP, 2008) 148.

<sup>181</sup> Gary Kelly, “Amelia Opie, Lady Caroline Lamb, and Maria Edgeworth: Official and Unofficial Ideology,” Ariel: A Review of International English Literature 12.4 (Oct. 1981): 7. Quoted in Ty, Empowering, 142-143.

(and could gossip heartily about Helen Maria Williams in private correspondence), Opie was not prepared to espouse the same sentiments in her fiction.<sup>182</sup> Remarks to Henry Crabb Robinson from his brother Thomas show a contemporary understanding of Opie's position regarding public sexual politics in literature:

I have imagined that Mrs. O. in her production intended to support a middle opinion betwixt the free notion of Godwin, on female chastity on the one hand, and the puritanical prudish doctrine of Miss Hannah More on the other.<sup>183</sup>

Opie clearly expressed here that fallen women should be able to regain their place in society in this novel, and I maintain that she argued not from a position where she considered it had been achieved, but one where it had still to be achieved. But Opie was also aware of novelistic conventions: she saw that her heroine had to die, even though seductions in real-life eighteenth-century England did not inevitably mean a death sentence for the women involved (Staves 134). I think that Opie saw, in *Agnes*, the opportunity simultaneously to bow to convention, and to give the criticism of patriarchy she presents in this novel, recognising that there was still work to be done before society really would accept the penitent fallen woman.

Opie was a clear example of the few writers in the thriving literary world of Norwich in this period who seemed to want to achieve national literary celebrity (Chandler "Athens" 186). Opie's career decisions from 1790 to 1801 suggest the mind of a very astute and cautious person who was interested in achieving literary fame but who was not prepared to put anything to her name in which she might invite a dangerous amount of negative criticism.

In terms of addressing the new philosophy in overt ways, Opie did not, in either of these early novels, make any comments (through her heroines' reading habits) about what women should or should not be reading. She thereby kept herself

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<sup>182</sup> See Chapter 1. Amelia Opie, letter to Susanna Taylor, [23 March] [1801], Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP61, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

<sup>183</sup> Thomas Robinson, letter to Henry Crabb Robinson, 31 July 1801. Quoted in Binhammer (162) and King and Pierce, eds, *Father* (269).

out of a debate that could easily then have claimed her for one side or the other. She also did not write about how the sins of one generation are visited on the next, so keeping her focus and trusting that her subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) messages would not be missed. She waited a bit longer, until her 1805 novel, Adeline Mowbray, to engage with the new philosophy in these ways.

The 1790s saw Opie flirting with radicalism. She tested the ground with different literary genres and with her social acquaintances. Where Inchbald, who *had* been publically radical in the 1790s, cut off her connections with Godwin, Opie took care not to take any such drastic steps in either direction. She wanted to keep on good terms with everybody but, as far as Godwin was concerned, her lack of commitment went too far. Opie's two novels (especially The Father and Daughter) deliberately have a much more restricted canvas than the works of her more radical contemporaries in order that she might more subtly introduce radical messages by burying them in ambiguous narratives. Opie, as part of her middle ground, took specific, individual examples of women whose situations demonstrated failures in the patriarchal system, where the more radical Mary; or, The Wrongs of Woman and The Victim of Prejudice (for instance) tackled a multitude of wrongs that needed to be righted by society as a whole. In this way, Opie also ensured that she would not be labelled a seditious, polemical, female philosopher. She was reformist, not reactionary in this decade, and the immense success of The Father and Daughter suggests that she had acted wisely.



### Chapter 3

#### Adeline Mowbray: A Quaker response to the “reformist continuum”<sup>184</sup>

This chapter considers Opie’s third novel, Adeline Mowbray (1805), her most famous and most contentious novel now.<sup>185</sup> Adeline Mowbray is a sentimental novel, quite like Opie’s earlier two novels in this regard, but it is the first novel in which she reacts to the 1790s’ cultural debate and addresses the “new philosophy”. Set at the time of the American Revolution – but often alluding to concerns more relevant to the French Revolution – Adeline Mowbray is often considered as a *roman à clef* about the lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin.<sup>186</sup> But it is difficult simply to categorise as an anti-Jacobin or even Jacobin novel.<sup>187</sup> Its subtitle – The Mother and Daughter – also illustrates its belonging to an eighteenth-century tradition of novels ‘about missing mothers and their suffering daughters’ that had become so entrenched by the turn of the century that Austen could parody it in Northanger Abbey.<sup>188</sup>

The question of the degree to which Opie supported or attacked Wollstonecraft and Godwin in this novel has driven Opie criticism since the 1970s. In general, critics who have made Wollstonecraft or Godwin their prime focus have not read Adeline Mowbray favourably.<sup>189</sup> Some have interpreted it as an anti-Jacobin

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<sup>184</sup> Miriam L. Wallace, Revolutionary Subjects in the English “Jacobin” Novel, 1790-1805 (Cranbury (NJ): Bucknell UP, 2009) 223.

<sup>185</sup> All references to the novel will be to the most recent edition unless otherwise stated: Anne McWhir, ed., Adeline Mowbray, 1805, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2010).

<sup>186</sup> Early in the novel, an acquaintance of Adeline’s in Bath expresses doubts about the propriety of noticing Glenmurray, saying that he is thought to be ‘a French spy, or a Jesuit’ (62). This allusion suggests that the historical background for the novel is fluid (McWhir ed. 62n).

<sup>187</sup> Kenneth R. Johnston, “Whose History? My Place or Yours?: Republican Assumptions and Romantic Traditions,” Romanticism, History, Historicism, ed. Damian Walford Davies (New York and London: Routledge, 2009) 97.

<sup>188</sup> Susan C. Greenfield, Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002) 13.

<sup>189</sup> Claire Tomalin, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974) 236; Richard Holmes, ed., A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, by Mary Wollstonecraft, and Memoirs of the Author of The Rights of Woman, by William Godwin (London: Penguin, 1987) 46; Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker, eds, Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, by William Godwin (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001) 35; Barbara Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination (Cambridge: CUP, 2003) 247.

novel without focussing on Wollstonecraft or Godwin particularly, with others acknowledging the ambiguity in the text, especially considering how negatively marriage is portrayed therein, which some contemporary reviews had already highlighted.<sup>190</sup>

Matthew Grenby's work provides perhaps the best example of how criticism of Opie (and Adeline Mowbray in particular) has developed in recent years, indicating that a strictly Jacobin / anti-Jacobin debate may have reached an impasse in literary criticism. From claiming Adeline Mowbray categorically as an anti-Jacobin novel in 2001 (Anti-Jacobin 79, 88-89), Grenby considered in his 2007 review of Miriam L. Wallace's Memoirs of Emma Courtney, by Mary Hays, and Adeline Mowbray, by Amelia Opie that these two works demonstrated how fragile the radical/conservative binary was. Much more knowledge of the context of the works and the debate in which they were engaging was necessary to begin to understand their complexities.<sup>191</sup> Grenby then reiterated in "Novels of Opinion" that the Jacobin / anti-Jacobin distinction was not particularly helpful (nor really a distinction that readers made at the time), and that Adeline Mowbray stood as an example of a work that

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<sup>190</sup> Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, 1975 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Matthew Grenby, The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution (Cambridge : CUP, 2001); Harriet Guest, Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution (Oxford: OUP, 2014); Claudia L. Johnson, Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1988); Anne K. Mellor, Romanticism and Gender (New York and London: Routledge, 1993; Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, Adeline Mowbray, 1805, (Oxford: OUP, 1999); Anne K. Mellor, Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830 (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000); Wallace, Revolutionary; Carol Howard, "'The Story of the Pineapple': Sentimental Abolitionism and Moral Motherhood in Amelia Opie's Adeline Mowbray," Studies in the Novel 30.3 (Fall 1998): 355-376; Harriet Devine Jump, "A revolution in female manners: women writers of the Romantic period, 1789-1832," An Introduction to Women's Writing From the Middle Ages to the Present Day, ed. Marion Shaw (London: Prentice Hall, 1998) 122-148; Eve Tavor Bannet, The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 2000); Roxanne Eberle, Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002); Anne McWhir, Introduction, Adeline Mowbray, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2010) 9-34; Rev. of Adeline Mowbray, or the Mother and Daughter: a Tale, by Amelia Opie, Annual Review /JAS 4 (1805): 653; Rev. of Adeline Mowbray, by Amelia Opie, Critical Review /JAS 3.4 (1805): 219-21.

<sup>191</sup> Matthew Grenby, rev. of Memoirs of Emma Courtney, by Mary Hays, and Adeline Mowbray, by Amelia Opie, ed. Miriam L. Wallace, The Modern Language Review, 102.2 (Apr. 2007): 489.

could be claimed for either “side”, as Johnston has argued (97).<sup>192</sup> Recently, the terms ‘anti-anti-Jacobin’ and ‘Post-Jacobin novel’ have also been used to explore the complexities of Opie’s Adeline Mowbray (1805).<sup>193</sup> A Jacobin / anti-Jacobin categorisation is largely unworkable with regard to works like Adeline Mowbray (Wallace Revolutionary 223). I prefer to work with Wallace’s concept of a “reformist continuum”, which she describes as ‘an extended continuum ranging from the more radical and identifiably feminist positions of Mary Hays to distinctly reformist but conciliatory positions exemplified by more conservative writers such as Jane West and Hannah More’ (223).

Other Adeline Mowbray criticism has focused on the novel’s subtitle, The Mother and Daughter, building on a general interest in criticism in the mother / daughter plot.<sup>194</sup> In my reading of this novel, I argue that Opie distributes the roles of motherhood between Savanna, the mulatto servant, and the Quaker Mrs Pemberton, with the latter acting as moral mother to Adeline. Not only is Mrs Pemberton important in this role, but she demonstrates also the Christian pro-marriage stance that the novel seems ultimately to endorse. Instead of presenting a pro-marriage stance that is clearly anti-Jacobin, Opie promotes this point of view through a character who, owing to her Dissenting status, would have been perceived as an enemy to the anti-Jacobins.

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<sup>192</sup> Matthew Grenby, “Novels of Opinion.” The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: CUP, 2011) 160-174 (172).

<sup>193</sup> Laura Mandell, “Bad Marriages, Bad Novels: The ‘Philosophical Romance’,” Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780-1830, eds Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool: LUP, 2008) 68; Peter Knox-Shaw, Jane Austen and the Enlightenment (Cambridge: CUP, 2004); Andrew McInnes, “Wollstonecraft’s Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period,” diss., U of Exeter, 2012, 27-28.

<sup>194</sup> Howard, 355-376; Mellor, Mothers; Greenfield; McWhir; Guest, 161; Ruth Bloch, “American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815.” Feminist Studies 4 (1978): 101-26; Marianne Hirsch, The Mother / Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989); Ruth Perry, “Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England,” Journal of the History of Sexuality 2 (1991): 204-234; Felicity A. Nussbaum, ““Savage” Mothers: Narratives of Maternity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” Cultural Critique 20 (Winter 1991-2): 123-151; April Alliston, Virtue’s Faults: Correspondences in Eighteenth-Century British and French Women’s Fiction (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996).

In this chapter, I adopt a Quaker lens to examine the main topics in this novel: sentimental education; marriage; the plight of the fallen woman, and patriarchal society more generally. Opie's decision to use Mrs Pemberton as a voice of reason and morality in this novel may encourage Adeline to adopt a pro-marriage stance in the end, but for reasons that are more complex and radical than Mrs Pemberton's own. Adeline is shown to be a complete victim of circumstance – both faulty education and immoral society – therefore rendering the prejudice against her as a fallen woman all the more unjust. Opie uses Mrs Pemberton – a Dissenting figure who not only threatens anti-Jacobin ideology through her Quaker Quietism, but also as a female minister – to raise the general profile of the Quakers.<sup>195</sup> This Quaker character allows Opie to advance her ideological argument at the end of The Father and Daughter as well: if society treated fallen women in the truly Christian way Mrs Pemberton treats Adeline, the lot of women would be greatly enhanced.

### Adeline's education

Novels of the Romantic era often indicated their sentimental heritage through their interest in education and educational philosophy, with heroines who either remained 'a type of naïve primitive' or who took on ideologies society would condemn.<sup>196</sup> Adeline clearly belongs to the latter category, but her naivety is also a strong point in favour of her virtue. These heroines predictably suffer greatly, as they serve as examples of why sentimental education cannot work, or cannot be seen to work (Rowland 201). In Adeline Mowbray, Opie's ambiguous treatment of Jean Jacques Rousseau's Julie, ou, La Nouvelle Héloïse – itself a very ambiguous text – presents opinions about sentimental education that are inconclusive, with Mrs Pemberton's

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<sup>195</sup> I explore Quaker Quietism in a little more depth later, but, in short, it is 'a form of mysticism which starts with the assumption of the essential moral ruin and religious incapacity of human nature': Elbert Russell, The History of Quakerism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943) 229. Thomas Clarkson sought to combat prejudice against the Quakers in a contemporaneous work: A Portraiture of Quakerism, taken from a View of the Moral Education, Discipline, Peculiar Customs, Religious Principles and Civil Oeconomy, and Character, of the Society of Friends (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807 (1806)).

<sup>196</sup> Ann Wierda Rowland, "Sentimental Fiction," The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period, eds Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: CUP, 2008) 201. Rowland cites the heroines of Eliza Fenwick's Secresy (1795), Mary Hays' The Victim of Prejudice (1799) and Adeline Mowbray in particular.

views further complicating the issue. Opie, like Rousseau in Julie, ultimately presents a utopian vision of sentimental education which would have its place in a fairer society, indicating also the possible positive role for the novel as a literary form in that society.

When Mrs Pemberton and Mrs Mowbray finally meet towards the end of the novel, and are united in their search for Adeline, Mrs Mowbray discusses her educational methods, to which Mrs Pemberton confidently responds ‘thy daughter’s *faults* originated in thee! her education was cruelly defective’ (267). Mrs Mowbray tries to explain the time she devoted to producing a theoretical work on Adeline’s education. Mrs Pemberton bluntly asks ‘but where was thy daughter; and how was she employed during the time that thou wert writing a book by which to educate her?’, concluding that ‘till of late years, a thick curtain of self-love seems to have been dropped between thy heart and maternal affection’ (268). Mrs Mowbray’s first fault, in Mrs Pemberton’s eyes, has been her failure to remain attentive to the effect on Adeline of the studies she had promoted:

But what were these studies? And didst thou acquaint thyself with the deductions which her quick mind formed from them? No – thou didst not, as parents should do, enquire into the impressions made on thy daughter’s mind by the books which she perused. Prompt to feel, and hasty to decide, as Adeline was, how necessary was to her the warning voice of judgement and experience! (268)

Adeline had not lived in the world, so she could not recognise how inappropriate her sentiments were for the world. Once Mrs Mowbray pointed that out, Adeline’s opinions were already fixed, leaving Mrs Pemberton to conclude that both Mrs Mowbray and Adeline were ‘pupils of affliction and experience’ (269). Opie’s treatment of Adeline’s education – in particular, Adeline’s reading – contributes to the ambiguity in this novel, but Mrs Pemberton’s views ultimately compound that ambiguity.

Mrs Mowbray fails to secure a proper education for Adeline, but it becomes increasingly difficult to glean from Opie’s text what she is suggesting a ‘proper education’ should be. Adeline’s body proves the subject of “experimental philosophy” throughout the novel (Eberle Chastity 113). The experiments range from

Mrs Mowbray's early educational theories about whether Adeline should wear shoes or not (45), through Adeline's various trials, until, as a married woman, she is nevertheless considered someone to be pursued (again) by Colonel Mordaunt, owing to her earlier, lax principles concerning marriage (235-239). The literary (and ideological) debt to Rousseau in this period is evident, but Opie's contribution has not been clear. She neither fits into Eleanor Ty's binary of "sex'd" or "unsex'd" females, nor Bannet's more recent categorisation of Egalitarians and Matriarchs, negotiating rather between these extremes, as her middle ground in The Father and Daughter has already illustrated.<sup>197</sup> The distinction between Egalitarians and Matriarchs is useful, nevertheless – the former imagining equality in their relationships with men, with the latter acknowledging male superiority but ruling their domestic households – and I adopt it in my discussion of other writers of this period.

Opie's treatment of Rousseau in Adeline Mowbray demonstrates her negotiation, as she addresses directly the effect of Julie on her heroine. Adeline chances upon the novel, but before she can read much more than the beginning, her mother forbids her to continue, not because she herself has read it, but because of what she has heard about its impropriety. The narrator indicates that the effect on Adeline may, however, have been quite beneficial:

Had she read it, the sacrifice which the guilty but penitent Julia [sic.] makes to filial affection, and the respectable light in which the institution of marriage is held up to view, would have strengthened, no doubt, Adeline's resolution to obey her mother, and give up Glenmurray; and have led her to reconsider these opinions which taught her to think contemptible what ages and nations had been content to venerate. But it was decreed that every thing the mother of Adeline did should accelerate the fate of her devoted daughter. (93)

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<sup>197</sup> Eleanor Ty, Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s (Toronto, Buffalo and London: U of Toronto P, 1993) 4. Bannet, 10. Bannet does not consider Opie in her detailed discussion of Rousseau's legacy (160-195): my nuanced discussion of Opie's debt to Rousseau might indicate why not.

Opie engaged here in a dialogue both with anti-Jacobin critics of Rousseau and with rationalist feminist ones. On the one hand, Opie rejected a conservative moralist's reaction against Rousseau on the grounds of the impropriety of Julie's affair with St Preux, instead claiming that the underlying moral of Julie upholds marriage. On the other, Opie argued that women readers would not necessarily be seduced by the novel, therefore opening themselves up to seduction in real life.

Where reading Julie might have had a positive effect on Opie's heroine, Wollstonecraft and Hays had demonstrated quite a different effect on their heroines – Maria in The Wrongs of Woman (1798) and Emma in Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796) – who had both been seduced by the sentimental idealism of St Preux.<sup>198</sup> The differences are partly owing to what these heroines have been used to reading, and Opie's message here is complicated. Wollstonecraft's heroine has quite a selection of reading provided her by Darnford, but having taken up a philosophical work, 'her attention strayed from cold arguments on the nature of what she felt, while she was feeling, and she snapt the chain of the theory to read Dryden's Guiscard and Sigismunda'.<sup>199</sup> An abstract treatise about the power of thought and emotion has less effect on Maria than a more concrete depiction in a narrative (Kelly ed. Wrongs 217n). Although Maria has read Julie before, the narrator informs us, this time its effect is all-consuming (88), only to be heightened by the appearance outside her window of a mysterious stranger (Darnford) whom she likens to St Preux (89). The marginalia written in the novel (she correctly but completely sentimentally conjectures) by that stranger, further intensifies her feelings: it reads, 'Rousseau alone, the true Prometheus of sentiment, possessed the fire of genius necessary to pourtray the passion, the truth of which goes so directly to the heart' (89).

Hays's heroine Emma confesses that she 'subscribed to a circulating library, and frequently read, or rather devoured – little careful in the reflection – from ten to fourteen novels a week'.<sup>200</sup> When her reading is subsequently guided by her father,

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<sup>198</sup> The objections to Rousseau's Julie were not confined to an Egalitarian perspective: Hannah More, a Matriarch, described Julie as 'a complicated drug': Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (London: T. Cadell, 1799). Quoted in McWhir, ed., 304.

<sup>199</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary, and, The Wrongs of Woman, 1788 and 1798, ed., Gary Kelly (Oxford: OUP, 1976) 86.

<sup>200</sup> Miriam L. Wallace, ed., Memoirs of Emma Courtney, by Mary Hays, and Adeline Mowbray, by Amelia Opie (Glen Allan (VI): College Publishing, 2004) 63-64.

she chanced upon Rousseau's novel, which her father promptly snatches away, 'but the impression made on my mind was never to be effaced – it was even productive of a long chain of consequences, that will continue to operate till the day of my death' (71).

Adeline, on the other hand, is no novel-reader. The narrator is negative about Adeline's stepfather's library and certain novels in particular as she notes that:

While Voltaire's chaste and moral tragedies were excluded, his profligate tales attracted the eye by the peculiar elegance of their binding; while dangerous French novels of all descriptions met the view under the downy pillows of the inviting sofas around, calculated to inflame the fancy and corrupt the morals. (93)

But the narrator then reveals that 'Adeline, unprepared by any reading of the kind to receive and relish the poison contained in them, turned with disgust from pages so uncongenial to her feelings' until she chanced upon Julie, and was so taken by it that she too compared her beloved 'to the eloquent lover of Julie' (93). The narrator describes this work as 'enchanted' (93) but, in the context, she surely means negative enchantment, although she later considers that Rousseau might indeed have been Adeline's salvation if she had been allowed to finish it. Opie joins Wollstonecraft and Hays in making a rationalist feminist critique of Rousseau's dangerous sentimental enchantment, but simultaneously presents a more favourable reading than they had by focussing on what she sees as the ultimate moral message of Julie rather than the initial dangerous enchantment. Opie dialogues with the anti-Jacobin critics of Rousseau who think he teaches giving in to passion and thus foments revolution, and with the rationalist feminist ones who acknowledge the attraction of his depiction of passion, but point out that it leaves idealistic young women vulnerable to men like Darnford, who fail them. Opie's point is that both kinds of critics underestimate the extent to which the later development of Rousseau's story counters the initial dangers. There is also a hint aimed at Opie's own readers that they should not judge the moral tendency of her work until they reach the end and consider the work as a whole.

Julie's early relationship with St Preux is clearly one that Rousseau wanted to be seen as innocent and natural, and St Preux – calling Julie 'my spouse! ... my

worthy and chaste companion!' – argues that Julie should not berate herself for their actions:

Have you not followed nature's purest laws? Have you not entered freely into the holiest of engagements? What have you done that divine and human laws cannot and should not sanction? What is lacking in our union but a public declaration?<sup>201</sup>

St Preux reflects later, in a letter from Paris (and therefore urban French immorality), with what little seriousness the marriage bond is considered, yet how prejudiced people remain to those outside it. He exclaims: 'A woman who has not feared to defile the marriage bed a hundred times would dare with her impure mouth to denounce our chaste embraces, and condemn the union of two sincere hearts that never were capable of breaking faith' (222). Yet once Julie is married to Wolmar, the value of marriage is clear, and a happy Julie can declare: 'I have as husband the most honest and gentlest of men; a mutual inclination adds to the duty that binds us; he has no desires other than mine' (420).

By referring directly to Julie, Opie also evoked Rousseau's opinions on the novel, both from his prefaces to the work and the novel's contents. In the first line of the first preface to Julie, Rousseau stated that novels were for the corrupt (3), 'presenting his work in effect as an anti-novel' in an attempt to avoid criticism for stooping to this literary form of dubious morality.<sup>202</sup> An example of a small concession to novels in the main body of the work is that 'novels are perhaps the ultimate kind of instruction remaining to be offered to a people so corrupt that any other is useless' (227), but Rousseau was very ambiguous about the novel form throughout. Opie was similarly ambiguous in her novel, also presenting a sentimental novel which, she clearly believed, possessed a moral purpose, whilst simultaneously criticising some novels (at least) for their immorality. In his second preface to Julie, Rousseau argued that he was transcribing the truth of the 'better world' he knows

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<sup>201</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Julie, or, The new Heloise: letters of two lovers who live in a small town at the foot of the Alps, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché, eds Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1997) 82.

<sup>202</sup> R. J. Howells, La Nouvelle Héloïse, Critical Guides to French Texts (London: Grant & Cutler Ltd, 1986).

exists (Howells 64). Opie, through Mrs Pemberton's faithful and compassionately Christian service to Adeline, also portrayed the better world Opie envisioned as a possibility, however remote the novel's trajectory may make it seem. Opie was a careful reader of Rousseau. She took him as a model not in the way that he was popularly understood (as a revolutionary writer of passion) but in the way he himself understood his project: a moralist-philosopher highly critical of the general run of novels but adopting the form in order to depict some visionary social ideas. Opie, then, had a more complex understanding of Rousseau as a novelist than many of her contemporaries. Her novel needs to be understood in a similarly complex way, not as simply endorsing or punishing Adeline's transgressions but using her experiences to point to visionary social ideals of her own.

Mrs Pemberton's criticisms of Adeline's education in themselves indicate an ideal world where sentimental education would not be as damaging as it is here for Adeline. She argues that Mrs Mowbray's ideals might have benefited 'thy second, third, or fourth child, hadst thou been possessed of so many; but, in the mean while, thy firstborn must have been fatefully neglected' (268). The education in itself was not necessarily to be deplored, but maternal (or parental) love and attention needed to be sure to accompany its administration. Opie was implying a criticism of Rousseau personally here, who wrote a seminal educational treatise (Emile 1762) but was famous for neglecting his own children. By evoking Julie in Adeline Mowbray, Opie had an eye on Rousseau as a model for her educational novel, but she was attempting a different type of story. Rousseau's model was of a lover / mentor with a sentimental heroine who believed in free love: Opie modified that model to see how the education would work from mother to daughter. From Emile, one can deduce that Rousseau considered education by example – that is, education through sentiment – more effective than education through reason, thereby illustrating his commitment to sensibility (Alliston 224). This is not what Mrs Mowbray's intentions are for Adeline, but she applies herself to the theory of cultivating Adeline's reason instead of the practice. Mrs Mowbray is too much like Rousseau: she has many ideals but provides no care. Adeline is an alternative Julie: her hopes that Mrs Mowbray will become a more diligent mother encourage her sense of filial duty, ultimately, as she agrees to marry Glenmurray should her mother insist on it (123). Mrs Mowbray's rejection of Adeline at that point seals her fate in a way that her education itself did not. Mrs Pemberton is the better mother figure in

terms of Adeline's moral education, and the Quaker character indicates that Opie's educational ideals are more Quaker – especially in terms of universal education – than indebted to Rousseau. Mrs Pemberton's frequent absence is considered here with regard to that role.

Even through the character of Mrs Pemberton, Opie did not want to condemn a sentimental education outright, but indicated instead how, in an ideal world, it would also have its place. Opie herself read Julie as a young woman and enthused about it in a 1796 letter to Wollstonecraft.<sup>203</sup> By the time she wrote Adeline Mowbray, she was a respectable married woman and author (Eberle Chastity 113). She could have been illustrating how the impact of the work (and of sentimental novels in general) should not be considered a foregone conclusion.

### Mrs Pemberton in the Novel

Having examined the effect on the novel's message of Mrs Pemberton's opinions on Adeline's education, I explore here the type of character Mrs Pemberton is, and how Opie introduces her to the novel. Mrs Pemberton embodies a range of positive Quaker qualities, and emerges as an ideal Christian role model, which leads to an examination of Mrs Pemberton as Adeline's moral mother in the novel.

Opie's narrator provides the reader with the details of Mrs Pemberton's early life very late in the novel, preferring perhaps to demonstrate first the compassion and benevolence of the character – who does not reject the fallen Adeline – before her own circumstances are explained. This explanation, when it finally comes, indicates the light in which Opie wishes to portray the Quakers:

When she was only eighteen, Mr. Pemberton, a young and gay quaker, fell in love with her; and having inspired her with a mutual passion, he married her, notwithstanding the difference of their religious opinions, and the displeasure of his friends. He was consequently disowned by the society: but being weaned by the happiness which he found at home from those public amusements which had first lured him from the

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<sup>203</sup> Amelia Alderson, letter to Mary Wollstonecraft, 28 August [1796], MS Abinger, ms, c.41, Fols. 9-10, Bodleian Lib., Oxford.

strict habits of his sect, he was seen desirous of being again admitted a member of it; and in process of time he was once more received into it; while his amiable wife, having no wish beyond her domestic circle, and being disposed to think her husband's opinions right, became in time, a convert to the same profession of faith, and exhibited in her manners the rare union of the easy elegance of a woman of the world with the rigid decorum and unadorned dress of a strict quaker. (265)

The warm affection, indeed 'passion', described here stood at odds with the prevailing image of Quaker marriage as 'puritanical', an image evoked even here.<sup>204</sup> The narrator's explanation serves to illustrate the strict tenets of the sect, but with possibilities for review and, ultimately, with a balanced understanding of the place for the public and the private in each person's life. Elizabeth Fry, with her strict allegiance to the Quakers, but with a prominent public philanthropic presence also, might have been the inspiration for Mrs Pemberton (McWhir 31). Opie's description of 'the rare union' of the worldly and strict in Mrs Pemberton is the kind of attitude Opie would ultimately adopt herself when she joined the sect twenty years later. Her own fictional ideal became a model she tried to follow, which indicates already Opie's attraction to the Quakers and her wish to see some of the stricter tenets of the Society of Friends infused with further warmth and elegance.

The context of Adeline and Mrs Pemberton's first meeting sets the tone for the moral guidance the Quaker gives Adeline throughout the novel, but it also provides evidence of how Adeline's principles against marriage are starting to falter, as well as demonstrating her virtuous qualities. Mrs Pemberton enters the narrative halfway through the novel, in the longest and by far the most important and pivotal chapter of the work.<sup>205</sup> At the beginning of the chapter, a pregnant Adeline laments her mother's abandonment of her, and considers herself and Glenmurray – already quite ill at this point – to be totally alone in the world (143). By the end of the chapter, she

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<sup>204</sup> Sandra Stanley Holton, Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radicalism in the Lives of Women Friends, 1780-1930 (London & New York: Routledge, 2007) 61.

<sup>205</sup> Chapter 17 in modern editions; Vol II, chapter iv in the original. Butler's wording has implied that Mrs Pemberton's rebuke to Adeline comes near the end of the novel (121), and Greenfield's comment that the novel introduces Mrs Pemberton 'towards the novel's end' (191) is also indicative of the degree to which current criticism has tended to neglect this character, who actually appears in the novel before the mulatto servant, Savanna.

has met Mrs Pemberton and taken Savanna in, but has lost her baby and Glenmurray, and has apparently been rejected again by her mother. The immediate backdrop of Mrs Pemberton's appearance is Adeline's dismissal of her servant, Mary, who has questioned Adeline's lifestyle and who demands Adeline present herself as a married woman in order that she might have a better chance of finding further employment.

The importance to Quakers of honesty has been explained earlier in this project. In the first chapter of Adeline Mowbray, Adeline's 'habit of ingenuousness' (45) is foregrounded, and her commitment to honesty is demonstrated in chapter 17 by her refusal to introduce herself to Mrs Pemberton as 'Mrs Glenmurray'. She is finally coming to realise, through Colonel Mordaunt's attentions to her (145-147) and her servant's rudeness (148-149), what her mother's rejection and that (apparently) of Dr Norberry's family have failed to convey. Adeline has stated that, if her mother insisted on it, she would marry Glenmurray immediately (123), but Dr Norberry's inarticulate failure adequately to convey this message contributes to the confusion (132-3). It sees Adeline rejected by her mother, by the Norberry family, and finally implored to call herself 'Mrs Glenmurray' out of kindness to her servant. As Adeline exclaims 'And I have stooped to the meanness of disguising the truth! ... surely, surely, there must be something radically wrong in a situation which exposes one to such a variety of degradations!' (150), she indicates not only the importance to her of veracity but also an idea of some inadequacy either with her own situation, or with society's reaction to it. It is as though, by mentioning the absolute importance of veracity, Adeline is inviting the first real (and honest) conversation about her situation, and for that discussion, Opie introduces Mrs Pemberton. Just at this moment, Adeline, 'for the first time in her life ... trembled to approach a stranger; for the first time she felt that she was going to appear before a fellow-creature as an object of scorn, and, though an enthusiast for virtue, to be considered as a votary of vice' (151).

Although Mrs Pemberton initially feels she cannot stay when she hears of Adeline's situation, her benevolence causes her to change her mind, and this benevolence in turn mollifies Adeline's feelings of anger immediately (152). Mrs Pemberton shows her potential for 'moral motherhood' as Adeline has the first real conversation in the novel about her principles and her situation with a disinterested party. Only Mrs Pemberton – after seeing that Adeline, 'firm as thou art in guilt' (154),

will not readily repent – realises, with her own Christian principles, that she cannot be a disinterested party, and offers Adeline her support. Yet Mrs Pemberton is unrelenting in her criticism of Adeline’s situation, arguing that:

Thou art one of the enlightened, as they call themselves – Thou art one of those wise in their own conceit, who, disregarding the customs of ages, and the dictates of experience, set up their own opinions against the hallowed institutions of man and the will of the Most High. (153-154)

Mrs Pemberton’s utterance here is a good example of her belonging to the Quietist phase of Quaker development: she evokes Scripture here rather than making any reference to any revolutionary climate, and thus distinguishes herself from those who might be interested in blaming Adeline’s decisions on particular political events or movements.<sup>206</sup>

As Mrs Pemberton offers Adeline her support, a comparison can be drawn with Mrs Mowbray’s treatment of Adeline in the preceding chapter, where the mother turns her daughter away with a curse which highlights the position of both women as sexual rivals, at least in Mrs Mowbray’s mind:

Mark my words: I solemnly swear ... that until you shall have experienced the anguish of having lost the man whom you adore, till you shall have been as wretched in love, and as disgraced in the eye of the world, as I have been, I never will see you more, or pardon your many sins against me – No – not even were you on your death-bed. Yet, no; I am wrong there – Yes; on your death-bed ... Yes, there; there I should – I should forgive you. (139)

Savanna’s vow to stay with Adeline (which occurs just after Adeline has saved Savanna (174)) has been considered the exact opposite of Mrs Mowbray’s curse (Greenfield 136). But a more ready parallel is found between Mrs Mowbray’s oath and Mrs Pemberton’s vow when she leaves Adeline after their initial discussion. Mrs

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<sup>206</sup> McWhir references Proverbs 26.5 and 28.11 for ‘those wise in their own conceit’ (ed. 153n).

Pemberton has been unsure of what she thinks (like Mrs Mowbray), but she then provides evidence of support that could not be more different from Mrs Mowbray's curse:

Yet not even against a wilful offender like thee, should one gate that may lead to amendment be shut. Thy situation and thy fortunes may soon be greatly changed; affliction may subdue thy pride, and the counsel of a friend of thine own sex might then sound sweetly in thine ears. Should that time come, I will be that friend ... and be assured that Rachel Pemberton will try to forget thy errors in thy distresses. (154)<sup>207</sup>

This declaration is the closest to unconditional love that Adeline has experienced from a mother figure, and stands in stark contrast to the almost unconditional hate that her own mother has just expressed. Savanna's vow 'to be faithful and grateful to this our mistress, till our last day; and never to forsake her in sickness or in sorrow' (174) reiterates Savanna's position as a servant, and indicates that she has little potential as a 'moral mother' in the way that Mrs Pemberton has. Savanna's vow does, however, evoke marriage vows, which is an aspect to be considered when I discuss Opie's use of oaths in the context of Jacobin / anti-Jacobin rhetoric.

The narrator describes Mrs Pemberton as Adeline's 'monitress' (156) after she has shared her memories of Adeline in her youth and led Adeline to lament the decline in her 'discharge of every christian duty' (155). There has been a prevailing religious theme to Mrs Pemberton's discourse, and Glenmurray comments afterwards that, from 'the elevated tone of her voice' (156), it sounded as if she had been preaching to Adeline. Yet, despite Glenmurray's general nature as a sceptic, he urges Adeline that she 'be sure to take care of Mrs Pemberton's address' (156), foreseeing her support. Upon his death, Mrs Pemberton immediately comes to Adeline, and her skill in tending to Adeline's precise needs (which has come, the narrator explains, from having experienced the death of her husband and two children (187)) is contrasted favourably with Savanna's 'loud and extravagant grief'

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<sup>207</sup> When Mrs Pemberton hears news of Glenmurray's death, she rushes to Adeline immediately, and the narrator specifies that 'she forgot Adeline's crime in her distress' (187).

(187). When Mrs Pemberton has to leave very soon afterwards to tend to others in her 'active duties of religion' (187), it becomes apparent that, perhaps owing to her frequent absence and her tragic personal experience, she can be viewed as a general mother figure who has many people to tend to in her extended care.

Although Savanna has been very diligent in her care of Adeline, this heroine still feels a need for a connection with Mrs Pemberton, and she writes to her – 'whose esteem she was eager to recover' (205) – when she marries Berrendale, and then to share her 'feelings of parental delight' (210) when Editha is born. Mrs Pemberton's lengthy disappearance from the novel then seems to serve not only as a reminder of the motherly duties Mrs Pemberton is performing elsewhere, but to provide Opie with the space to trace Adeline's difficult path through various tribulations without the support (especially spiritual) that Mrs Pemberton supplies. The fact that Mrs Pemberton is not present in the novel a huge amount might be connected to the Age of Quaker Quietism that encompassed the time Adeline Mowbray was written.<sup>208</sup> Indeed, this novel sits in an interesting phase of the Age of Quietism which had a strong focus on philanthropy, seeing a great increase in public ministry alongside Quietist principles, both of which are exemplified by Mrs Pemberton (Russell 251). Quaker meetings were normally silent, with members actively listening for the Holy Spirit: this silent contemplation can be contrasted with the loquacity often thought to be part of women's nature, which Quaker women did not share (Michaelson 66). In her employment of Mrs Pemberton, Opie may suggest that what her Quaker character says might be little, but it will be spiritually inspired and pivotal to the development of the story. For Quietists, 'the essentials of religion were inward – the effort to silence the creature, to feel after the will of God for the existing situation, to be fully resigned to do his will' (Russell 292).

Mrs Pemberton pauses often, which Opie does not explain, but which could easily be interpreted as giving space to listen for the spirit. She sits in silence when deciding whether to stay with Adeline on their first meeting (151), and after she has realised who Adeline is (155): in this latter instance, the narrator adds an even clearer 'here again she paused' (155). Mrs Pemberton also pauses in silence before leaving after Glenmurray's death (189), and she reflects silently as she meets a

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<sup>208</sup> Patricia Howell Michaelson, Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002). Russell dates this third phase of the 'Age of Quietism' from 1784 to 1827 (251-298).

dying Adeline, then stating that Adeline, in her penitent state, resembles her former innocent self more than the person Mrs Pemberton first met (281). Opie does not state explicitly why her character silently pauses so much, but no other characters in the novel behave in this way, and the idea that Mrs Pemberton is pausing for Divine direction lends extra weight to the importance and significance of her decisions.<sup>209</sup> The Quietist emphasis on silent (and patient) waiting is mirrored in Mrs Pemberton's absences: something more beneficial will come of acting calmly after reflection than from acting immediately and rashly. Mrs Pemberton's absences are made necessary in order that Adeline can come gradually through her own reflections to a better state of mind, rather than being lectured into goodness, which would be neither morally nor artistically satisfactory.

The power of Mrs Pemberton's discernment is demonstrated by the rapidity with which she realizes that Miss Woodville, Mrs Mowbray's niece, has been tampering with Adeline's correspondence in order to avoid a reconciliation between mother and daughter (267; 269-270). It is perhaps owing to this skill also that Mrs Pemberton needs to be absent as Adeline experiences the trials of mistreatment by Berrendale, then trying to find her marriage certificate, and experiencing the vicious impertinence of the lawyer Mr Langley, through whom she meets her former servant Mary again, and contracts smallpox. Mrs Pemberton has such a powerful influence that one imagines she would be able to help Adeline through these trials in a way that would ruin the plot Opie had planned for her novel. It should be noted, however, that Adeline does not immediately resolve after her first meeting with Mrs Pemberton to follow the Quaker's principles and marry Glenmurray: not only does Mrs Pemberton's absence allow for the plot to develop, but her moral motherhood is given more time to do its work in her absence. She represents a moral motherhood that requires maternal absence, so Adeline can face her trials alone and come to maturity. This ideal of motherhood acknowledges Adeline's need to grow independently.

Adeline Mowbray's subtitle, 'The Mother and Daughter', indicates its belonging to the historical moment where the concept of the "moral mother" was

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<sup>209</sup> Opie does state, on the other hand, when Mrs Pemberton withdraws 'to pour forth in solitary prayer the breathings of devout gratitude' (262) after Mrs Mowbray saves her from a bull, or when Mrs Pemberton, 'her hands clasped in each other, seemed lost in devout contemplation' (283) just before Adeline dies.

idealised in Britain (Howard 356).<sup>210</sup> Many of the various mother / daughter tropes in this tradition are evoked by the relationship between Adeline and Mrs Mowbray: daughters who are deprived of education despite their parents being present, or those whose mothers pose a threat to them by competing for their marriage partners, for instance (Alliston 221).<sup>211</sup> The presence of mother-substitutes is a theme that is of particular interest in Adeline Mowbray, with regard to both Savanna and Mrs Pemberton. Opie distributes maternal functions between these two characters: Savanna represents physical proximity, intimacy, emotional expression and constant devotion, while Mrs Pemberton exemplifies rationality, moral education and discernment, and the proper encouragement of independent development, all the qualities associated with the 'moral mother'. Although Savanna has been more present than Mrs Pemberton – being considered by some as Adeline's surrogate mother – Mrs Pemberton provides complementary maternal qualities.<sup>212</sup> It is Mrs Pemberton who is more measured and calm when Glenmurray dies (187-188), compared with Savanna's 'loud and extravagant grief' (187). Savanna also demonstrates errors in judgement, as she gives Berrendale hope of his imminent marriage to Adeline (197-199) quite to Adeline's surprise, or is so rude to him following his ill treatment of Adeline as his wife that Adeline has to fight to keep her (211).

Opie uses both Mrs Pemberton and Savanna to highlight society's injustices: Mrs Pemberton foregrounds those of religious intolerance, while Savanna invites the slavery debate into the novel. Opie makes connections through Savanna between the slavery narrative and a woman's place in a patriarchal system more generally. It is perhaps important that Savanna is so present in the novel, with Mrs Pemberton so absent, because this dynamic allows Opie to foreground the patriarchal injustices in this novel. Savanna's status in the novel is unclear: she is both slave and servant to Adeline, and is property passed from daughter to mother at the end of the novel.<sup>213</sup> Savanna is even put back into slavery in Jamaica by Berrendale, once it is clear that

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<sup>210</sup> Howard cites Bloch and Perry here (375). This focus on moral ideology developed more than fifty years after the literature with which the 'cult of motherhood' has been associated, seeing the woman's ideal place shift from wife to mother (Nussbaum 126, Howard 356).

<sup>211</sup> Alliston works with many minor French and English novels; of more canonical texts, she analyses Madame De Lafayette's The Princess of Clèves and works by Madame de Staël and Austen.

<sup>212</sup> Greenfield, 126; Mellor, Mothers, 105.

<sup>213</sup> Howard, 358; Greenfield, 141.

she is going to return to England to tell Adeline of his bigamous marriage (223); since she escapes almost immediately, this detail serves primarily to remind readers of her precarious status. A small aside just before the end of the novel also reminds readers of Savanna's poverty and powerlessness, as she reflects on Dr Norberry's treatment of the dying Adeline: "This it be to have money," said Savanna, as she saw the various things prepared and made to tempt Adeline's weak appetite: – "poor Savanna mean as well – her heart make all these, but her hand want power" (280). Savanna is certainly a carer for Adeline, administering many maternal tasks, and she commits herself to Adeline in the role of servant. But she is not in a position to be a representative of 'moral motherhood', lacking the sense and moderation that Mrs Pemberton embodies. Although frequently absent, the final scenes of the novel show Mrs Pemberton as a better mother for Adeline even than Mrs Mowbray, and as an appropriate guardian for Savanna.<sup>214</sup> When Mrs Pemberton appears near the end of the novel after a long absence, it is somewhat out of the blue in a comic coincidence scene which sees Mrs Mowbray saving her from a raging bull. Mrs Pemberton helps Mrs Mowbray realise the weight of her poor decisions in the past, and helps her to orchestrate a reunion with Adeline, which evokes in turn the Age of Quietism's focus on philanthropy. Mrs Mowbray's sentimentality and Mrs Pemberton's temperance are contrasted when they meet (263), but Mrs Mowbray herself says that, in her behaviour to Adeline on Glenmurray's death, the benevolent Quaker 'acted a mother's part – you did what I ought to have done' (264).

### Marriage, and the novel's conclusion

It is important to consider, however, that Mrs Pemberton has not yet reappeared in the novel when Adeline pronounces herself in favour of marriage. It is important because the reasons Adeline sees for the utility of marriage are quite different from the conventional ones Mrs Pemberton represents. Adeline recants her former anti-marriage stance, but the result is ambiguity for the novel's overall message regarding marriage.

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<sup>214</sup> Howard, 369.

Many critics have pointed out how unfavourably marriage is portrayed in Adeline Mowbray.<sup>215</sup> I build here on Bannet's close reading of Adeline's arguments in favour of marriage at the end of the novel to demonstrate that Adeline does not come to revise her opinions owing simply to a realisation that conventional ideas were correct after all. Given Adeline's earlier views on marriage, Colonel Mordaunt does not realise she is actually married to Berrendale, and pursues her. His misunderstanding of her situation gives her 'an opportunity of proving, incontrovertibly, my full conviction of the fallacy of my past opinions, and that I became a wife, after my idle declamations against marriage, from change of principle' (237). At this point, her new opinions seem quite conventional, but she says that 'at present I am not equal to expatiate on matters so important: however, some time or other, perhaps, I may make known to you my sentiments on them in a more ample manner' (238). It is when Adeline provides this more exhaustive account that her views can be seen to diverge from conventional opinions about the value of marriage in society. Adeline reasons that 'marriage must be more beneficial to society in its consequences, than connections capable of being dissolved at pleasure; because it has a tendency to call forth and exercise the affections, and control the passions' (256), but not because society expects it. Adeline considers that the commitment she and Glenmurray shared is so rare that marriage needs to provide a legal framework for those who may aspire to such a union but be unable to commit themselves to it.<sup>216</sup>

In the context where people are as changeable as they generally are, if marriage did not exist, Adeline predicts that 'unbridled licentiousness would be in general practice. – What then, in such a state of society, would be the fate of the children born in it?' (256). Her concluding statement on the subject seems to provide a total recantation of her previous principles:

On this ground, therefore, this strong ground, I venture to build my present opinion, that marriage is a wise and ought to be a sacred institution; and I bitterly regret the hour when, with the hasty and

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<sup>215</sup> Claudia Johnson Jane Austen, 23; Howard, 355-376; Devine Jump, "A revolution," 122-148; Bannet, 122; Eberle, Chastity, 116-117; McWhir, 24.

<sup>216</sup> Bannet, 123.

immature judgment of eighteen, and with a degree of presumption scarcely pardonable at any time of life, I dared to think and act contrary to this opinion and the revered experience of ages, and became in the eyes of the world an example of vice, when I believed myself the champion of virtue. (257)

Through providing a second, more emphatic statement in favour of marriage, Opie might be deliberately shying away from a logical conclusion that Society's total defence of marriage was to blame for all that unhappiness, following all the awful examples of marriage in the novel:

We might even read its ostentatiously orthodox conclusion as a ruse – a deliberate attempt to dress up the author's radical sentiments in a form that readers would find acceptable, and thus to fend off precisely the kind of hostility that Opie presents as the regrettable result of Adeline's freethinking. (Grenby "Novels" 172)

Once Mrs Pemberton has returned, the message regarding marriage does not become any less complicated, however. Many critical discussions of the novel's ending mention Mrs Pemberton's involvement in the closing scenes, but most underestimate her significance. Mrs Pemberton plays a multiplicity of roles in the conclusion, demonstrating the character's crucial importance in carrying Opie's multi-layered meaning.

One focus for Opie at the very end of the novel is the all-female utopia she presents, as Adeline passes the care of her daughter over to her own mother, Savanna and Mrs Pemberton, and is removed from the scorn of the outside world.<sup>217</sup> The all-female utopia reminds the reader on one level how powerless women are in the outside world: the final victories necessary for this "utopia" – Adeline's legitimate marriage and the surety of Editha's inheritance from Berrendale – have been secured by men.<sup>218</sup> Mrs Pemberton is important to the novel's conclusion in terms of

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<sup>217</sup> Mellor, *Mothers*, 105; Eberle, *Chastity*, 134.

<sup>218</sup> Joanne Tong, "The Return of the Prodigal Daughter: Finding the Family in Amelia Opie's Novels," *Studies in the Novel* 36.4 (Winter 2004): 477. It is Colonel Mordaunt who finally acquires Adeline and

her contribution to the all-female group and to the promotion of marriage (alongside Dr Norberry), and as a representation of a woman who does, indeed, possess power.

An understanding of these final scenes relies on being reminded of the significance of Dr Norberry's presence. Dr Norberry has been a surrogate father for Adeline, although rather lacking in this role throughout much of the novel.<sup>219</sup> Alongside Mrs Pemberton, there is the basis for a 'companionate marriage, as [Opie] makes it clear that Dr. Norberry and Mrs. Pemberton, both widowed by the end of the novel, share a special sympathy' (Tong 481). When Adeline lies dying on Savanna's arm, and Mrs Mowbray lulls Editha to sleep, the couple are separated from these women, as 'Dr. Norberry, stifling an occasional sob, was contemplating the group, and Mrs. Pemberton, her hands clasped in each other, seemed lost in devout contemplation' (283). The most significant figure in this final scene is Mrs Pemberton, for what she represents in both the all-female group and the image of a traditional marriage. Mrs Pemberton, in her position as a Quaker preacher, not only has a public role that she will continue to fulfil, but this role also bestows a certain amount of power on her that other women do not have. Through Mrs Pemberton, Opie reminds the readers at the end that, regardless of ideological debates, women will still have important benevolent and philanthropic work to do in the world.<sup>220</sup>

A brief comparison with Opie's earlier novels shows the degree to which Adeline Mowbray can nevertheless be highlighted as a novel which is responding to the revolutionary debate. Although the previous chapter here has demonstrated the ambiguity that can be read in Opie's first two novels – especially The Father and Daughter – one striking difference is in the way Opie concludes her third novel. The morals that are provided at the end of Dangers of Coquetry and The Father and Daughter are not necessarily as simple to read as contemporary reviewers (and some current criticism) have argued, but whatever the message, they stand in stark contrast to Opie's abrupt close to Adeline Mowbray: 'she laid her head on Savanna's bosom, and expired' (283). Having raised so many issues and implicitly asked so

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Berrendale's certificate of marriage, and Berrendale decides, in a fit of repentance, to leave Editha her rightful inheritance.

<sup>219</sup> Tong indicates that Claudia Johnson, King and Pierce, and Kelly all come to the same conclusion (479).

<sup>220</sup> McWhir, 34.

many questions of her readers, Opie refuses, at the end of the novel, to give her readers any guidance about the way or ways in which they might attempt to answer these questions. A possible final impression – that Adeline’s story will provide a warning for her daughter, Editha – is compatible with anti-Jacobin rhetoric. But Opie stresses here through the figure of the Dissenter Mrs Pemberton that such messages can also be interpreted as Christian messages devoid of any political framework.

#### Anti-Jacobin / Christian views from a Dissenter

What Grenby wrote about anti-Jacobin disinclination to debate in fiction does not correspond to the level of ambiguity Opie presented in Adeline Mowbray:

Anti-Jacobins deplored any semblance of debate in fiction not simply because they felt it dangerous to open up the possibility of doubt and disputation amongst the innocents they imagined to be reading novels, nor only because the novelists themselves felt unwilling, on the grounds of either propriety or profitability, to interrupt their fiction with such stuff. Most of all, they felt that debate, questioning and ratiocination, were the very tools of the Jacobins and the hallmarks of their new philosophy. (Anti-Jacobin 79)

A further complication to categorising this novel as anti-Jacobin comes from the fact that the most clearly conventional pro-marriage views (for example) are delivered as Christian views from a Dissenter who would have been considered an enemy to the anti-Jacobins. It was not impossible to incorporate a positive Quaker character in an anti-Jacobin novel: Henry James Pye had given the ‘most authoritative voice’ in his 1795 novel The Democrat to an anonymous American Quaker.<sup>221</sup> This character – in a long monologue in his only scene – rebukes his disillusioned company in a stagecoach for giving time to the revolutionary Jean Le Noir’s radical and ill-considered rantings. But his role as a *deus ex machina* seems

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<sup>221</sup> Kevin Gilmartin, Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832 (Cambridge: CUP, 2007) 165.

to draw attention away from his Dissenting heritage. In writing not only a Quaker, but an American Quaker character, Pye seems to have chosen a figure of reason from as remote a collection of categories as possible: he needed to be an “other” before anything else.

Mrs Pemberton, on the other hand, and despite her frequent absences, is a figure who has a particular function in the world within the novel, as well as in the novel’s framework. Her Dissenting heritage is therefore more significant than that of Pye’s anonymous character. In arguing against free love and a disregard for marriage, Mrs Pemberton performs the function given to the good conservative moralist in conservative and anti-Jacobin fiction. But by giving these views to a Quaker, a member of the Dissenting groups politically opposed to the anti-Jacobins, Opie refuses to allow political conservatives to “own” the right views about marriage. She takes the question out of the Jacobin / anti-Jacobin framework and puts it into a religious framework – specifically into the framework of a radical religion. Opie used Mrs Pemberton not only to illustrate how favourably the Quakers could be viewed, but also to show, through a disinclination to use oaths for example, that the principles of the Quakers could be aligned with the principles of contemporary radicals.

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Quakers, as Dissenters, were frequent targets for The Anti-Jacobin and The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine, whose loyalty to the King was clearly connected

to their loyalty to the Church of England (Wallace ed. Emma Courtney / Adeline Mowbray 438). Dissenting ministers had often supported the principles of Bannet's Egalitarian Enlightenment women writers – the radical side of her binary – and their ancestors, which immediately made them seem threatening to the anti-Jacobins (45). But even a Matriarch writer like Hannah More – Evangelical, but never really considering herself broken away from the Church of England, and on the “conservative” side of Bannet's binary – became a target for the anti-Jacobin press:

Anyone from the followers of Fox and the Society of Friends of the People to the enemies of the slave trade or those who, like Hannah More herself, sought to establish Sunday schools, could be labelled as Jacobins, and frequently were by the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, the individuals who made up its staff and many others of like mind.  
(Grenby Anti-Jacobin 7-8)

Anti-Jacobin novelists chose to draw attention to religious freedom as one of the great threats to British stability during the 1790s, and ongoing pleas for religious toleration were interpreted as sedition in disguise.<sup>222</sup> By placing conservative Christian morality in the mouth of a perceived enemy to Church and State, Opie might have been indicating that religious freedoms did not necessarily have to result in a less moral framework. She might also have been demonstrating her allegiance to her nonconformist background. Opie created a character who, through her frequent silences to invite the Spirit to speak, and through her travelling ministry as a woman, epitomised the differences with the Established Church that were found threatening.

Mrs Pemberton's honesty and simple manner might have been enough in itself to evoke 'that ideal of simple candour in personal relationships which was cherished by Dissenters and English Jacobins alike' (Kelly English Jacobin 82). One aspect of this candour for Quakers was their dislike of oaths, and this dislike was shared by Rational Dissenters, including Godwin. The marriage oath which 'runs as a subcurrent' through Adeline Mowbray finds ready comparison with Mrs Mowbray's awful oath never to see Adeline again, and Savanna's oath to serve Adeline always

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<sup>222</sup> Grenby, Anti-Jacobin, 168; Kelly, English Jacobin, 50.

(Wallace Revolutionary 208-209). I consider it significant not only that Opie should treat oaths in this nonconformist way, but also that, of the three oaths, the only one that is viewed positively in the novel (in terms of the person actually living up to the conditions of their oath) is Savanna's, which is echoed in the alternative female grouping at the novel's close.

### Conclusion

Opie consciously avoided the Jacobin / anti-Jacobin debate in Adeline Mowbray, but this binary would still benefit from more thorough redefinitions of the conservative ideology of the period to render itself useful for such works.<sup>223</sup> Opie's nuanced treatment of Rousseau, for example, shows how an anti-Jacobin interpretation of the novel is problematic – where anti-Jacobins routinely demonstrated 'antipathy to Rousseau and "the new philosophy" more generally' – yet a Jacobin one no less so (Mee "Anti-Jacobin" 653). Wallace's "reformist continuum" provides a more nuanced idea of a climate that was much more complex than Jacobin / anti-Jacobin distinctions can allow for.

Mrs Pemberton is the voice who speaks sense and measure against excesses of sentiment – mainly from Mrs Mowbray and Savanna – in a novel which is, itself, written in a sentimental style. She is pivotal in the conclusion to the novel, which leaves a more optimistic impression than The Father and Daughter, 'as Opie advances a vision beyond that of the insular and troubled parent-child relationship, supplying a solution to the problem she raised in her earlier novel' (Tong 479). But this solution is only partial, as Opie revisits from a Christian viewpoint the need she had presented in The Father and Daughter for society to redeem and forgive the fallen woman.

Like The Father and Daughter, Opie argued for a middle ground in Adeline Mowbray, promoting a traditional pro-marriage stance from Mrs Pemberton, but demonstrating through her benevolent and compassionate character what a truly Christian reaction to a fallen woman might be. The views of Mrs Pemberton on marriage may appropriately be taken to represent Opie's views: that marriage really

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<sup>223</sup> Jon Mee, "Anti-Jacobin Novels: Representation and Revolution," Huntington Library Quarterly 69.4 (December 2006) 650.

is the best relationship on which to base a family. But her representations in this novel of how marriage is used and abused in society, and how the fallen woman is trampled on, point to an idealistic vision where society would be kinder and fairer, as her conclusion to The Father and Daughter had done.

In Godwin's preface to his contemporaneous work Fleetwood (1805) he considered that he had, in An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793), enquired 'whether marriage, as it stands described and supported in the laws of England, might not with advantage admit of certain modifications' (49), but that it did not follow that he must be deemed a hypocrite for marrying. He asked: 'can any thing be more distinct, than such a proposition on the one hand, and a recommendation on the other that each man for himself should supersede and trample upon the institutions of the country in which he lives?' (49). Godwin's influences regarding the miserable lot for women inside marriage in Fleetwood have been traced back to Inchbald's A Simple Story (1791), Holcroft's Anna St Ives (1792), Hays's Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796) and The Victim of Prejudice (1799), and Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman (1798).<sup>224</sup> Contemporary with Fleetwood, Adeline Mowbray can be seen as one in a long line of novels that criticise marriage laws and customs for causing misery to women, with the position of fallen women yet more miserable.

Like Agnes in The Father and Daughter, Adeline appears here as a victim of society. Her rejection by her mother seals her demise, but it is also made clear that, had Colonel Mordaunt not been a libertine, she might have married him before she fell in love with Glenmurray (239). Colonel Mordaunt, for his part, sees the error of his ways and takes Adeline's advice to marry (239). His marriage to Emma Douglas – a woman he loves not only for her resemblance to Adeline, but for her defence of Adeline's character and plea for pity and forgiveness (249-250) – can be viewed as a good marriage that has been directly influenced by Adeline. As for the plight of the fallen woman, Opie illustrates through the truly Christian behaviour of Mrs Pemberton her idealistic vision of how society might one day learn to approach and support such women. In her choice of a Dissenting Christian to perform this role, Opie indicates a further idealistic vision: one in which Dissenters could be respected and admired for their views.

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<sup>224</sup> Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley, eds, Fleetwood, 1805, by William Godwin (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001) 28-32.



## Chapter 4

### A surge in fiction writing; a surge in spiritual enquiry

Following the aspirational ideologies of a first generation of female “Romantic” writers (1790-1810), ‘Regency women writers’ (1811-1832) were disappointed that their hopes for improvements in the education and social position of women had not been realised. They were united in recognition that:

Any gains in the education and social stature of women would have to come from within the domestic sphere rather than from overt political action. Their writing engaged in a practice that we would now recognize as "consciousness-raising," an effort to persuade individual readers to question the social construction of gender in local and personal ways.<sup>225</sup>

Opie belonged, of course, to both generations described: we have seen the extent to which she did (or did not) engage with the ‘REVOLUTION in female manners’ for which Wollstonecraft had appealed, or a more conservative simultaneous demand for better female education exemplified by Hannah More. This chapter considers Opie’s three published novels from 1812-1822, Temper (1812), Valentine’s Eve (1816) and Madeline (1822). It situates Opie within this second generation of ‘Regency women writers’, examining her “consciousness-raising” in the domestic sphere in relation to a class of novel of this period that Mellor does not fully consider: the ‘moral-evangelical’ novel. I take this term from Peter Garside, and define it as a novel intended to promote the active Christianity of the Evangelical novel, while enveloping it within a theme of moral correction.

Garside describes Hannah More’s hugely successful Evangelical novel Coelebs in Search of a Wife (1809) as ‘probably the most influential single work’ in the period 1800-1829, encouraging many ‘moral-evangelical’ novels in the following

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<sup>225</sup> Anne K. Mellor, “What’s Different about “Regency” Women Writers?,” Keats-Shelley Journal 55 (2006): 42, 43, 43-4.

years and renewed confidence in the term 'novel' as well.<sup>226</sup> This phenomenon was specific to the 1810s, and included novels with simple titles evoking moral qualities, like Opie's 1812 novel Temper; or, Domestic Scenes and Mary Brunton's Self-Control (1811) and Discipline (1814).<sup>227</sup> The psychological interest that Brunton's novels brought to the moral-evangelical novel gave a fresh perspective which is useful to compare with Opie's later novel Madeline (1822) in particular. I also draw some comparisons between Opie's work and Austen's Mansfield Park (1814), which, despite Austen's general dislike for the Evangelical cause, finds some common ground with the moral-evangelical phenomenon.<sup>228</sup> Maria Edgeworth's novels, with their clearly secular concerns, exemplify another side of contemporary fiction, and will not be discussed here.<sup>229</sup>

Gary Kelly provides a useful context in which to view how Opie might have been engaging with Christianity, alongside promoting the reader's interest in her heroines:

For whether or not the heroine has transgressed a moral or social code, her suffering and humiliation seem incommensurate with her real or supposed crime, and she remains to be bathed in the reader's sympathy alone. The centre of Opie's tales is this 'passion', in the Christian sense: 'the sufferings of a martyr'.<sup>230</sup> This is not the passion felt by the heroines of Lady Caroline Lamb and the 'silver-fork' novelists of the 1810s and 1820s; it is more acceptable to conservative religious and social morality; it is self-condemning rather than self-aggrandizing, passive rather than active, domestic rather than amorous and erotic in its nature. (English Fiction 85)

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<sup>226</sup> Peter Garside, "The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal," The English Novel 1770-1829: a bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles. Vol 2: 1800-1829, eds Peter Garside; James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 58, 59.

<sup>227</sup> Similar titles Garside quotes include Margaret Roberts's Duty, A Novel (1814), and Anne Raikes Harding's Correction. A Novel (1818) and Decision. A Tale (1819) (59).

<sup>228</sup> Garside, 59-60.

<sup>229</sup> Ann H. Jones refers to contemporary critical censure meted out to Edgeworth 'for her lack of reference to Christian principle': Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 13.

<sup>230</sup> Oxford English Dictionary. (Kelly's footnote 109): Gary Kelly, English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830 (Harlow: Longman, 1989) 85.

I investigate how the heroines of Temper, Valentine's Eve and Madeline fit Kelly's concept of the Christian martyr, concluding that those in the latter two do, in a way that Temper's does not.

The period between Adeline Mowbray (1805) and Madeline (1822) was a very prolific one for Opie: she published four tale collections – Simple Tales (1806), Tales of Real Life (1813), New Tales (1818), and Tales of the Heart (1820) – and a volume of poetry, The Warrior's Return (1808), alongside the three novels under discussion here. But this period also saw her drawn increasingly towards the Quakers and Quaker faith, possibly influenced by the sudden death of John Opie in 1807, when Opie was only 37. Having been left in a comfortable financial position following her husband's death, Opie was under no financial pressure to publish, but she may have found writing a therapeutic activity in dealing with her grief.<sup>231</sup> Expressions of her grief would suggest that she had a religious commitment at this time (Macgregor 48), but the little information we have from this period makes it difficult to state clearly whether this faith was specifically Unitarian or not at this point. Running concurrently with her prolific writing was a growing attraction to the Quakers, most easily traceable from 1814 (through correspondences starting then) to her official conversion in 1825. Her correspondence, as we will see, shows that she believed that an official commitment to the Quakers would mean abandoning the novel form. Between her growing interest in the Quakers and her evident continuing commitment to novel-writing, Opie experienced a conflict which, I argue, affected the novels written in this period. Her conflicting feelings are demonstrated here through analysis of Opie's correspondence with the poet William Hayley, and her correspondence with her Quaker mentor Joseph John Gurney, which both date from 1814, and which show Opie having her feet both in the literary, fashionable, pleasurable world, and in the Quaker and otherwise religious world.<sup>232</sup> These letters show that Opie's spirituality moved from the Rational Dissent of her Unitarian upbringing towards a

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<sup>231</sup> Margaret Eliot MacGregor, Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend (Menasha (WI): The Collegiate Press, 1933) 48.

<sup>232</sup> This archive material has received very little critical attention, partly because very few of the letters (or parts of them) have been published: Margaret Eliot MacGregor, Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend (Menasha (WI): The Collegiate Press, 1933); Clive Jones, "The Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)," diss., OU, 2001.

more mystical faith through the influence of her Quaker friends. This influence caused her to write more religious novels, in an attempt to resolve the conflict she felt between a duty to write on the one hand, and a duty Gurney encouraged on the other: to renounce the novel form.

After presenting Opie's spiritual journey in the first part of this chapter, I turn to a discussion of the novels in the second. I argue that Temper is a rationally religious novel, in line with a Unitarian practical vision of religion and with moral didacticism. However, by 1814, by which time she was composing Valentine's Eve, Opie was influenced by a more mystic Quaker tradition to value a religion of the heart. In Valentine's Eve, Opie criticised society's lack of support for such religious faith, presenting an overtly Christian heroine, who dies. Opie then moved to a journal-based novel in Madeline, in order to appease her Quaker friends in particular, but also to create a heroine who finds a happy ending through her Christian faith that Opie had failed to deliver in Valentine's Eve. The religious message is secured to a certain extent, but the reader's pleasure is sacrificed. In my analysis, Opie's literary voice will be shown to become increasingly fractured as she tries to marry her literary interests with her spiritual ones, and ultimately fails.

Before the Gurney and Hayley correspondences are analysed in this first part of the chapter, the religious context will be presented in order to support the later analyses of the letters and of Opie's works. It will consider the realities of what it would mean for Opie to move from the Unitarians to the Quakers at this time, and how the rise of Evangelicalism in this period simultaneously affected Opie (mostly through Gurney) despite her never approaching the kind of Evangelicalism she associated with More and William Wilberforce.

#### From Unitarian to Quaker: what would that mean?

Opie's decision to declare to Brightwell in the year of Joseph John Gurney's death (1847) that 'in 1814 I left the Unitarians' indicates a strong link in Opie's mind between her religious attitudes then and the person of Gurney.<sup>233</sup> He was certainly very influential in Opie's decision finally to join the Quakers in 1825. Even though

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<sup>233</sup> Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie, selected and arranged from her Letters, Diaries and Other Manuscripts, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander; London: Longman, Brown, & Co., 1854) 173.

Opie had been in regular contact with the Gurney family members since the death of John Opie in 1807 and her return to Norwich to live with her father, the correspondence that Joseph John Gurney started with Opie in 1814 is of particular significance to Opie's spiritual enlightenment at this time.

The differences between Unitarian and Quaker thought and belief systems have been discussed in the Introduction, but there needs to be a brief consideration here about what it meant at this particular point in time to be a Unitarian or a Quaker, and what might have been drawing Opie from one to the other. Under the influence of Joseph Priestley, early nineteenth-century Unitarianism strongly emphasized the rational, and though this emphasis was challenged within the faith, notably by Anna Letitia Barbauld, Unitarians were increasingly associated with the head rather than the heart.<sup>234</sup> The more cerebral the Unitarians became, the more some of their members missed certain mysterious or spiritual aspects of their faith, resulting in a debate questioning the roles of reason and mystery in personal or community-based religion.<sup>235</sup> In the early years of Opie's widowhood, it seems that her faith may have tended towards sentiment and the mysterious, where reason failed to comfort (MacGregor 48). In these circumstances it is understandable that Opie, whose connections with Quakers through the Gurney family were strong, would be increasingly drawn away from Unitarian ideas towards the comfort to be found in a tradition which can be considered more of a religion of the heart.

One Quaker influence was surely Elizabeth (Gurney) Fry. A letter to Hayley from the Gurney family home following the death of the eldest brother, John Gurney, reveals that Opie had not seen Fry for some years, but that does not mean that she had not been hearing about or following Fry's public ministry.<sup>236</sup> Mrs Pemberton's role as a 'public Friend' in Adeline Mowbray indeed prefigures a role Fry was to develop in public ministry during her thirties: she spoke (alongside Joseph John Gurney) to the Bible Society in Norwich in October 1811, and started to minister in

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<sup>234</sup> See R. K. Webb's "Rational Piety" in Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 287-311. Alistair Mason, "Unitarianism," The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought, eds Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 731.

<sup>235</sup> Mark Knight, and Emma Mason, Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction (Oxford: OUP, 2006) 53.

<sup>236</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 20 September 1814, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 85, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

Newgate prison in January 1813.<sup>237</sup> Opie responded to the possibility of having a public face as a Quaker, rather than thinking about the Quakers as retired, reflective, passive people. She saw in Fry some of the possibilities of engagement with social reforms, such as prison reform, supported by both Unitarians and Quakers. But she also saw in Fry personally the mystical Quietism that had been portrayed favourably by Opie in Adeline Mowbray. Some letters to Hayley, discussed later, indicate Opie's developing interest in the mystical side of the Quaker faith with which she came into contact.<sup>238</sup> Her comments suggested that she sought some of this sort of mysticism in her own spiritual life, which was incompatible with Rational Dissent and the Unitarians.

It is important to keep in mind that Opie was reacting most especially to Gurney's guidance at a time when he was developing his own Quaker theology, which was evangelical and based more on Scripture than mainstream Quaker thought.<sup>239</sup> By the time he was writing to Opie in 1814, Gurney was strongly inspired by his decision, in 1812, to become a strict Quaker. In particular, he was concerned with the doctrine of salvation, a point on which he differs both from Unitarians and from some Quakers, and his correspondence with Opie suggests that he influenced her own views on this matter. Gurney mentions salvation in the second of the two letters he writes to Opie during the summer of 1814:

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<sup>237</sup> Fry was delayed and interrupted in her philanthropic aspirations by the founding of a large family: she had ten children between 1801 and 1816. Francisca de Haan, "Fry, Elizabeth (1740-1845)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004) n.p. Augustus J. C Hare, The Gurneys of Earlham (London: George Allen, 1895) 1.229-232. Janet Whitney, Elizabeth Fry: Quaker Heroine (London, Bombay and Sydney: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1937) 186.

<sup>238</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 17 September 1814, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 84, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University; Opie to Hayley, 20 Sep. 1814; Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 15 October 1814, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 87, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

<sup>239</sup> Gurney was influenced by the Evangelical movement at the time, but not part of it. Difficult to define clearly, I consider this movement as one which attempted to revive serious and active Christianity, with a focus on practical piety. I do not, however, limit Evangelicalism to a socially conservative movement intent on suppressing political subversion, since its positive influence on Joseph John Gurney and his development of a new Quaker theology, for instance, demonstrate how much broader the movement was. Elisabeth Jay, The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 6; Mary Waldron, Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) 85.

Christianity appears to me to consist of the work which is wrought *for* us; and the work which is wrought *in* us, justification and sanctification. By the one our sins are forgiven, by the other, they are purged away; by the former we are reconciled to God, “who imputeth not our trespasses unto us,” by the latter we are made fit for the inheritance prepared for us. I feel some delicacy in making my statement; because I do not know how far the habits and principles of the denomination of Christians,<sup>240</sup> amongst whom my friend has been educated, may have impressed her with different views. Thou must, therefore, take what I say, as a statement of my own belief; as proof of intimacy with one whom, under every possible difference of opinion, I feel the most sincere friendship.<sup>241</sup>

Where Unitarians considered salvation to be the work of God in this world (and some Quaker theology seems to have been the same (Russell 53)), Gurney in particular placed an emphasis also on the stage of salvation reached upon death.<sup>242</sup> Opie’s letters of this period, too, refer at times to salvation and to the Saviour (or Redeemer), in a manner not characteristic of Unitarian writing. By the time Opie visited her Unitarian friend Susanna Taylor on her deathbed in 1823, it is clear from Opie’s correspondence to Gurney that she felt a strong difference between hers and

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<sup>240</sup> The Unitarians. Braithwaite’s footnote: Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, ed., Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney; with Selections from his Journal and Correspondence (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander, 1854) 1.239

<sup>241</sup> Joseph John Gurney, letter to Amelia Opie, 22 July 1814. Quoted in Braithwaite, 1.237-240 (1.239).

<sup>242</sup> For a consideration of these doctrinal differences, the following works can be consulted: Joseph John Gurney, “Jesus of Nazareth / Salvation by Christ,” Quaker Heritage Press, The Quaker Homiletics Online Anthology, Section Three: The 19<sup>th</sup> Century; Joseph John Gurney, “A Letter To A Friend On The Authority, Purpose, And Effects Of Christianity, And Especially On The Doctrine Of Redemption,” Works, vol 4, Quaker Heritage Press, Earlham School of Religion’s Digital Quaker Collection; Job Scott, “On Salvation by Christ: Remarks upon the Nature of Salvation by Christ; showing that it is a Birth of Divine Life in Man,” Quaker Heritage Press; Samuel Worcester, A Letter to the Rev. William E. Channing, on the Subject of his Letter to the Rev. Samuel C. Thatcher, Relating to the Review in the Panoplist of American Unitarianism (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1815); James Yates, “The Scriptural Meaning of the Title “SAVIOUR” as applied to our Lord: A Sermon preached at Glasgow, July 28, 1822, At the Annual Meeting of the Scottish Unitarian Association” (London: R. Hunter, 1835).

her old friend's attitudes to the importance of the Saviour at such moments, not least Taylor's lack of humility, apprehension, or prayerfulness:

But oh! my dear friend, to see her preparing as it were to act a sort of Heathen philosopher's death! ... She talked of "Providence", and of its "pleasing God" to do so and so, but du Sauveur pas un mot – and I was shocked to see the love of display uppermost on what is probably, her couch of death!<sup>243</sup>

It is in this context of Opie's gradual, shifting attitudes regarding spiritual matters – attitudes traceable in her correspondence – that her fiction writing in this period needs to be considered. Though Opie distanced herself politically from conservative Evangelicals such as Wilberforce and More, she was, through Gurney, strongly influenced by the broader movement, and it affected what she chose to write.

#### The Gurney and Hayley correspondences

By quoting from Hayley's The Triumphs of Temper (1781), Opie aligned herself in Temper with this popular and prolific writer, encouraging a correspondence with him that would last until his death in 1820. Hayley was the patron of William Blake, but also befriended and helped many other writers, including William Cowper.<sup>244</sup> It is not difficult to imagine why Opie desired to connect herself with such a prominent (and such an affluent) public figure. Opie had a fondness for Hayley's poetry: she had repeatedly read his Triumphs of Temper with her mother as a child.<sup>245</sup> Her citation in Temper led Hayley to praise Opie's works in the next edition

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<sup>243</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 11 February 1823, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/336, Library of the Society of Friends, London. Reproduced with permission from the Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>244</sup> See Morchard Bishop, Blake's Hayley: The Life, Works, and Friendships of William Hayley (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1951). For Hayley's support of Charlotte Smith, see Loraine Fletcher, Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 65.

<sup>245</sup> Shelley King, "Amelia Opie's "Maid of Corinth" and the Origins of Art," Eighteenth-Century Studies 37.4 (2004): 637. "The Maid of Corinth" was a poem included in the first edition of The Father and

of his poems, and this ‘double compliment’ (Macgregor 57) led in turn to a correspondence between the pair which Opie initiated at the beginning of 1813, but which began in earnest in 1814.<sup>246</sup> Opie’s obsequious tone in her first letter suggests that she was also seeking patronage from Hayley, even though he was more of an erstwhile public figure by this point, having retired into almost complete seclusion in ‘the Turret’ on his Felpham estate at Eartham in Sussex following the break-up of his second marriage.

An account of Opie’s correspondence with both Gurney and Hayley at this time indicates the degree to which Opie was vacillating between her literary life and an ever-increasing attraction to the Quakers.<sup>247</sup> These correspondences reveal Opie to be somewhat double-faced as she writes to one friend frequently about the other, and demonstrate the depth of Opie’s struggle at this time, including the composition of her 1816 novel Valentine’s Eve and its reception.<sup>248</sup>

In June 1814, Joseph John Gurney wrote to Opie from the family seat at Earham (near Norwich) as she was enjoying the particularly exciting London summer season that year: Brightwell devoted an entire chapter to Opie’s letters and diary entries of that London summer (Brightwell Memorials 146-166).<sup>249</sup> It is clear from Gurney’s comments about ‘thy affectionate conduct to us all, during the last months of affliction’ (Brightwell Memorials 169) that Opie has very recently been

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Daughter in 1801, and Shelley King and John B. Pierce included it in their edition of The Father and Daughter, with, Dangers of Coquetry (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 158-170.

<sup>246</sup> Opie’s first letter to Hayley is not with the bulk of their correspondence: Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 23 January 1813, Add. MS 3085.38, British Lib. This letter is quoted verbatim in a footnote by King (649-650), and by Kenneth Povey verbatim also: “Amelia and the Hermit,” The Sussex County Magazine 3 (Jan. 1929): 38.

<sup>247</sup> The main Gurney archive is held at the Library of the Society of Friends, London; the main Hayley archive (especially where correspondence with Opie is concerned) is held at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University. As with other Opie archives, these archives include letters *from* her almost exclusively. I mention in Chapter 1 my theory that the letters she received were routinely burned by her to preserve her (and others’) privacy.

<sup>248</sup> Letters from Opie to Dawson Turner which started in 1815 (and continued until 1848) do not show this struggle, however: they concern, chiefly, requests from Opie for etchings from Turner’s wife. Opie appears to have shown only as much of her inner conflict as she deemed necessary at this time, and depending on the correspondent. MSS, O 13 11-25, O 14 19-45, Trinity College, Cambridge University.

<sup>249</sup> Alison Adburgham also discusses the feeling of ‘unprecedented elation’ in London in the summer of 1814 following Napoleon’s abdication and exile on Elba: Alison Adburgham, Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature 1814-1840 (London: Constable, 1983) 6.

giving support to the family as the eldest brother (John Gurney) is critically ill. Gurney praises Opie's 'Christian charity' and expresses his desire 'that the same fear, (shall he call it "godly fear?") may attend thee in all thy communications with the world' (169). He foresees Opie's potential reaction to 'thy countrified, drab-coated, methodistical friend' (169-70) as he warns her of the possible dangers of too close a connection with 'the "fashionable world"' (170):

I will refer to two texts, "Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is this – to keep one's self *unspotted from the world*," and again, "be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may know what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God." (169)<sup>250</sup>

Gurney ponders these 'apostolic precepts', and how 'perhaps they are meant to warn us, not literally against the world, but against a *worldly spirit*' (170), concluding that it is his desire for both him and Opie to be 'redeemed from a *worldly* spirit, and ... enabled simply to follow an unerring guide within us, which will assuredly inform us, if we will but *wait for direction*, what to touch and what to shrink from' (170).<sup>251</sup>

Opie's reply to Gurney is full of soul-searching (and the letter is twice as long as her average) but also demonstrates the depth of her existing commitment to religious belief. She writes, regarding Christian charity that 'I fall in my own estimation so infinitely short of that degree of this virtue', and the letter contains many examples of Opie reflecting on what she sees as her shortcomings and unworthiness. She also considers the spiritual "fear" she is feeling. She states that it 'was not originally a "godly fear" that influenced my candour towards others ... But I

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<sup>250</sup> The term 'methodistical' was used generally at this time to express excessive religious declarations, and not related specifically to the Methodists. Michael Watts considers how Dissenters of all shades disliked Methodist enthusiasm in this period: The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 451. Opie would also use 'methodistical' in this way in Valentine's Eve.

<sup>251</sup> Lucilla Stanley – the paragon of a heroine in More's Coelebs – makes just this point. She argues to Charles (the 'Coelebs' character) that 'the world, I believe, is not so much a place as a nature. It is possible to be religious in a court, and worldly in a monastery' (265). It is important to consider the degree to which Gurney's thought was Evangelical in nature, and how his influence on Opie might be deemed Evangelical.

think that at this present time my mind is really influenced by “godly fear”, a fear which I try never to lose sight of in any of my communications with the world’.<sup>252</sup> Statements like these may lend weight to the idea, as Brightwell suggested, that Opie’s Unitarianism might never have had a particularly strong chapel-led emphasis. The very next paragraph in this letter nevertheless suggests that Opie is already committed to daily Christian practices when she states that ‘no dissipation has yet had power to make me neglect to read the Scriptures every day, or fail to take advantage of every opportunity that has offered itself of religious conversation with a view to instruction’ (13 June 1814 325a).

In Gurney’s second letter, like the first, he makes no particular references to the impropriety of fiction writing, although he does comment that his ‘chief desire’ is that Opie may be made willing ‘simply and obediently’ to follow God’s direction, ‘and to give up everything which the light of truth may, by degrees, point out to thee as inconsistent with the holy will of God’.<sup>253</sup> Through this comment, Gurney may be making perfectly clear his intentions for Opie: that she should give up at least novel writing (Clive Jones 250). Both letters focus in a more general way on the evils of the fashionable world, although attention has already been drawn to a doctrinal difference between the Unitarians and the Quakers regarding salvation in the second letter. Before Opie replies to Gurney, she considers this letter in her correspondence with Hayley.

Opie writes that ‘my son’ – her affectionate term for Gurney – has sent her a double letter, ‘most touching, and most welcome’ to her, offering ‘proofs of the strong interest he takes not in my temporal, but my eternal welfare!’.<sup>254</sup> She adds, though, that Gurney is not conscious of how much he wishes to ‘make a quaker of me – yet to that conversion everything in his letter of today tends’ (25 July 1814). On the same day, Opie writes to Gurney and tells him of a new religious ‘exercise’ that gives her ‘great satisfaction’: she has started to say particular prayers for particular people

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<sup>252</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 13 June 1814, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/325a, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>253</sup> Joseph John Gurney, letter to Amelia Opie, 22 July 1814. Quoted in Braithwaite, 237-240 (237). A shorter version of this letter can be found in Brightwell Memorials, 171-2.

<sup>254</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 25 July 1814, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 82, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

'because they have no faith'.<sup>255</sup> The same letter shows that Opie might have been feeling less excitement from worldly pleasures as she spends time in London. She writes that her presence at a masked breakfast 'hurt my mind':

If that was all the hurt this London residence had exposed it to, I should be almost satisfied with myself – those sort [sic.] of flatteries and scenes are not new to me, and indeed they have lost much of their power over me – while a sense of their emptiness comes over me in the very midst of their brilliancy. (25 July 1814)<sup>256</sup>

In her correspondence to Gurney, Opie repeatedly refers to her spiritual guilt and 'inadequacy', but she also teases Gurney for thinking she would be angry with him or offended by his advice and instruction regarding her interaction with the fashionable world.<sup>257</sup> Yet her earlier letter to Hayley suggests why Gurney might wish to tread lightly, as she declares 'I am a strange, wild, varying person in all respects' (25 July 1814). It is also clear that Opie's friendship with Hayley, and her visits to his house in Felpham, are some of the more worldly activities that concern Gurney.

Opie admits that Hayley flatters her – and 'it is impossible all his doses should fail of effect' – but reassures Gurney that her first visit to Hayley's house is well-judged (4 Aug. 1814). Once there, Opie reassures Gurney that Hayley is full not only of Christian belief of 'the most firm, and supporting nature', but also that he would excite religious tendencies 'even in sceptical minds'.<sup>258</sup> Hayley has, nevertheless, already shown proof of his worldly interest in Opie as 'my poetical daughter', thanking Opie for sending him some of her poetry, and writing that the exchange of familiar verse between private friends 'is to my fancy a tie as sacred as having

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<sup>255</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 25 July 1814, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/326, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>256</sup> Reproduced with permission from the Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>257</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 13 June 1814, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/325b, Library of the Society of Friends, London. Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 4 August 1814, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/326A, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>258</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 18 August 1814, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/327, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

broken bread together'.<sup>259</sup> In this letter, Hayley asserts that he is just as concerned for Opie's body and soul as his 'filial rival in the sublimest of Passions Evangelic' (27 July 1814): these two men clearly appreciate the competition that the other represents, and Opie herself is no less aware of this rivalry. Although the letters to Gurney are often of a more serious nature than those to Hayley, there are sometimes flashes of cheekiness, and faith, simply, that Gurney will not be an unkind judge of her behaviour, even at Hayley's:

(Don't laugh) I will tell you and you only – I am here alone – tête à tête with Mr Hayley! the Johnstones are not come, and when they come we know not – Now I see and feel no harm in a woman like me being alone with a lame man of 69, and upwards – but I know that were I to write to Brooke Park, and own the situation, and I should think it disingenuous to conceal it, Mr G. K: would tell the Ch. Tompson's [sic.], Mr Kett would tell the Hoare's [sic.], and I should be quizzed, and dear me'd! and wondered at, and probably censured, till I was at least vexed, if not angered – and so, I will not write yet – (18 Aug. 1814)<sup>260</sup>

Letters to Hayley in September 1814 take a serious tone, however, as they mostly concern the death and funeral of the eldest Gurney brother, John, and show strong development in Opie towards the Quakers. Opie is very moved by the prayers offered by the Gurney sisters as they prepare to bury John: when Priscilla fell on her knees in front of the open coffin and burst into the language of prayer, 'I was dissolved in tears' (17 Sep. 1814). Opie adds that the prayers offered by an Anglican clergyman are not as congenial to her as those of the 'mystics' (17 Sep. 1814); another Quaker, Anna Buxton, spoke in the cemetery and Opie wrote 'I never heard anything so perfect' (17 Sep. 1814). She also expresses to Hayley how uncomfortable she is with her father's reaction (before Opie arrived in Earlham) to Elizabeth Fry's prayers as her brother was dying. James Alderson reflected later to Opie that 'it looked more like ostentation than religion', and the degree of unease Opie reports to Hayley on this score indicates how her religious attitudes are moving

<sup>259</sup> William Hayley, draft letter to Amelia Opie, 27 July 1814, Hayley Archive, ms, XXVII 2, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

<sup>260</sup> Reproduced with permission from the Library of the Society of Friends, London.

away from those of her father, and towards those of her Quaker friends (20 Sep. 1814).

The letters to Hayley especially over the coming months vary greatly in tone and seriousness, with a real sense of Opie playing Gurney's principles off against Hayley's, and sometimes telling Hayley about how naughty she is in Gurney's company. She asks Hayley what she should do when she hears 'jeers and scoffs' and condemnation 'at the folly of my friends and enthusiasm' and commendation of sceptical writers (15 Oct. 1814). Her conclusions indicate not only that she is proud to be associated with the Quakers' way of worshipping, but also that she does not yet consider herself one of them as she writes 'I am a christian on conviction, and I am now studying the Scriptures with a view to form my own particular opinions on the subjects' (15 Oct. 1814). In this particular letter, she writes straight afterwards that she is about to go off into society, and will be 'making the agreeable': her suggestion that she would rather be at Earlham but 'my lot is cast in the World – at least at present –' (15 Oct. 1814) makes the difficulties of her choices clear at this point.

A month later Opie writes amusingly (and amused herself) about how she plays Gurney off against his brother, Dan, a sceptic. Where she refers to Gurney as 'my son', she refers to Dan Gurney as 'my husband', even though there is nothing romantic between them. She comments to Hayley:

Your favorite dress, the black and purple, which I wore at Earlham one day, made Joseph miserable and Dan glad – Jos: begged me never to wear it again it was so gay, and wanted to burn it – Dan said it was quite handsome, and begged me to wear nothing else.<sup>261</sup>

As far as dress is concerned, Opie remarks further in that letter that Gurney is already foreseeing the next summer season, and has plans 'to convince me by that time that "drab is the only wear" and that nothing is good in London except Yearly Meeting – a Rogue – but I rather think he will be mistaken' (18 Nov. 1814). Opie is right – it would be almost ten years, in fact, before she adopted Quaker

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<sup>261</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 18 November 1814, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 91, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

dress, but it is her jovial manner of talking about serious issues that really characterises much of her correspondence to Hayley in particular.

One particular letter, however, displays not only her ability to talk to Hayley seriously, but the degree to which she confides in him. She writes from London, and comments that she is surprised not to have received any letters there from her father (in Norwich). She remarks that she has not written to him about a certain subject, 'nor shall I', and confides to Hayley that 'I agree with you in yr [sic.] mind observations and will try to go on silently, tho' steadily in my way to the only path worth treading –'.<sup>262</sup> Opie is writing to Hayley about her spiritual deliberations in a way that she feels she cannot share with her father. Where King and Pierce comment that Dr Alderson had been very influential in Opie's spiritual development at this time (Introduction Father 48), the archival evidence does not seem to concur.<sup>263</sup>

#### Literary exploration: writing *Valentine's Eve*

Opie's letters to Gurney and Hayley see her moving in fashionable society, meeting fashionable people, but all the while analysing her conduct, her temptations, and the way in which she feels herself drawn to a closer relationship with God, trying her best to be guided by her Saviour. In the same letters to Hayley, Opie is constructing her heroine for Valentine's Eve, and discussing the novel with Gurney in person and in letters. In November 1814, she talks about making her heroine 'a pattern of Christian faith and thereby enabled to bear up nobly under all her trials – one, the greatest a woman can know, I think, that of being suspected of guilt when conscious of innocence' (18 Nov. 1814).

Opie mentions to Gurney as she is writing Valentine's Eve that she can see a responsibility for herself in fiction, and indicates not only that she might have a positive effect, but that an association with worldly people might serve as a warning for her:

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<sup>262</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 8 November 1814, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 90, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

<sup>263</sup> MacGregor, in her use of the archives, came to the same conclusions as me (80-81).

Some things lately have forced on me a conviction that I am of use where I am – that to those not hardened in error, I may be of service – having access, to many, who might shrink from admonition & example under a [serious] form. It is my wish, I almost say *my prayer*, to be preserved from all tendency to *Monkism* – & that selfishness which thinking only on its own salvation, leaves willingly others to perish – Our blessed Saviour associated with publicans, and sinners. (9 Aug. 1815)<sup>264</sup>

The same letter shows her greatly anguished, simultaneously, by her sense of her own sinfulness as she writes: ‘my own constant consciousness of sin is so great, that if my sense of the mercy of my creator, and my reliance on the efficacy of my redeemer’s blood, did not keep pace with it, I should be quite miserable’ (9 Aug. 1815). In this letter, Opie also indicates that she is not as impressed with Hayley’s Christian principles as she had been before, writing about her alarm that he speaks of Heaven with certainty, where Opie tries to encourage him to think of it as a ‘delightful expectation’ that one should think of ‘with great humility’(9 Aug. 1815). She has seen a change in him – ‘indeed it shocks me to see a person so little in my idea, really religious, with such a conviction that he is both virtuous and pious’ – with him taking the Lord’s name in vain ‘incessantly ... till frightened by my thunder face’ (9 Aug. 1815).

But Opie was clearly still prepared to benefit from Hayley’s advice on Valentine’s Eve, and her interest in nurturing this friendship might have also stemmed from her anticipation of not being able to enjoy the friendship – or certainly the correspondence – with Gurney that she had previously enjoyed. A letter to Hayley of 6 March 1815 indicated that Opie was interested in whether Gurney was likely to marry, concluding that ‘I am the *only woman* for whom he feels any *fondness* – that *fondness* of which love is ultimately made when all things are *suitable thereunto*’.<sup>265</sup> Perhaps Opie wanted to marry Gurney herself (Clive Jones 252-254). But it seems more likely that, had Opie really wanted that, she would have taken the

<sup>264</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 9 August 1815, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/329, Library of the Society of Friends, London. Reproduced with permission from the Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>265</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 6 March 1815, Povey MS 10. Quoted in MacGregor, 76.

advice of Dan Gurney – the sceptic brother – and become a Quaker directly in order to secure him (MacGregor 77). Opie wrote to Hayley a month later about the influence on her of the Quaker minister William Forster, Gurney's brother-in-law. Her comments suggest that, although her sense of spiritual belonging was shifting, it had not yet moved her definitely towards the Quakers:

Dear W: Forster! how I love him! & I have loved my name ever since he called me 'Amelia' . . . he is *indeed* a person to *make converts* . . . but I remain as I was at present – or rather tho I have left in my heart my *own* chapel, I have *not* yet gained in thought any other.<sup>266</sup>

It was very clear that Gurney had to marry a Quaker, and it was clear that Opie was not yet ready or willing to make that transition, nor aware that she ever would be. But her sadness in losing Gurney as an intimate friend is very obvious from a long letter of New Year's Eve 1815, in which she wrote that 'it is not in nature [sic.] for any wife to approve her husband's being as intimate with a female friend as you are with me', and that their correspondence must therefore come to an end.<sup>267</sup> Although she clearly still socialised with the family at Earlham, it is significant, with regard to the impact on her novels, that Opie would have no more correspondence with Gurney until 1822, after Madeline had been published, when Opie wrote Gurney a poem to commiserate with him on the death of his wife, Jane Birkbeck.

What we can therefore conclude about Opie's spiritual journey is that her correspondences with Gurney and Hayley indicate the two directions in which she was being encouraged simultaneously to move: towards the spiritual, particularly Quaker, world, and towards the fashionable and literary world. Her growing interest in the mystical side of Quakerism inspired her to give much more space to increasingly active demonstrations of religious faith, moving her from a more rational and practical – a more Unitarian – view of Christianity to one that was all-encompassing: a religion of the heart. Influenced by Gurney, and by his relations like William Forster, this more mystical view of her spirituality was clearly inspired in part by the Quakers. But Opie's lack of certainty in this regard must be noted: as late as

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<sup>266</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 28 April 1815, Povey MS 11. Quoted in MacGregor, 73.

<sup>267</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 31 December 1815, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/331(a), Library of the Society of Friends, London.

1824, Opie admitted to Elizabeth Fry that she did not know whether she wanted to be part of any particular religious group, let alone the Quakers specifically.<sup>268</sup> When she came to write Valentine's Eve, she knew that a correspondence with Gurney was likely to come to an end as he considered marriage, so, although she would be able to enjoy his company still, she would not have the nurturing spiritual support that his letters had provided.

Even before Valentine's Eve was published, Opie's relations with Hayley also became a little strained, as he worried about whether secrets concerning his private life might be completely safe with her, and their correspondence became increasingly irregular up to his death in 1820.<sup>269</sup> Further letters to Hayley concerning Valentine's Eve are considered in my analysis of the work; it is worth remembering here that Opie would have had the input of neither Gurney nor Hayley when she came to write and to consider the publication of Madeline. It seems, with this third novel, that Opie was working to build bridges with Gurney, although her two appeals to Southey to have the work reviewed also indicate her interest in staying in the literary world at this point.<sup>270</sup>

### The Novels

Temper, Valentine's Eve and Madeline, none of which has been republished since the nineteenth century, have received relatively little criticism. Eleanor Ty's chapter on Temper, a rare exception to general critical silence surrounding these works, argues through a secular reading for a richness in the novel that has not generally been acknowledged.<sup>271</sup> Valentine's Eve and Madeline are also worthy of consideration, especially in connection with Opie's growing interest in the Quakers at the time, or with her shifting religious perspectives. Kelly has recognised Opie's debt

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<sup>268</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Elizabeth Fry, 19 January 1824, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP48, Huntington Lib., San Marino. This letter will receive further analysis in the next chapter.

<sup>269</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 7 January 1816, Hayley Archive, ms, XXVII 14, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

<sup>270</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Robert Southey, 10 March 1822, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, HM23043, Huntington Library, San Marino; Amelia Opie, letter to Robert Southey, 16 March 1822, Pforzheimer Collection, ms, AO13, New York Public Library.

<sup>271</sup> Eleanor Ty, Empowering the Feminine: the narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812 (Toronto; London, 1998) 161-177.

in this period, alongside novelists including Edgeworth, Elizabeth Hamilton and More to the development of the domestic novel, but Opie's novels of this period do not receive analysis (or even a mention) in seminal works dealing with such concerns.<sup>272</sup>

Here, I examine how Opie's personal religious development (as evidenced through her letters) can be traced in her three acknowledged novels of this period, and how these novels interact with the phenomenon of the moral-evangelical novel in the context of Mellor's "consciousness-raising". Opie's literary voice gradually becomes fractured from Temper; or, Domestic Scenes to Madeline as she struggles with her growing commitment to the Quakers. I compare Temper with More's Coelebs in Search of a Wife (1809) and Mary Brunton's Self-Control (1811) as a moral-evangelical novel, concluding that Opie's emphasis on religion is less explicit than her contemporaries', whilst her more realistic plot and greater variation in character indicate how she is still writing for the world and focussing on exciting the reader's interest.

The impact of Opie's correspondence with both Gurney and Hayley is seen as Opie's focus shifts when she writes and publishes Valentine's Eve (1816), a novel which finds more apparent resonances with Richardson's Clarissa (1747-1748) than with Brunton's Discipline or Austen's Mansfield Park (both 1814), for instance, but which nevertheless illustrates links with the moral-evangelical novel. It also demonstrates the personal spiritual dilemma Opie was experiencing about whether to leave the novel form (and the world) and wholeheartedly embrace Quakerism.

Opie's choice to use a form of writing beloved by the Quakers – the journal – in her last acknowledged novel, Madeline (1822), indicates her interest in combining the worldly and the Quaker. But her fractured voice here – demonstrated most particularly through inelegant shifts between the journal and third-person-narrative passages, and unsatisfactory plot resolutions as she focuses on her religious heroine – indicates her lack of success. She employs most obviously in this novel a

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<sup>272</sup> Gary Kelly, "Religion and Politics," The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen, eds E Copeland and J McMaster (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 152. Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985); Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1989); Roxanne Eberle, Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Miriam L. Wallace, ed., Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750 to 1832 (Farmingham, England, and Burlington (VT): Ashgate, 2009).

'subtle grasp of psychological realism which is probably rooted in her Dissenting cultural background and its practices of self-examination and spiritual autobiography' (Kelly English Fiction 84). But she gives it even more of a Quaker flavour than can be seen in Brunton's works, for instance, through her investigation of female moral autonomy, aided by the use of a first-person narrator. The development in Opie's novels of this period will therefore demonstrate how Opie's personal religious allegiances were shifting over this period, with her lack of certainty most clear in the novelistic failure, Madeline.

Given the massive sensation that was More's Coelebs in Search of a Wife. Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Matters, Religion and Morals (1808), it is worth introducing this novel alongside Brunton's Self-Control (1811) to appreciate the context in which Opie presented Temper to the world. More's only novel sought as much to promote active Christianity as it did to promote the novel as a potentially moral form. Coelebs ran into at least sixteen editions between 1808 and 1826, and has been claimed as the most widely read novel of its time.<sup>273</sup> Given the mistrust in many quarters about the novel as a seductive form, Coelebs appeared to provide an antidote, being a serious, religious novel with the necessary courtship and marriage elements (Vallone 92).

Garside's claim for the influence of Coelebs is based also on the amount of reworkings and parodies of the novel that appeared (58). This popularity is quite difficult to fathom now: More's single novel has been eclipsed by every one of Austen's novels, for instance, and even by some of Opie's. It is also possible that the work was widely bought rather than widely read owing to the unattractive nature of its language, 'so tessellated with practical theology and biblical allusion'.<sup>274</sup> In this regard, it is easy to see that Temper was working differently.

Mary Brunton, the author of Self-Control (1811), came from quite a different background to More. Married to a Kirk of Scotland minister, Brunton was influenced by the Kirk of Scotland in her writing, although her particular denominational belongings have not been a focus of critical interest in relation to her writing. Brunton

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<sup>273</sup> Robert Alan Colby, Fiction with a Purpose: Major and Minor Nineteenth-Century Novels (Bloomington and London: Indiana UP, 1967) 80. Lynne Vallone, Disciplines of Virtue: Girls' Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1995) 91.

<sup>274</sup> Patricia Demers, ed., Coelebs in Search of a Wife, by Hannah More (Peterborough: Broadview, 2007) 30.

is sometimes classed as an evangelical novelist or an Evangelical, but whether she considered herself an Evangelical is unclear.<sup>275</sup>

In the dedication to Joanna Baillie, a contemporary Scottish playwright, Brunton implies that her heroine, Laura Montreville, is (like More's Lucilla Stanley) implausibly good.<sup>276</sup> What the reader will likely find more implausible than Brunton's characterisation, though, is the plot of Self-Control. Coelebs was set up in its preface as a courtship novel without the excitement or intrigue (40).<sup>277</sup> In contrast, the plot in Self-Control – with Laura, having been abducted to Canada, escaping alone in a canoe trip down a river, after her father has suddenly died and before her abductor (and betrothed) kills himself – prompted a particularly acerbic reflection from Austen. She described Self-Control as 'an excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it. I declare I do not know whether Laura's passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, every-day thing she ever does'.<sup>278</sup>

It is with these three aspects in mind – representation of religion, characterisation and plot – that I examine the extent to which Opie is indebted to the moral-evangelical novel in Temper. This examination leads to an assessment of how much Opie was interested in this novel in "ensuring" readerly pleasure or entertainment from her work, in promoting rational and practical Christianity in line with her Unitarian upbringing, but not the degree of active Christianity that More or Brunton advocated.

### Temper

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<sup>275</sup> Jane Rendall, "'Women that would plague me with rational conversation': Aspiring Women and Scottish Whigs, c. 1790-1830," Women, Gender and Enlightenment, eds Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 328. Vallone, 82.

<sup>276</sup> One difference, however, is Brunton's interest in exploring the psychological workings of her heroine's minds, which indicates a link to her non-conformist background and the Kirk of Scotland, with its roots in Presbyterianism.

<sup>277</sup> Waldron described the novel as 'falling in love by numbers': Mary Waldron, Introduction, Coelebs in Search of a Wife, by Hannah More (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995) xxiv. Quoted by Patricia Demers, ed., Coelebs in Search of a Wife, by Hannah More (Peterborough: Broadview, 2007) 12.

<sup>278</sup> Jane Austen, letter to Cassandra Austen, 11-12 October 1813, Jane Austen's Letters, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (OUP: Oxford and New York, 1995) 234. Waldron, Jane Austen, 87.

Opie's decision to involve Hayley so obviously in her literary career at this point – possibly seeking patronage from him – indicates her desire still to be appealing very much to the literary world with her 1812 novel. Hayley was a Christian, but his Triumphs of Temper (1781), from which Opie quoted in her work, was a mythical rather than a Christian analysis of the good regulation of temper. Temper was published in the increasingly popular three-volume format with Opie's regular publisher, Longman and Co. The main plot intrigue in Temper centres around a marriage between Agatha Torrington and Mr George Danvers that cannot be proved to have taken place; the heroine (their daughter) Emma's potential illegitimacy, and her love story with Henry St Aubyn. The denouement sees Henry playing 'the Good Samaritan' to a destitute man in Paris, who turns out to be the very man whose deceit prevented Agatha from gaining access to the documents that would prove her marriage had taken place. When Henry realises that Emma (the woman he loves) is just about to be married to her half-brother, he rushes to the scene, reveals the shocking truth, marries Emma, and all ends for good through human agency and a well-regulated temper.

Temper's concerns are those of many domestic novels of the period: female education, good or bad mothering, and – as the plot-device of the missing marriage certificate shows – the unfairness of prevailing patriarchal marriage customs. The novel displays the 'interesting tensions between female desire and social constraint; between authority and transgression' that the domestic novel often explores (Ty Empowering 161). Opie shows in this novel her interest in the moral drama of the home, set against and contrasted with the intrigues and vice of the world outside (Kelly English Fiction 84).

As well as being a domestic novel, Temper is also, to a degree, a religious novel. Its clergyman, Mr Egerton, plays an important role as a moral guide, and the novel can fairly be considered more obviously religious than Opie's earlier works (Garside 59). However, compared to More's Coelebs or Brunton's Self-Control, Temper is less overt in its displays of religious sentiment. It can be defined as a moral-evangelical novel in that it promotes active Christianity, but its religious feeling is quietly expressed, and rather than evoking sympathy for Christian martyrdom, Opie concentrates on providing readerly pleasure through plot and characterisation.

In Coelebs and Self-Control, the preface or dedication states explicitly that religion is a major theme in the novel.<sup>279</sup> In Temper, there is no such introductory material, and Opie introduces religion for the first time about a tenth of the way into the work when Agatha (the mother of the heroine) is in crisis, left destitute by her bigamous husband. The narrator asks, ‘where on earth could she look for succour and sustenance?’ (16), and an immediate (but thus-far unacknowledged) recognition of the religious possibility for comfort and support follows.<sup>280</sup> Agatha declares, ‘I will seek the pardon and mercy of my God’ (16), and she asks for directions to a church. The narrator reveals that Agatha has been suicidal (15), and, lost in London and starving, she is taken in by the Orwells, shopkeepers who fulfil Clive Jones’ idea of Temper’s ‘moralistic artisan ideology’ (103).

The Orwells speak of Providence – they see in Agatha and her daughter the child and grandchild they have lost – but where one might have expected Opie to use the Orwells as bringers of religion (as Rachel Pemberton had been in Adeline Mowbray) there is no more than latent religion here. Upon being offered a place to stay, Agatha ‘fell on her knees, and audibly returned thanks to God for having allowed her to be snatched from irremediable perdition’ (17). This reaction does not receive a response in the spirit of particularly active Christianity: ‘her new friends listened and beheld her with considerable alarm, and feared her frenzy had only taken a new turn’ (17). Similarly, when Agatha realises she can work for the Orwells, her exclamation that these ‘kind, generous, Christian beings ... were the means of saving from destruction, from *self*-destruction, a wretched, injured, but *virtuous* fellow creature!’ (18), Mrs Orwell encourages Agatha to be quieter so as not to wake her baby, and a possible moment for religious reflection is missed. The Orwells are exemplary Christians, but they provide understated, practical and rational help for

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<sup>279</sup> Hannah More, Coelebs in Search of a Wife, ed. Patricia Demers (Peterborough: Broadview, 2007) 38; Mary Brunton, Self-Control, 1811 (Pandora: London and New York, 1986) v-vi. Brunton dedicates her work to Joanna Baillie, ‘for many, the epitome of a Christian gentlewoman’: Norma Clarke, “Baillie, Joanna (1762-1851),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004) n.p.

<sup>280</sup> All references to Temper will be to the following volume, as it is the most accessible online version of a work which has not been reprinted since the nineteenth century: The Works of Mrs Amelia Opie; Complete in Three Volumes, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: James Crissy, 1843) 1-175. This text reduces the three-volume work to 175 pages, so the difference in page numbers from Longman’s original edition should be taken into consideration.

Agatha, whose temper shows no sign of yielding to 'her religious emotions' (19) while she is with them.

Agatha's reaction to hearing the parable of the prodigal son at church soon after – 'throwing herself on her knees, she hid her face on the seat, and nearly sobbed aloud' (23) – is not something the narrator is prepared to acknowledge as an example of active Christianity either, explaining it as 'the cause of illness' or 'the effect of an illness then impending' (23). The narrator needs to make it clear that Agatha is dying, but there seems to be no space for a religious reading of Agatha's actions. They bring her to the attention of the clergyman Mr Egerton, and an investigation of this character – to whom Agatha will entrust her daughter Emma upon her death – provides further evidence of the degree to which Opie is working with a more muted vision of active Christianity than either More or Brunton in this novel.

Mr Egerton is introduced by the narrator as a 'truly pious man' (23), but Opie's portrait establishes him as a much more flawed and realistic character than either More or Brunton would present, especially in a clergyman. Upon meeting Mrs Castlemain, Agatha's mother, Mr Egerton declares that he was 'a solitary, insulated, unattached being; but I feel *now* that I have still affections, and that my heart is not entirely buried in the grave' (28), now that he has Emma as his ward. He relates how, 'in a fit of gloom, and disgust to the world' (28), he had requested the curacy of the village where Agatha met him:

But I found not there the comfort which I sought. I had been used to society, and I saw myself in a desert; – true, there were poor around me, and I could minister to their wants; but they were as ignorant as they were indigent, and I felt the wretchedness which made me leave the world, increased by the fancied remedy which I had chosen. Therefore I was resolved to give up the situation and seek a less gloomy one, when I became acquainted with your lost Agatha. (28)

Mr Egerton sees in his new role as guardian to Emma the opportunity to give up preaching, as it 'does not agree with my health' (28), and to 'content myself with performing the other duties of a parish priest, namely, visiting the sick and the afflicted, and bestowing on them the consolations of religion' (28). Although honesty

is a very important Quaker trait, there is a Unitarian flavour to Mr Egerton's rational candour, and to Opie's interest in portraying all the shades of grey in human beings, even her religious characters.

Opie wants to insist that the clergyman, Mr Egerton, be considered as just another human being, with the same weaknesses and failings as everyone else. Mr Egerton suggests that Mr Orwell was the Good Samaritan who helped Agatha: Mrs Castlemain chastises him for thereby implying that Mr Jones (who drew up Agatha's marriage certificate, but has not helped her find it) is the priest who passed by on the other side. Mr Egerton laughs and recognises that when he made the comparison he was too much 'under the dominion of TEMPER, that domestic enemy against which I am so fond of guarding others' (118). He is subsequently ungracious enough to suggest that Mr Jones would not have understood the implied insult anyway. Opie, then, portrays a clergyman subject to human weaknesses, indeed one who expresses some levity regarding the backbone of Christian teaching. Neither More nor Brunton would present their main characters, let alone clergymen, in this way, and this difference highlights Opie's interest, characteristic of Unitarianism, in acknowledging and presenting all the shades of grey of human experience.

There are references to Clarissa in Temper: Clarissa resembles Agatha in her atonement for having failed in her filial duty and eloped with her lover (Ty Empowering 162). But Mr Egerton makes it clear that Agatha and her mother (Emma, or Mrs Castlemain) do not deserve the readers' sympathy when he tells their stories to the younger Emma (53). Emma, for her part, is a relatively passive character, who follows diligently the advice of Mr Egerton (95) and who is therefore never really in any palpable danger, unlike Brunton's Laura. Emma has been considered a paragon by Mrs St Aubyn, Henry's mother, 'all pure nature there' (74) and St Aubyn himself (75), reflecting Mr Egerton's good opinion of his ward (Clive Jones 245). But the tone of their reflections is one of pride and partiality, not shared by the narrator. The narrative presents Emma as a potentially good but still developing character, who is therefore easier to identify with than, say, the paragons of Lucilla Stanley or Laura Montreville.

Opie's depiction of flawed characters is closely knit to her interest in a realistic (yet exciting) plot. The whole of the first volume is dedicated to Agatha, the mother of the heroine, her own mother's failure to educate her correctly (leading to Agatha's marriage to a libertine) and Agatha's subsequent insistence on instilling in her own

daughter a hatred of this mother. Through references to Agatha's 'fatally indulgent mother' (1) in the very first scene, for instance, the reader is told how to interpret these characters and their behaviour. In stating that 'Agatha found too late, that she had inspired her child with the sentiment of hatred unworthy of a Christian to feel or to inculcate' (22), Opie continues to present characters which require so much improvement that the reader is drawn into an interest in the development of the story. In some cases, Opie introduces characters who seek revenge on the main protagonists: Cammell, following the death of his daughter after an altercation with a foul-tempered Agatha in youth, will refuse to help the adult Agatha find her marriage certificate (14). Similarly, Varley is brought in much later as someone wronged by Agatha's mother: he will continue to spread the word that Emma is illegitimate (115). Once the narrator has revealed, early on and dramatically, that 'AGATHA TORRINGTON WAS HIS LAWFUL WIFE!' (11) – that the first wife of Agatha's libertine husband had actually died before Agatha married him – the reader is drawn into a plot that clearly needs resolution.

The lack of plot in Coelebs has already been mentioned: the fact that there are to be no surprises is even remarked upon ironically by Lady Belfield, a good friend of Charles, in the novel itself:

No difficulties, nor adventures to heighten the interest. No cruel step-dame, no tyrant father, no capricious mistress, no moated castle, no intriguing confidante, no treacherous spy, no formidable rival, not so much as a duel or even a challenge, I fear, to give variety to the monotonous scene. (164)

Opie did not need to write the type of Gothic novel that is being parodied here to succeed in writing a courtship plot with a lot more action than More's. Emma cannot officially requite St Aubyn's love, but jealously observes his apparent connection with a wealthy widow, before becoming engaged herself to a man who turns out to be her half-brother, and saved from an incestuous marriage only in the nick of time by St Aubyn. Yet Opie succeeds in achieving a plot that has realistic potential, unlike Brunton's Self-Control. Having explained in the Dedication her aim of demonstrating how Laura's religious fortitude will equip her to overcome any obstacle (v), Brunton makes the obstacles ever increasingly formidable, and

therefore proportionately implausible. Opie, on the other hand, draws on anecdotes that come not only from plausible events but actually from life experience, as she titillates her reader with episodes set in Paris.

Temper's popularity might have been enhanced by the inclusion of scenes from Paris that Opie had experienced first-hand on her 1802 visit with John Opie: 'these may have had added appeal at a time when France was, and had been for some time, inaccessible to the English traveller' (Ann H. Jones 292n). The path traced by the protagonists is tantamount to a tourist trip around places of revolutionary bloodshed. Opie's characters stay in Rue de la Concorde, 'the best and widest street in Paris', and the narrator introduces, with some sensational touches, nearby scenes 'most pregnant with impressive associations' (121):

At one end of it, was the place where the perpetual guillotine stood; at the other, was the church of La Madeleine, where so many victims of revolutionary fury were buried; and the stones of that street, now so peaceable and so smiling, had lately reverberated from the heavy steps of a ferocious multitude, and, almost without a metaphor, had been dyed with rivers of blood. (121)

Emma waxes lyrical about the beauty of the scenery, whilst Mr Egerton is very ill at ease, since he is remembering a friend who was guillotined there. Emma's reaction is a fascinated horror – a reaction Opie is also trying to evoke in her reader. Emma exclaims, "I fear ... that I shall never think it beautiful again." Yet the next moment she wished to go back again to see the very spot where the guillotine stood' (121). Further excitement is provided immediately, both from the topical interest of Buonaparte's appearance, and in the melodramatic expression of Emma's more personal concern with St Aubyn:

But neither the different corps of Mamelucs, their sabres glittering in the sun, nor the eight bays harnessed to the Consul's carriage, nor the splendid consular guard bringing up the rear, could draw Emma's attention from the narration which she had just heard! St. Aubyn in France! St. Aubyn disgraced, though more deserving of honour than before! St. Aubyn gone on a mission of benevolence into a remote part

of the country! St. Aubyn lost to her, probably for ever; though why, alas! she knew not. (123)

The trip to Paris enables Opie to widen her treatment of the evils that arise from an ill-guided temper. These are not just individual foibles in contemporary society: temper, as Mr Egerton's remarks suggest, is responsible for French revolutionary excesses and bloodshed. He reflects on the terrors that befall humans when they take it upon themselves to do God's work:

I never feel more disgust at the operations of temper ... that universal agent in all human actions and that soul of party spirit, than when they lead men to assume, as it were, the terrors of the Almighty, and presume to point the arrows of retributive justice. (137-138)

Yet, although important to the novel, religion has finally to give way to temper as the concluding scenes stress the moral. Even Mr Egerton, the clergyman, states that 'there is no situation in life in which fine temper is not of use ... for though religion may in time clear away every obstacle to their desirable ends, the way to them is made easy and quick at once if Temper be the guide' (174). At the end of the discussion, in the last lines of the work, Mr Egerton doesn't even mention religion as he extols good temper, saying that, 'considering *happiness* as the goal in view, VIRTUE and TALENT are two Arabian coursers, which, however fleet and powerful, would never reach the desired and destined point unless managed and guided by the hand of Temper' (175).

In Temper, religion is in plain view, but it is achievable and unobtrusive religion. Opie's aim in interesting the reader has been made clear here, where More's objective was not the reader's entertainment: More aimed to show how a novel could be used for religious purposes, and to 'propound the Anglican evangelical system' (Waldron Jane Austen 87). She was aware that the novel would not appeal to people who were looking for the entertainment a novel normally provides, which is clear from Charles's comments in his preface to the work (38). The comments with which Lady Belfield prefaces her observations about the lack of an exciting plot also stress this point, as she remarks 'it will be a sad dull novel, however ... all is likely to go on smoothly that we shall flag for want of incident' (164).

Although Opie used religion as a theme in Temper, her interest was clearly as much in entertaining the reader as in pushing for heightened religious awareness in her readers.

Coelebs might have been bought but not read, precisely because of the wealth of in-depth theological discussion. But More succeeded in pleasing The Christian Observer, a review that was notoriously anti-novel, even though they rejected the categorisation of Coelebs as a novel. They expressed their 'delight in anticipating their usefulness, admiration at the genius and virtues of the author, and gratitude for the consecration of such talents to the cause of truth'.<sup>281</sup> Another conservative review, The British Critic, remarked that 'we have not read a work which combines the *utile com dulci* more completely than *Coelebs*', which was high praise indeed, and could have contributed to the many sales of the work.<sup>282</sup> More had succeeded in writing a particularly religious novel. Its stark differences from Temper indicate the degree to which that sort of novel was not Opie's aim in her 1812 work.

Opie indicates in Temper her awareness of her own precariousness as a female writer of novels through both Mr Egerton's praise of Mme de Sévigné and her literary works (140-141), and a lengthy discussion between Emma and Mr Egerton about Bluestockings (54-55). In her conclusion that it is much safer to be a bluestocking than an authoress, Opie commented on the difficulty of combining entertainment and instruction. Her later novels show her continuing attempt to find a balance between these two, but the attempts become less successful.

### Valentine's Eve

In this novel Opie uses worldly concerns only as a backdrop for what is the prime focus for her: Catherine's piety, and how the world's refusal to accept and nurture it leads to her martyrdom. Catherine is a Clarissa-like character, but her suffering is non-conformist, unlike her novelistic forebear. Opie used a worldly form to religious ends with a certain degree of success: she managed to write something

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<sup>281</sup> The Christian Observer 8 (February 1809): 109-121. Quoted in Demers, ed., (399-402). This reference to 'the truth' may, incidentally, refer to exactly that sort of religious truth which might have proved unproblematic for the Quakers to see in fiction.

<sup>282</sup> The British Critic 33 (May 1809): 481-494. Quoted in Demers, ed., (407-408).

larger and bleaker than a moral-evangelical novel here, as her heroine is not rewarded for her devout Christianity in this world. Opie's 'religious ends' included more of a criticism of the religious status quo in England than her contemporaries'. Her decisions were influenced by her own religious struggle and her dismay that active religion (specifically mystical, in Opie's case) was so mocked in society.

By situating her narrative in the recent past, Opie engaged with topical issues as a backdrop in this novel: the relationship between republicanism and the aristocracy; class boundaries more generally, and a criticism of duelling, for instance. Valentine's Eve saw Opie place less of a stress on tracing generations of female protagonists in order to highlight the shortcomings of inadequate education or mothering, as she had done in Adeline Mowbray and Temper especially. The effects are shown, however, of a secret marriage between the heroine's parents owing to inequality in class status. The secret marriage precedes the narrative in Opie's 1816 novel, but it is a primary focus of the plot in Madeline. In Valentine's Eve, Catherine Shirley moves back to live with her aristocratic family after having grown up with the republican Merle family. Opie sets her backdrop as a reflection on the benefits and shortcomings of both aristocratic and republican principles in the early years of the 1800s – the 'Valentine's eve' in the denouement is 13 February 1809. The main focus of the novel, though, is Catherine and her piety, and how her trust in people and Providence enables those jealous of her beauty and virtue to convince her family of her immorality. Having married a cousin, Lord Shirley, Catherine bears him twins whom he takes away from her once he learns of her supposed infidelity. Catherine's republican friend Lucy Merle, and Lord Shirley's aristocrat friend Lord Livesay work together to try to prove Catherine's innocence, which finally comes to light in letters stolen on Valentine's eve. Catherine and Lord Shirley are reunited, but Catherine bows to the will of God and goes willingly to her death.

With regard to the quotation from Mellor which opened this chapter, it becomes clear in Valentine's Eve that Opie's "consciousness-raising" is less to do with these topical concerns, and much more to do with Catherine's piety and the impact of fashionable society's refusal to accept it. Christianity is primordial for

Catherine, and the narrator uses Biblical quotations to illustrate it (112).<sup>283</sup> Lucy draws a simple distinction between herself and Catherine by saying ‘I am only a hearer of the word: Miss Shirley is a doer also’ (114). Catherine stands out immediately because of her active piety. General Shirley and Lord Shirley are not accustomed to Christianity in action, which they associate with ‘methodists and fanatics’ (63).<sup>284</sup>

Mrs Baynton (Catherine’s great-aunt) associates her ‘methodistical cant’ (66) with the Merle family with whom Catherine has grown up. When Catherine comes out in society, the malicious Mrs Baynton has her moving in circles where she might be called ‘saint Shirley’ (149). The discussion held between General Shirley and Lord Shirley illustrates the problem, and Lord Shirley’s comments express a rational understanding of the dangers that face Catherine given the nature of society:

“Well,” coolly replied the General, “that is better than being called Sinner Shirley.”

“But, my dear sir, with the generality of the world they mean the same thing; and true piety like Miss Shirley’s, firm faith regulating every movement of her heart and every word of her tongue, is so rare a thing, that no one believes in its existence; and as we none of us like to admit superiority in any thing, our dear relation will be deemed by most people either hypocritical or insane.” (149)

Catherine comes to realise that ‘if I must associate with the world, I see that I must, in trifles at least, not go counter to its ideas’ (150), resolving that ‘all I can do I will, and that is, not run the risk of bringing religion itself into contempt by exposing it in my person to scorn’ (151). Catherine (unlike Adeline Mowbray) recognises ‘this terrible world’ (151) for what it is, but when Miss Clermont and Mr Melvyn manage to convince Lord Shirley of Catherine’s infidelity, she is sadly mistaken in thinking that

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<sup>283</sup> All references to *Valentine’s Eve* will be to the following volume, as it is the most accessible online version of a work which has not been reprinted since the nineteenth century: Amelia Opie, *Valentine’s Eve* (Boston: S. G. Goodrich, 1827).

<sup>284</sup> This criticism was a rather commonplace one in the period: in Brunton’s *Discipline*, Ellen Percy and her immoral friend Juliet Arnold called Miss Mortimer, Mrs Percy’s close friend and a pious companion to Ellen, ‘Argus and duenna; voted her a stick, a bore, a quiz, or, to sum up all reproach in one comprehensive epithet, a Methodist’ (20).

'he [Melvyn] and his accomplices will find even their falsehood and cunning no match for truth and innocence like mine' (339). Opie then devotes a large part of the narrative to the illustration of Catherine's belief in Providence, with the continuing machinations of villainous human beings, who delight in their successful duping of Lord Shirley, and in the couple's misery.

As Opie mentioned in her letter to Hayley of 18 November 1814, she was interested in tracing the effect on a woman of being innocent yet believed guilty. The way Opie chose to explore this theme here differs from her much earlier exploration in Dangers of Coquetry because she allows the heroine to be found innocent and reunited with her husband before she kills her off. A closer examination of how Opie constructs this ending reveals what she might intend by giving such a religious focus to the 'worldly' form of a novel, and what kind of religious focus she intended.

For a work so steeped in religion, Opie's decision to give this work such a secular title illustrates Opie's interest in creating a fusion between the worldly and the religious. It is in the confusion (and thieving) of papers being delivered to loved ones on the eve of Valentine's Day that papers proving Catherine's innocence are found and used in her defence. Opie shows how Providence can turn mischievous behaviour around this secular love-rite to the purposes of heavenly love, as the letters fortuitously find themselves in the hands of those who can use them to restore Catherine's fame and family life. The servant who chances upon the letters 'loudly thanked God for having made her the means to restore the lost reputation of her master's child' (384), and then addresses the thief, saying 'I fear you did not come honestly by these; but it sometimes pleases Providence to use bad agents for good ends' (384). The novel form might be seen as this 'bad agent' which Opie means to suggest may be used for good ends. But the good ends here also extend beyond a promotion of the vital importance of active religion in society to a criticism of how such religion is perceived in society.

It is fundamental for Opie to stress that the world does not know how to deal with Catherine's active Christianity, but Opie herself seemed somewhat unsure of how to handle this aim in novelistic terms. Opie was used to writing heroines who developed, but found herself writing a paragon instead. Opie clearly was interested in portraying a character who developed, only not as her main protagonist. In November 1815, Opie wrote to Hayley:

Lucy Merle is my favourite I think, and having made her standard of morals republicanism, while my heroine's is christianity, and having made Lucy in time feel that the latter was the only ... director of human conduct, I trust I have made a ?salutary? contrast, and could I keep my work by me another six months, it might be very good perhaps – ,  
However, such as it is, it is about to be launched et vogue la galère!<sup>285</sup>

The fact that Lucy was Opie's favourite character, one who needs development, indicates one of the possible concerns in the novel regarding Opie's control of the Catherine character, and readerly satisfaction also. If the author herself finds the heroine less interesting or less likeable than one of the other characters, she may find it difficult to inspire in her readers the enthusiasm for Catherine that is required for their entertainment and their sympathy. Writing of criticisms of Mansfield Park as an 'artistic failure', with 'its central character an impossible prig' (89), Waldron argues that a possible solution is to see Austen's novel 'as a working through of the *unresolvable conflict* facing a young woman who sets out, on the model of the Evangelical heroines of Burney, More and Brunton, to be wholly and consistently good' (89; my italics).<sup>286</sup> We can see Valentine's Eve as Opie's attempt to resolve the unresolvable, to create a wholly good yet realistic character, who lives as an active Christian. But, conscious as she was of the way active Christianity was mocked in society, Opie ultimately could not portray such a character as successful in the world.<sup>287</sup> Catherine therefore had to die.

Another letter to Hayley of November 1815 suggests a sense in Opie of the genre in which she was comfortable and where she had success. She writes that Walter Scott 'told me that [the] father & daughter made him cry more than any thing

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<sup>285</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 15 November 1815, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 102, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University. Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum.

<sup>286</sup> Waldron argues that Fanny Price has her weaknesses – her jealousy of Mary Crawford particularly (Jane Austen 89) – but Vallone argues that, although Austen's dislike of Evangelicals 'might seem to dissociate Fanny Price from Lucilla Stanley, the moral values each author espouses in her fiction are largely similar' (186n).

<sup>287</sup> See Opie's earlier comments to Hayley questioning how she should react when her Quaker friends are mocked for their enthusiasm (Opie to Hayley, 15 Oct. 1814).

he ever read', continuing, 'I *likes* [sic.] to make people cry, indeed if they do not do it, all my readers are disappointed – I *wish* they would let me make people happy in my own way – but even *my Co.* say *indeed* Madam, you must be horrid pathetic'.<sup>288</sup> But there is a change here in Opie's use of the pathetic: she decided to revisit a tradition of killing off the innocent heroine in a time of reformist, domestic literature that hardly supports such a decision. Kelly's earlier quotation regarding Opie's heroines as 'martyrs' who remain to be 'bathed in the reader's sympathy alone' (English Fiction 85) fits in with Opie's interest in continuing with the pathetic. It also provides a useful lens through which to consider Opie's decisions regarding the fate of Catherine in Valentine's Eve.

When Lord Shirley finally does come back to Catherine with their infant children, she expresses her delight in Providence; "yet if it be thy will," she added, raising her eyes to heaven, "thou knowest that I am willing to resign them" (391). The earl expresses consternation at this declaration, and Catherine explains her sentiments in terms of profound piety:

Because, my dearest lord, I have always considered this world only as a state of probation for another, and that trials are to be looked upon as favours from the Giver of all good if borne with thankfulness and endured with patience, and as touchstones of our real faith in the mercy and goodness of Providence. – To have died, my beloved Shirley, with fortitude and resignation, when I was an alien to your heart, an exile from you and my dear children, and lost to reputation and to happiness, would have been no proof of my love and gratitude to my Creator; but to be willing to obey his summons when every thing that is most precious in life is mine again, *that* is a sacrifice worthy to be offered by a Christian spirit and, hard as the struggle is, I *hope* I shall be enabled to prove myself equal to it'. (391-392)

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<sup>288</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 27 November 1815, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 100, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University. Quoted in King and Pierce, Introduction, Father, 12.

This religious death evokes Clarissa's death, and Catherine's words to Lord Shirley about her willingness to die are very similar to Clarissa's, as the earlier heroine contemplates her shroud as a wedding outfit:

O hasten, good God, if it be thy blessed will, the happy moment that I am to be decked out in his all-quieting garb! And sustain, comfort, bless, and protect with the all-shadowing wing of thy mercy, my dear parents, my uncles, my brother, my sister, my cousin Morden, my ever-dear and ever-kind Miss Howe, my good Mrs. Norton, and every deserving person to whom they wish well! is the ardent prayer, first and last, of every beginning hour, as the clock tells it me, (hours now are days, nay, years,) of

Your now not sorrowing or afflicted, but happy, CLARISSA HARLOWE.<sup>289</sup>

By evoking Clarissa's death, Opie makes a strong attempt to secure the success of the endeavour to use the worldly form of the novel to religious ends. But by contrasting Catherine with Clarissa, she also indicates the breadth of her religious agenda in this novel, which is much larger and bleaker than the moral-evangelical novels referenced here as it extends to implied criticisms of the Established Church. Clarissa's death is socially acceptable in that she is a violated woman, whilst Catherine's is not. Catherine's is also incredibly understated, where Clarissa's death is something for which the reader is amply prepared.<sup>290</sup> It is through society's refusal to acknowledge the importance of religion in everyday life – and the malice that virtuous piety seems to invite – that Catherine Shirley comes to die, and that her very young children are deprived of the mothering of an exemplary woman. In this case, it is not only female education that is jeopardized, but the education of both boys and girls, since Catherine leaves a baby son and a baby daughter. Opie suggests in this work that if society's ignorant and prejudiced assumptions about religion are not corrected, it is society as a whole that will bear the consequences.

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<sup>289</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; Or, The History of a Young Lady*, 1748, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 1339.

<sup>290</sup> As in *Adeline Mowbray*, Opie gave the reader no particular indications of how they were to interpret the heroine's death at the end of *Valentine's Eve*; Richardson did not take such risks.

Catherine fits aspects of Kelly's example of the Christian martyr because her passion is 'self-condemning rather than self-aggrandizing, passive rather than active, domestic rather than amorous and erotic in its nature' (English Fiction 85). But it is not 'more acceptable to conservative religious and social morality' (85) in that Opie still draws Catherine in her fundamentally non-conformist mould, which is at odds at least with aspects of conservative religious and social morality. Catherine is a member of the Church of England – there is nothing in the narrative (except jibes about her being a Methodist) that suggests Catherine belongs to any other denomination – which means that Opie, in this novel, is directly attacking Anglicanism's lukewarmness as she perceives it. All Catherine is doing is taking her Anglican religion seriously. Opie's conclusion that Catherine is better out of this wicked world where such people are targeted and condemned indicates the degree to which she thinks the Church of England (and the whole of society as an extension of it) needs to change.<sup>291</sup> Kelly seems to imply that Opie bathes in this idea of the Christian passion, but I do not think that Catherine plays that idea out. Her trust in Providence is too strong – perhaps naïvely so, but that would be another criticism of wicked society – for her to dwell on her sufferings. With the abrupt ending, Opie does not direct the reader to bathe in her pathos either.

Letters to Hayley of February 1815 and February 1816 (once the novel had been published) indicate that Opie was not entirely clear in her own mind about how paragon-like Catherine would appear. The 1815 letter shows that Hayley had given his opinion in intervening correspondence about the type of character Opie might have wanted to construct in this novel, but Opie could not agree with him on all points:

What you say about religion is so good I believe I shall steal it – but I have no fancy for introducing the character you mention – I have called my heroine Catherine – and I have learned to like the name – Yes – my heroine is good always – because always she is under the influence of religion – teaching forgiveness, forbearance, integrity, truth, and so forth – I have read discipline, and allowing for improbable, not to say

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<sup>291</sup> Opie indicated to Hayley that she found Church of England modes of prayer, whether public or personal, inferior to Quaker worship (Opie to Hayley, 17 Sep. 1814).

impossible situations, I think it masterly in the greater part of it – But sometimes her heroine is too odious – Miss Mortimer's going away, should, I think, have softened her more, and obviously ...<sup>292</sup>

Opie swiftly chastised herself for this unkind comment, writing 'judge not, that ye be not judged' (8 Feb. 1815). But her comments on Brunton's heroine indicated Opie's desire to create a character, perhaps, who is more aware of her Christian faith and its importance than Ellen Percy is, or a character who does not need to grow into her faith in the way Ellen Percy does. By introducing a character as sure of her faith as Catherine Shirley, Opie could present most effectively the perils faced by a truly religious character in a society that is not willing to accept such active piety. But she also managed – unintentionally, I argue – to create, in Catherine, a character in the mould of More's Lucilla Stanley.

Opie's comments in the 1816 letter show that the religious nature of this novel was not interpreted by others as Opie intended. She made jovial remarks about her most drastic, last-minute alteration, but also revealed surprise and shock about the reactions of a sceptic friend, her doctor, Lemaistre:

Yes, indeed, you did threaten me horribly if I killed Catherine, but I did not mind you, and was joking only when you said you wouldn't forgive me. Your praises please me much. Poor Lemaistre who has all a sceptic's hate of religion and what he calls saintship, has written me a letter in which he praises my new work far more than I think it deserves with respect to language and character, but he likes not the plan, nor the principles – declares Saintship in his opinion the greatest enemy possible to morals, and is shocked at my having condescended – (think of that) – to enlist under the banner of Mr Wilberforce and Hannah More!!! How ignorant he must be in such points. There are certainly no 'evangelical' lights in my book, as he calls them – and, except that my heroine keeps the Sabbath day holy, she is only such a Christian in many respects as I have often drawn before ... He is on this subject

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<sup>292</sup> Opie refers to Brunton's 1814 novel here. Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 8 February 1815, Hayley Archive, ms, XV 93, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University. Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum.

narrow, prejudiced and ignorant, however, I must reply to him in a Christian spirit.<sup>293</sup>

Opie's shocked reaction to Lemaistre's suggestion in this letter that she had 'condescended' to ally herself with Wilberforce and More indicates her admiration for their principles. But she was clearly aware of differences in political and religious ideology (especially where her fiction is concerned) that Lemaistre did not seem to appreciate. More was an Evangelical loyalist who had a 'lifelong dedication to promulgating an agenda of conservative moral reform in almost every imaginable literary genre'.<sup>294</sup> Opie's reform agenda coincided with More's in many points of human rights and Abolition, and Opie admired some of More's writing.<sup>295</sup> But she could not agree with More politically: Opie, with her strong Whig sympathies, underestimated the degree to which Catherine resembles Lucilla Stanley. Although the tenor of Opie's novel is quite different from More's – Barbauld wrote that Coelebs presented 'the gravest theological discussions' to the world, and Valentine's Eve does not engage in grave theological discussions at all, let alone 'the gravest' – Opie seems not to appreciate the similarities owing to her focus, perhaps, on personal differences.<sup>296</sup> Opie had made it clear to Hayley that she did not want to model Catherine on Ellen Percy, Brunton's heroine in Discipline, another character who develops (8 Feb. 1815). Catherine needed to do no wrong in order that her sacrifice might be all the more laudable, but also more tragic. With such intentions, it would have been difficult to portray a character which did not resemble Lucilla Stanley.

Opie's conflicting ideas about her heroine in these two letters demonstrate Opie's dilemma as she tried to resolve the unresolvable, to create a wholly good yet realistic character, who lives as an active Christian. The character in the first letter sounds like a paragon (8 Feb. 1815), yet Opie made it clear in the second letter not

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<sup>293</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 28 February 1816, Hayley Archive, ms, XXVII 16. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University. Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum.

<sup>294</sup> Elizabeth Eger, and Lucy Peltz, Brilliant Women: 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Bluestockings. (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008) 115.

<sup>295</sup> Opie wrote to Gurney that she had read two or three chapters of More's Practical Piety (1811) 'with much pleasure, and I hope edification', and was thankful that she 'stumbled upon it' (Opie to Gurney, 18 August 1814).

<sup>296</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, Preface to British Novelists, 1810, quoted in Demers, ed., 9.

only that such a character type was not her intention, but also that such a character type was not what she had written (28 Feb. 1816). She claimed that Catherine was no more Christian than any of her previous heroines, but a mere glance through Opie's novels to this point reveals Catherine to be a much more active, involved and flawless character in her commitment to her religious faith. This apparent confusion in Opie further illustrates the novelistic dilemma that Catherine presented, and how this dilemma was fed by Opie's personal spiritual dilemma at this time.

If one compares Catherine's death with Adeline's (in Adeline Mowbray), one can observe another marked shift in Opie's focus in Valentine's Eve. Adeline's mind is put to rest in her last moments by the assurance that all those she is leaving behind will be well looked after (by Mrs Pemberton, Savanna and Mrs Mowbray), and that she herself has been forgiven by others (Adeline Mowbray, 281-283). Catherine's last thoughts, on the other hand, are filled with ideas of forgiving Miss Clermont and Mr Melvyn, and of receiving the sacrament with her husband (395), where Lord Shirley's thoughts are still of revenge. In Adeline Mowbray, the final religious emphasis is placed on tolerance, which will lead to Adeline's daughter Editha receiving a balanced education from three surrogate mothers. The reader is soothed by the depiction of Adeline's death, where Catherine's seems so pointless, and Lord Shirley unchanged.

Writing of the conclusion to Temper, and contrasting it with Opie's more usual, pathetic model, Clive Jones notes that the novel 'enjoys a comedic resolution in keeping with Opie's purpose of demonstrating that those who live according to her values, that is, are modest, truthful and receptive to instruction, will be rewarded' (249). Since Catherine does nothing wrong in Valentine's Eve to warrant her death, the reader must question what kind of reward might be possible for such a pious woman in such a hostile world, and it is the sort of question that is not normally asked of the readers of a 'moral-evangelical' novel.

Opie was very surprised by the reaction to the novel of her Quaker friends and acquaintances, and she wrote to Hayley in May 1816 of the work's reception.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> A contemporary reviewer commented that '[Catherine's] example might have been more inviting, if her misfortunes had not arisen from the exercise of her virtues; and if her death had been retarded and she had been allowed to enjoy the esteem of her husband and the caresses of her children before she went hence to be no more seen': Rev. of Valentine's Eve, Monthly Review / JAS 79 (1816): 438.

Gurney had told her of ‘the pain that my new book had given some of the best and most respectable friends from its impurity’, owing to allusions to adultery, seduction, and a reference to a house of ill fame, and that, in their opinion, ‘[I have] injured my own consideration in society’.<sup>298</sup> By underlining that whole phrase, Opie gave it the gravitas that it was due in her opinion: she had failed to please both her religious and her worldly friends, and it was wholly unexpected, but ‘I could however lift up my torn soul with confidence to my Creator that my motives were not only pure but good, and I felt that “he judgeth not as man judgeth”’ (3 May 1816).

Opie’s correspondence with Hayley provides good reasons for Opie’s misunderstanding of Gurney’s opinions on the novel, but also confusing messages about what Quaker attitudes to fiction were at this point, as exemplified by Gurney. In the letter Opie wrote Hayley just before publishing Valentine’s Eve (28 Feb. 1816) – in which she playfully discussed having killed off the heroine – Opie also wrote about Gurney’s reactions to the manuscript work. Gurney, ‘tho writing a learned work on the Deity of Christ’, had read the first volume of the work with Opie, and she wrote that ‘he was far too interested for his principles to approve, and he is much pleased with the book as a proof of talent’. Opie’s next comments about Gurney in the letter indicate the difficulty in pinpointing what was wrong with novels in the eyes of Quakers at this time:

As he has imagination himself, works of imagination, if he allowed himself to read them, would take great hold of him, but he forbids himself the gratification, and I laughed, and told him today as we walked to Norwich that I never saw so strong a struggle as he daily exhibits between nature and grace. (28 Feb. 1816)<sup>299</sup>

It seems clear from this letter that Gurney could approve of at least some of the novel, but it is equally clear, from comments about Opie in his autobiography, that the relinquishing of novels was an obvious pre-requisite for Gurney to joining the Quakers. He wrote, regarding Opie’s struggles at this time, that ‘she gradually discovered that all her vanities, her position in the world, and her novel writing, in

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<sup>298</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 3 May 1816, Hayley Archive, ms, XXVII 17, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

<sup>299</sup> Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum.

which her reputation was high, must be laid at the foot of the cross of Christ' (Braithwaite 235). Opie's decisions regarding Valentine's Eve indicate that she had not yet made this discovery.

Although Opie took Gurney's criticism of Valentine's Eve on board, she did not simply turn to the Friends. In June 1816, Opie discussed the London season in letters to Gurney in a tone that would hardly single her out as a budding Quaker, but some comments do indicate also her religious inclinations:

I am a complete worldling now.... I am rarely at home alone, & this week has been one of excessive gaiety ... Fancy me at a fine, & blue party at Lady Cork's, recommending *Scott's bible* to Lady Crewe & Lady Lonsdale – Lady Mary Shepherd, from my last work<sup>300</sup> called the bible 'the *book you are so fond of* – ' no *disgrace* that – .<sup>301</sup>

A letter to Hayley from Gurney's house in December 1816 further exposed Opie's struggles, with her writing that, in the seven months since its publication, Gurney had not stopped heaping criticism on her for her ill-judged decision (in his opinion) to publish Valentine's Eve. Opie concluded, however, not only that Gurney was "right", but that he was the kindest and most tender of friends, and that she is completely unworthy of his kind attention.<sup>302</sup>

In Valentine's Eve, Opie attempted something larger and bleaker than a moral-evangelical novel. Temper saw the first Opie heroine who was allowed to live, and this plot decision on Opie's part made it religiously optimistic in the general style of the moral-evangelical novel. But, in killing off Catherine in Valentine's Eve, Opie indicated that she could not (at this point) conceive of the possibility that a young lady could be truly religious and find a place in the world, perhaps playing out her own dilemma of wanting to be truly religious whilst retaining her worldly place as a novel-writer.

### Madeline

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<sup>300</sup> *Valentine's Eve* (MacGregor's footnote, 62).

<sup>301</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 15 June 1816, quoted in MacGregor, 62.

<sup>302</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 16 December 1816, Hayley Archive, ms, XXVII 18, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

At a time when Opie was losing Gurney as a correspondent and a moral and spiritual guide, and when Hayley had begun to mistrust her as a correspondent – a trust that would not really be regained before his death in 1820 – Opie was faced with constructing a narrative without the support and guidance upon which she had come to rely. Valentine's Eve does not indicate that Gurney and Hayley's combined efforts to help Opie with her work were completely successful, but Opie's literary voice became more fractured without them. She realised that she needed to approach the synthesis of the worldly with the Quaker from a different angle, so she chose the journal form, and a more morally autonomous character. She also realised that she needed to portray a character who, unlike Catherine, lived to benefit from her Christian devotion, but it did not work.

The religious backdrop in Madeline might have been chosen so that Opie could give a more prominent position to worldly concerns that had preoccupied her in earlier novels, but her fractured voice leads 'Madeline, the religious heroine' to come to the fore as the novel's message. Madeline is shown to fit the 'martyr' type that Kelly described, but, in suggesting that Madeline considers all her woes to be her own fault, Opie cannot address the patriarchal pressures that pervade her novel. Opie's failure to deliver a heroine rewarded for her religious devotion in Valentine's Eve leads Opie to exaggerate Madeline's religious compliance in spite of huge trials. In this way, she secures the happy ending that is so conspicuously missing in Valentine's Eve, but without a convincingly happy heroine. Like Temper and Valentine's Eve, Madeline was another three-volume novel Opie published with Longman and Co. Opie chose to address some of Gurney's objections to Valentine's Eve by using the journal form, a form beloved of Quakers, and by claiming that her work was based on fact, but also by setting the novel in Scotland and the Kirk of Scotland. Opie's claim that her narrative was based on fact came not from a need similar to that of early novel writers like Aphra Behn to give authority to a widely-distrusted form of writing, nor from later silver-fork writers' interest in signalling that their readers may well find themselves within the pages of the work. Opie's claim for a factual basis to her novel was designed rather to appease her Quaker audience who distrusted works entirely of the imagination. Opie insisted that this work 'came into my hands', assuring her readers that 'I lay before them a story which is, in many respects, literally true, and that the characters in it are not entirely the creatures of

the imagination' (9).<sup>303</sup> The work is described by the narrator as a 'TRUE STORY' at the end (110), and this insistence suggests a growing unease as Opie tries to marry her interest in the value of fiction with her growing interest in the Quakers, or a desire at least not to offend her close Quaker friends in the way Valentine's Eve had.

Opie's decision to set the work in the Kirk of Scotland may have been to do with its Presbyterian roots of Bible-led scholarship, through which Opie could present religion (including the prominence of family worship) as the norm.<sup>304</sup> But it could also act as a reflection of the type of worship she had been observing and getting involved in amongst her Quaker acquaintance at this time.<sup>305</sup> It certainly meant that Opie could depict a character as religious as Catherine Shirley without worrying about the effect of a hostile society.

In this novel, Madeline Munro returns to her lowly Scottish family after the death of her English benefactors, and her journal traces her reintegration into the local community, especially that of the Kirk. Her father finds her an unsuitable suitor, but she is then courted by the local laird, Mr Falconer. Owing to their difference in status, Falconer convinces Madeline to enter into a secret marriage. It is in Madeline's negotiations of the consequences of that secret marriage that the plot unfolds, and a more suitable potential suitor appears. Opie revisits prominent themes from her earlier novels, especially criticisms of patriarchy – with Madeline faring badly owing to the irregularity of her relationship with Falconer – and criticisms of war and dishonesty. Madeline is brought to the brink of death, with Opie saving her owing to the depths of her religious examination of her guilt. But Opie's portrayal of the blame placed on Madeline's shoulders ultimately jars with the novel's criticisms of patriarchy in particular, especially owing to the deeply unpleasant character of Falconer.

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<sup>303</sup> All references to Madeline will be to the following volume, as it is the most accessible online version of a work which has not been reprinted since the nineteenth century: The Works of Mrs Amelia Opie; Complete in Three Volumes, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: James Crissy, 1843). This text reduces the three-volume work to 110 pages, so the difference in page numbers from Longman's original edition should be taken into consideration.

<sup>304</sup> A. C. Cheyne, The Transforming of the Kirk: Victorian Scotlands [sic.] Religious Revolution (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1983) 4.

<sup>305</sup> Opie's desire to set the work in Scotland might have also been influenced by the popularity of Scotland in works of fiction at the time, demonstrated by Walter Scott, Mary Brunton and Susan Ferrier in particular.

In Madeline, contrary to Valentine's Eve, religion is the norm, and it is through the heroine's journal that the reader can observe the development of her religious faith as it is tested by societal pressures. The habit of keeping a journal was very popular among Quakers – Gurney refers to preferring to read Friends' Journals than sermons – and the appropriateness of the journal form as a more truthful form of writing is considered here.<sup>306</sup> But Opie's use of the journal form in this novel, with the narrator appearing quite frequently to provide some of the plot that Madeline could not provide, also demonstrates Opie's fractured literary voice, as she sacrifices the pleasurable readability of a novel for religious message alone.

Kelly's comment about Opie's 'subtle grasp of psychological realism which is probably rooted in her Dissenting cultural background and its practices of self-examination and spiritual autobiography' is most relevant to Madeline (English Fiction 84). The journal format allows for the fullest expression of 'self-examination and spiritual autobiography' in Opie's works, but also shows how some parts of Opie's 'Dissenting cultural background' and the culture of Quakerism towards which she was moving were not necessarily that different. Something more distinctly Quaker in this novel is Opie's interest in Madeline as a morally autonomous being, and 'this attention to the personal uniqueness of ethical challenges is squarely in the Quaker tradition'.<sup>307</sup>

In my analysis here, the novel's structure shows Opie's fractured literary voice as she tries to fit the journal form to the purpose of a novel. Opie used the journal format to examine the development of Madeline's religious faith, tracing Madeline's progression from young, proud, distracted girl to enlightened religious heroine.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Gurney to Opie, 22 July 1814, quoted in Braithwaite, 1.240.

<sup>307</sup> Such touches also crept into Opie's use of first-person narrative in her 1820 Tales of the Heart, for instance: "A Wife's Duty," Tales of the Heart, vol. 2; The Works of Mrs Amelia Opie; Complete in Three Volumes, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: James Crissy, 1843) 209. I am very grateful to Gillian Thomas for bringing this example to my attention: Gillian Thomas, email to the author, 16 April 2014. Gillian Thomas is a Professor Emeritus of English Literature, Saint Mary's University (Halifax, Nova Scotia); she has published books and articles on Harriet Martineau, and on the women contributors to the 1910 Encyclopedia Britannica, and she is a long-time Quaker.

<sup>308</sup> It should be noted that, although Opie presents a proud heroine here who needs to develop in her religious faith, Madeline is not a heroine like Portia Bellenden from Opie's 1821 anonymous novel The Only Child, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Portia is always interested in displaying her accomplishments and has no sense of her place (and responsibilities) in the community: she is a character who is unkind and vengeful, and who needs to develop considerably

The trials set up for Madeline find her increasingly less able to trust her judgement, or indeed to rely on her faith. Part of the difficulty here comes from Opie's portrayal of Madeline's husband Falconer as a selfish and unpleasant character, where the clergyman she might have married – Lewis Maclean – is consistently seen as a proper, pious and upright man. Opie cannot manage the journal format here, constantly requiring breaks in the journal to explain things that Madeline does not or cannot know, but the ultimate failure of the novel rests in its focus on a happy religious heroine at the end. This apparent happiness is (unfortunately) directly linked to Madeline's loss of good judgement regarding Falconer's actions, and to her loss of moral autonomy, whilst such a focus completely eclipses Opie's concerns regarding criticisms of patriarchy, war, and dishonesty in this novel.

The novel begins as a journal, in accordance with her attempts to conform to Quaker expectations, especially those of Gurney. But Opie soon finds that she cannot marshal the plot detail of a novel as she is used to do without an omniscient narrator. Opie tended throughout her career to dip into the narrative to explain, moralize, or emphasize what her readers' focus or opinion should be, and this need to control the narrative made it very difficult for her to write a novel in journal form throughout. The journal is first 'discontinued' (47) to allow Opie to narrate how Falconer's abrupt departure to England caused Madeline to faint; it is often interrupted when Madeline faints or is ill, normally owing to Falconer's inconsiderate actions (49; 74; 108). As Madeline's trials become increasingly dramatic, the reader may wonder whether Opie initially employed this strategy of breaking into the journal narrative to present an omniscient narrator in order that she might ultimately kill Madeline off as she had done Catherine. Looking at the novel as a whole and in its context in Opie's career, however, it is clear that Opie could not contemplate portraying another religiously enlightened heroine who dies.

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in order to achieve her happy ending. Madeline is more like Fanny Price when she returns to her family in Portsmouth, initially 'all agitation and flutter – all hope and apprehension' (378), but who soon comes to regret what she has left in Mansfield Park, where 'there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards everybody which there was not here' (384). Madeline needs to adjust to being with her family again from the beginning of the narrative, to accustom herself to their ways, but she is not unkind, and frequently checks herself for hasty assumptions about their motives. Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. June Sturrock (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001).

Considering that Falconer is a character who keeps a lot of information from his wife, it is unsurprising that Opie had to discontinue the journal in order to relate to the reader things that Madeline does not (yet) know (74; 93; 104), or to provide more detail (77-80), or to communicate letters that pass between other characters (58). In one instance, Opie discontinues the journal and then picks it up without signalling 'journal resumed' as she normally does (97), which indicates how she herself was getting confused about who was narrating the novel.

Opie's attempt to force the journal form onto a novel – to fuse Quaker Quietism with a romantic novelistic plot – and the ways she nevertheless incorporated a narrator make for an uneven tone. The tension in the plot is lacking, which is normally something Opie masters in her novels (Clive Jones 278). This breaking up of the novel into bits represents how Opie's narrative voice is breaking up as she fails to appease both Gurney and her more worldly readers.

As with Valentine's Eve, Madeline starts with the heroine being reunited with her family. In Madeline's case, the distance from her former acquaintances provided Opie with the possibility to have her heroine keep a journal to be sent to her former governess (Mrs St Leger). From the very beginning, Madeline's faith is very present in her journal. The family's first evening together 'was one of unmixed gratification; and when my father, while we knelt around him as we assembled for family worship, gave thanks for my return, I only wondered how I could have borne to stay away so long' (11). Journal entries for Sundays lead Madeline to reflect often on how much she enjoys her religious observances, but also point towards feelings of superiority and of self-examination in Madeline that will be a recurrent feature in the journal:

Sunday, May, 1813.

This day has been spent, to my agreeable surprise, in strict religious observances, such as are sufficient to satisfy even the Scotch servants in the family; and yet how little Christian spirit there seems in the heads of it! But I forbear; and in order to avoid the temptation of being severe, I will lay by my pen and read my Bible. (14)

As the narrative progresses, however, and Madeline becomes increasingly romantically involved with Falconer, the journal entries have fewer and fewer references to the kirk or religious observances. The journal entries concerning her

Sunday religious observances also show how distracted she is letting herself become as she begins to feel more and more for Falconer.<sup>309</sup> An early entry (following the appearance of Falconer in the narrative) indicates the degree to which Madeline's ideas of her own self-importance – and her need to confess such to her mistress – are starting to eclipse her religious feelings on a Sunday (22-24). The following entry, concerning the Sunday evening family devotions, introduces the idea – as Falconer, with only Madeline and her sisters knowing, listens outside – of clandestine meetings between Madeline and Falconer which will take place later on in the narrative. It also evokes Madeline's sense of superiority over her sister:

I listened for the tread of his feet to-night under the hedge, and *I saw* a tall man in a cap. It was he no doubt. I felt my voice *falter*; but I sung louder and more powerfully than usual, that he might hear me better; but when we sung together, Bessie outsang me. I cannot think where that girl gets her vulgar way of doing everything ... (42)

The journal format allows for a much more in-depth analysis of Madeline's sentiments as she feels 'in all its force the whole misery of a clandestine marriage' (84), for instance, or considers, when seriously ill, that 'if I live, I will try to correct my querulous nature, and subdue my ungrateful murmurings, for I have had more blessings in life than I have ever deserved' (108). Madeline's final sentiments in her journal – and the close of the novel – indicate how far she has come on her spiritual journey:

Thus then is my cup made full to the brim with blessings; but pray for me, my dear friend, that I may never forget the schooling which my heart received from the consequences of its weakness; and may I always consider that schooling as the greatest of all the mercies for which I have daily to lift up my soul in gratitude to Heaven. (110)

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<sup>309</sup> Mr Falconer appears in the narrative under three names, the others being Glencarron (the name of his estate), and Lord Dalmany (having been heir to this title through most of the narrative). For clarity, I refer to him as Falconer throughout.

Madeline's journey is complete, and Opie's focus on her as a religious heroine is attained, but many other journal entries along the way, and other elements in the novel indicate the degree to which this conclusion is unsatisfactory. One important factor here is how unpleasant Opie makes the hero, whilst making it clear that Madeline might have chosen a kinder and, significantly, a more religious man instead.

Falconer seems to Madeline 'almost like a descended god!' (21) when she first sees him, and she attributes this impression to having spent too much time being bothered by the unsuitable suitor her father had chosen for her: Mr Dobbs's 'cockney *conceit*' (18) is one of a long list of unattractive traits Madeline cites in her journal. It is partly owing to Madeline's sense of rank and her superiority to her family (following her English education) that Falconer is so appealing to her, and she is very soon in love. But even though the novel is told predominantly through Madeline's journal, Opie still manages to make Falconer an unlovable hero. He is not civil (54); he is not prayerful (55), and is only willing to enter into a secret marriage with Madeline, as he knows his sister, Lady Benlomen, will not approve the match (56). In comparison to Lewis Maclean, the clergyman whom Mr Munro would wish Madeline to marry (having long forgotten the "Cockney" Mr Dobbs as a potential match) (59-60), Falconer seems to fall short in everything except wealth and rank. Madeline herself has considered the impeccable character of Maclean (54), but she does not love him and loves Falconer, and it is evident that Mr Munro will not force his daughter into marriage. In a narrator interlude, it is lamented, after Falconer's suggestion of a secret marriage, that 'she [Madeline] was to steal clandestinely, and not in the temple of the Most High, into marriage, and take the most important step in life in suspicious secrecy!' (58).

Falconer uses emotional blackmail to encourage Madeline to agree to his scheme (60). Her journal does not record anything about a duty to the 'Most High', but only to those she has offended on earth as she exclaims 'and now I was a bride! But a bride in secret, a bride unblessed by her parents, and, what was worse, a bride against the will and wishes of one of them!' (61). Madeline's journal, once the secret marriage has been performed, indicates some of Falconer's selfishness, and her awareness of it:

“O Madeline! how happy you have made me! I shall go to England without fear of finding you on my return the betrothed of Maclean.”

I shall not recall my answer; I thought it *cold*; but it filled him with rapturous joy, and he said he could not require a kinder. (62)

In Maclean, Opie presented a lovable foil to her unlovable hero. Very soon after the secret marriage, Madeline is so moved by the eloquence of one of Maclean’s sermons that she herself makes the comparison:

I do really believe that had I known him before I saw Glencarron – but no, it is a species of *infidelity to my husband (my husband!)* to imagine such a possibility. Still, I could not but say to myself, “how proud, as well as happy, must the wife of such a man be!” (66)

One can only imagine that Opie wanted to make Madeline’s trials the greater, in order that her religious enlightenment might appear all the more exemplary. But compared with Brunton’s Self-Control and Discipline, for example, Opie misjudged. Even though Laura Montreville was presented with quite extraordinary events to try her faith, she was not left, ultimately, married to the man who had been the cause of so much of her suffering. As for Ellen Percy, she was not faced with any lesson from Mr Maitland that could really be deemed unfair or unkind, which is often the case in Opie’s novel. Madeline lets Falconer read her journal after she has been quite ill when their son was born. Madeline relates that ‘it has made him very thoughtful’ (81), but he very quickly makes light of it, saying that, ‘as Dobbs used to say, you are a shrewd observer! I find I must take care what I look and say, and do, or my wife will put me in a book!’ (81). Falconer insists that they live apart, so that he can further his political ambitions and appear to lead the life of the bachelor everyone believes him to be, and he soon catches the attention of a Lady Jane L– (84). Where the reader might expect Falconer to reassure Madeline that he has no interest in being unfaithful, instead ‘he saw my jealousy, and rather played on my feelings to punish my *injustice*’ (94). This injustice, as Madeline now sees it, has caused her to attempt to dissolve their marriage and leave for London (92), which has ironically brought her back to the Bible and the Church (93). But the fact that Madeline sees her reaction

as an ‘injustice’ to Falconer also indicates the degree to which his treatment is hampering her ability to reason well, which is another ongoing theme.

Shortly after the Lady Jane L– episode, Madeline and Falconer are legally married publically (96). But Madeline then discovers that their marriage had been legal all along, and that Falconer had let her experience all the pains of a clandestine arrangement whilst knowing himself that there was no need. Madeline’s reaction shows the resignation to Providence that one might expect from one of Opie’s Christian martyrs (Kelly English Fiction 85):

Oh! how I loved him for this generous thought! ... See what precaution he had taken to strengthen a union which I fancied he wished to break. Oh, my dear friend! how wickedly distrustful of Providence I have been! but I hope that the voice of my contrition, my penitence, and my thankfulness, have found acceptance. (97)

If this were the end of the novel, and Madeline were to suffer no more, it might be more acceptable as a representation of how Madeline’s faith had developed. But, in the context of her sufferings, it is clear to readers that Falconer’s selfishness and not Madeline’s jealousy is to blame in this instance. A letter extract Madeline includes in her journal (from a Major Cameron to Falconer) even lists explicitly how unjust Falconer’s behaviour has been (95). Yet Madeline’s trials only continue at Falconer’s hands, and she continues to deem them fair and just, as her pride is “corrected”.

What seems counter-intuitive – in terms of Opie writing Madeline’s religious development alongside the trials set for her – is that Falconer takes Madeline away from her religious observances, either because of the stresses of her irregular situation (84; 87-88; 90; 91), or because he actively forbids her to attend the Kirk so that their irregular circumstances are not discovered (83). It is Maclean who draws Madeline back to her religious observances well before her secret marriage to Falconer (49). Narrator interludes reveal that Maclean has been praying for Madeline since she left home to be with Falconer in England, apparently unmarried, and has reassured her family that she probably is married after all (79-80).<sup>310</sup> In what appear

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<sup>310</sup> We later find out that he always knew they were legally married but was bound not to say (97).

to be Madeline's final moments, Maclean is portrayed favourably compared to Falconer. Madeline refers to him as 'my friend, my *soul's* friend!' (109), and, though he 'struggled with his feelings ... [he] was soon able to pray long and fervently by the couch of the sufferer' (109). Falconer, on the other hand, 'groaning in spirit, and his head bowed beneath the overwhelming stroke, showed that at present human feeling was triumphant over christian resignation' (109). Falconer, having read the rest of Madeline's journal, displays some contrition, but, in terms of readerly satisfaction, it is far too little and far too late. He exclaims 'O Madeline! had you been the wife of Maclean, you would now have been well and happy; but you have been the victim of my want of firmness of character, and my irresolution' (109). The reader is only too likely to concur.

Madeline reasons at the end that:

I was jealous, complaining, and ungrateful. But Madeline stretched apparently on the bed of death, and stretched there by her own unreasonable desires, and Madeline mercifully restored to health, humbled by the consciousness of sinful murmurings and overwhelmed by the sense of unmerited blessings, are two distinct persons, my dear friend, and the faults of the one are, I trust, for ever abjured by the other. (110)

The immoral threat that was present (and criticised by Gurney) in Valentine's Eve is presented, at least as far as Madeline is concerned, as something that has only been in her head, hence the "appropriateness" of her feelings of guilt. But the widespread impression in society, for example, that Falconer and Lady Jane L— are together is a threat that Opie presents as entirely plausible. There is therefore an implied criticism of the way women can blame themselves (and be encouraged to blame themselves) for things that are not their fault. Yet Opie seemed not to want to draw attention to this point, even supplying in a footnote near the end assurance from the editor (Mrs Leger) that 'Madeline has blamed herself so justly and commented so satisfactorily on her own conduct, that I have had no occasion to animadvert upon it myself' (103). Madeline's utterances at the end about how she

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has been to blame for everything are very inconsistent with the criticisms of patriarchy that resound throughout this novel. Opie found herself with a conflict between two purposes: firstly, to criticise patriarchal systems that oppress women as she always had in her novels, and secondly, to present a woman so virtuous that she takes all blame upon herself. The novel is therefore uncertain and difficult.

Out of Opie's religious heroines in this phase of her novel-writing career, Madeline is definitely the one who displays the most moral autonomy – which demonstrates the growing effect of Quakerism on Opie at this juncture – and the journal format allows Madeline to express her sense of moral autonomy. She is not forced into marriage by her father (58-60), but initially decides to reject Falconer anyway (58); she takes it upon herself to turn up unannounced at a canvassing ball Falconer is holding (84-86), and then decides to dissolve their marriage and travel to London with their baby (92). But whilst Opie can casually refer in Madeline to marriage as slavery for a woman (94), her insistence that all the threats that face Madeline have been her own fault, owing to her failure to trust in God and Providence, is completely at odds with the way Opie herself presents these threats. After Madeline and Falconer have finally been married in an English church, Opie has Madeline face the same problems as Adeline Mowbray of being assumed a mistress and therefore exploitable by other men. Madeline is 'assaulted' by a stranger's proposition (97) in the same way that Adeline, married to Berrendale, is 'assaulted' by the propositions of Colonel Mordaunt. But by focussing on the religious heroine who relies on Providence, these details fade into obscurity.

Similarly forced very much into the background are Opie's criticisms of violence and war, seen through Madeline's brother Ronald, a soldier (15; 83; 103-105), and his duel to defend Madeline's honour (104), which Falconer keeps from Madeline (104).<sup>311</sup> The amount of dishonesty in the novel is also flagrant (84; 97; 103; 104), some of which Madeline herself has to resort to (58; 61; 80), as Opie places her focus on Madeline as a religious heroine. Opie's attempt at consciousness-raising – 'an effort to persuade individual readers to question the social construction of gender in local and personal ways (Mellor "What's Different?")

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<sup>311</sup> Madeline writes that 'there has been a battle at a place called Waterloo, and such a complete and glorious victory has been obtained by our armies! But oh! that I could but hear something of dear Ronald!' (83): England's necessary victory against Napoleon is brought immediately into the human context of families fearing for the welfare of their soldier relatives.

43-44) – is therefore compromised by her insistence on the religious development of her heroine at the expense of all other themes.

### Conclusion

This period in Opie's life saw a great surge in fiction writing alongside a great surge in spiritual enquiry. With two guides in Gurney and Hayley – one pulling her towards an increased (ideally Quaker) faith and spirituality, and the other encouraging her to remain in the literary, fashionable world – her faith saw substantial development, and her interest in the moral-evangelical novel shifted.

Opie was engaging in consciousness-raising like other Regency female writers, but as her personal religious commitments developed, her voice became more fractured. Her religious interest in the novels grew to a point where it swamped the consciousness-raising about other reform concerns that she had been trying to achieve in many shorter tales of the period.<sup>312</sup> The readerly pleasure that would make such consciousness-raising effective was similarly affected.

In Temper, Opie saw an opportunity to promote an active Christianity in the context of moral correction, without presenting a Christianity that was at the centre of her message. Her interest (and success) in forging ties with Hayley indicated that she considered a future for herself in the literary world, and her representation of Christianity did not stretch beyond mainstream commitment. Opie's attempt in Valentine's Eve and Madeline to convert a frivolous or immoral form – the novel – to the purposes of religion and virtue, just as Richardson had done, is one that Opie was ultimately unable to master. Her personal religious involvement interfered too strongly with her artistic endeavour and her interest in exciting the reader's pleasure. Valentine's Eve demonstrated the degree to which Opie had come to realise that active Christianity was not taken seriously in the world, partly from her own religious experience, but her reaction in the novel was bleaker than anyone had expected. Attempts to make amends in Madeline did meet with Joseph John Gurney's approval, but the "happy" religious heroine at the end – alongside the uneven tone

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<sup>312</sup> From Simple Tales (1806), "The Robber" (vol. 1), "The Soldier's Return" (vol. 3) and "Murder Will Out" (vol. 4) are particularly significant; "Henry Woodville" stands out from New Tales (1818, vol. 2).

throughout the novel – meant that it failed to provide the kind of novelistic energy or tension that Opie had previously achieved (Clive Jones 276).

The predictable and moralistic nature of Madeline caused Mary Mitford to write a scathing assessment of the ‘plum pudding’ quality she was beginning to recognise in Opie’s work:

So much common sense (for the flour); so much vulgarity (for the suet); so much love (for the sugar); so many songs (for the plums); so much wit (for the spices); so much fine binding morality (for the eggs); and so much mere mawkishness and insipidity (for the milk and water wherewith the said pudding is mixed up).<sup>313</sup>

Indeed, by the time Madeline was published, Opie’s sales had declined dramatically, as had her earnings.<sup>314</sup> It may seem clear that Opie’s career as a fiction writer was coming to an end, especially with her growing Quaker allegiances, but the reality appears to have been more complex. A letter to Robert Southey of March 1822 sees Opie almost begging for Madeline to be reviewed in the *Quarterly*: her tone is nothing short of sycophantic as she seeks to further her literary career (10 Mar. 1822).<sup>315</sup> One has to question what kind of literary career Opie was still envisaging for herself at a stage where she was being increasingly drawn to an allegiance with a sect that would prohibit her from pursuing that career, and where her popularity was clearly waning.

The failure of Madeline marked the culmination of a decade of being torn between the literary world and religion – still not definitely Quakerism in Opie’s eyes – and it signalled an appropriate stopping point for Opie as an acknowledged author. The next chapter examines the extent to which this trajectory can be traced in Opie’s anonymous novels of this period – The Only Child; or, Portia Bellenden (1821) and Much to Blame (1824), alongside Opie’s Quaker works.

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<sup>313</sup> F. Brinley Johnson, ed., Letters Of Mary Russell Mitford (London: Bodley Head, 1925) 170. Quoted in Clive Jones, 202.

<sup>314</sup> Thomas Love Peacock had also satirised Opie in his 1816 novel Headlong Hall as Miss Philomela Poppypeed, a boring and self-obsessed novelist.

<sup>315</sup> Opie wrote another a few days later, also requesting a review (Opie to Southey, 16 March 1822).

## Chapter 5

### 1821–1828: Deliberation and Experimentation

Strange, inconsistent being that I am! one day I am at a Countess's assembly, the other at a quaker's meeting, & a quaker's yearly feast – now hearing sermons from public friends, now seeing plays – now walking along the Streets on the arm of a plain quaker, now leaning on that of a volatile Viscount – and what a strange thing it is, & did it ever happen I wonder to any one before to have my company as much relished by the one description of person as the other? I sometimes think it calls my sincerity in question – & as if like St. Paul I was all things to all 'men' but not for such good purposes.<sup>316</sup>

This quotation shows that Opie initially found quite some enjoyment moving between the Quakers and the “world”, and the preceding chapter has considered Opie's wavering between these two identities, culminating in her unsuccessful attempt in Madeline to make a popular novel inspired by a typically Quaker journal format. But the 1820s demonstrate the heights of Opie's uncertainty about both her spiritual belonging – especially regarding joining the Quakers – and about her career as a writer of fiction, testing her sincerity and revealing her inconsistencies as she experimented with different forms of fiction and non-fiction, anonymous and acknowledged. Between 1821 and 1824, Opie published her only anonymous novels since Dangers of Coquetry (1790) – The Only Child; or, Portia Bellenden (1821) and Much to Blame (1824) – as well as publishing her last acknowledged novel, Madeline (1822), and formally relinquishing novel-writing by giving up a novel in progress (The Painter and His Wife) late in 1823. Her spiritual vacillations are clear from her correspondence with both Joseph John Gurney and Elizabeth (Gurney) Fry at this time, but she finally made the decision to join the Quakers in 1825, and was officially accepted into their membership in August 1825. She had already published a didactic work of non-fiction – Illustrations of Lying – with fictional tales for elucidation in January 1825, having published an extract from this work under the

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<sup>316</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to William Hayley, 5 June 1815, ms, Friends Historical Lib., Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. Quoted in MacGregor: Margaret Eliot MacGregor, Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend (Menasha (WI): The Collegiate Press, 1933) 76.

name 'Philo-Veritas' in 1822.<sup>317</sup> She also produced a collection of didactic tales for children – Tales of the Pemberton Family – later in 1825; she had started contributing some short fictional tales to annuals and periodicals in 1823, and published a non-fiction work in 1828 – Detraction Displayed – in which she identified herself clearly as a Quaker.

Opie's 'ambivalence about forsaking her public role as author' was made visible not only through her spiritual debate between 1814 and 1825 with Joseph John Gurney, who demanded she relinquish fiction writing to become a Quaker, but also through her decision to publish two anonymous novels at that time.<sup>318</sup> This chapter focuses on these two anonymous novels and Opie's Quaker work Detraction Displayed (1828) in the context of her correspondence with Gurney and Fry, amplifying Eberle's account. Opie put herself in a place of contradiction throughout this period, vacillating between Quaker-approved fiction and anonymous works that not only tested her principles on lying and withholding the truth, but also saw her explore the freedom of writing the kinds of fiction she might not have felt comfortable (or permitted) to produce publically. My discussion opens with Opie's second anonymous novel, Much to Blame (1824), because it most clearly demonstrates the uses of anonymity to Opie, allowing her to turn away from the highly religious concerns of Valentine's Eve (1816) and Madeline (1822) and instead to return to her earlier interest in the novel of society. In fact, in Much to Blame, Opie in many respects approaches the silver-fork novel.

Opie's correspondence with Gurney and Fry in the time leading up to the publication of Much to Blame shows a very different side of Opie, sometimes in

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<sup>317</sup> Amelia Opie, "Observations on Lying," The European Magazine and London Review 83 (September 1822): 101-5. Signed 'Philo-Veritas'.

<sup>318</sup> Roxanne Eberle, Introduction, Women and Romanticism, ed. Roxanne Eberle, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2006) xxxvii; Paula R. Feldman came to similar conclusions and attributed both these anonymous novels to Opie: "Amelia Opie," British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1997) 527. Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling added the novels to their exhaustive survey of the English Novel in 2000, citing the same unpublished letter to Sir John Gurney of 1839 that had determined the authorship of Much to Blame: Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling, eds, The English Novel 1770-1829: a bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles. Vol. 2: 1800-1829 (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 522; 586. Amelia Opie, letter to Sir John Gurney, Baron of the Exchequer, 21 June 1839, ms, Paula R. Feldman, University of South Carolina. Sir John Gurney was not related to the Quaker Gurney family.

direct contradiction to what she is doing in publishing Much to Blame, a rollicking ride of a fashionable novel. Opie's other experiments in fiction are also briefly considered – her short tales published in periodicals, and the fictional tales in her Illustrations of Lying (1825) and Tales of the Pemberton Family (1825) – in order better to appreciate the breadth of Opie's experimentation at this stage. Opie's earlier anonymous novel The Only Child; or, Portia Bellenden (1821) finds a ready comparison in her Quaker work Detraction Displayed (1828): Opie revisits in the later, acknowledged work of non-fiction many themes that she had explored in the 1821 work. These two works see Opie pushing for universal education and lamenting the pride which (Opie believed) so often accompanied good female education, rather than the education itself.

Opie used anonymous novels in this period in different ways. In The Only Child, she integrated Quaker-inspired ideas of reform into the novel without having to worry too much about the perceived "immorality" in her plot. In Much to Blame, written as she was preparing to relinquish novel-writing, she indulged herself and her readers for the last time with all the pleasures of the novel form. In Detraction Displayed, Opie clearly expressed her bitter feelings, both about giving up writing moral fiction, and about the ridicule meted out even to "entertaining" writers, let alone that reserved for those aiming to instruct. Opie's correspondence with Joseph John Gurney and Elizabeth Fry at this time indicates that joining the Quakers was a difficult decision for her, but one that she took pains to work through, and one which reaped its spiritual rewards, as she came to see little future for herself as a writer.

### *Much to Blame*

Despite having been identified as Opie's in 1997, Much to Blame has only slowly come to critical attention, being mentioned by Eberle but not examined (Introduction vol. 1 xxxvii). A contemporary review suspected either Edgeworth or Opie as author – 'the two first of our fair Novelists of the day' – given the novel's accomplishments, concluding that it belonged more probably to the author of The Father and Daughter, although much less melancholy in tone.<sup>319</sup> In a letter to Opie of 1829, the French sculptor Pierre-Jean David d'Angers expressed how much he had

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<sup>319</sup> Rev. of Much to Blame, The Morning Post 16733 (6 Aug. 1824): n.p.

been enjoying Much to Blame, which suggests either that the work was known as hers by this point, or that Opie had told him to look out for it as a further work of hers.<sup>320</sup> It was Opie's letter to Sir John Gurney of 21 June 1839, however, which conclusively claimed the work, and this letter is the source of modern attributions.<sup>321</sup>

Much to Blame represents a very different approach to fiction from that of Madeline. As we have seen, Gary Kelly defined the kind of 'passion' depicted by Opie as 'the sufferings of a martyr', very different from the erotic passion explored in silver-fork novels.<sup>322</sup> In Much to Blame, however, a novel of which Kelly was apparently unaware, Opie moves towards a consideration of the 'self-aggrandizing', 'active', 'amorous' and 'erotic' passion Kelly associates with the silver-fork novel (English 85).<sup>323</sup>

The silver-fork genre was an up-and-coming trend in fashionable novels when Opie published Much to Blame in 1824: the genre had the dual aim of providing readers with an insight into glamorous high society whilst pointing out the vacuity and hypocrisy therein.<sup>324</sup> Henry Colburn published most silver-fork novels, nearly always anonymously: he established the Literary Gazette, the New Monthly

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<sup>320</sup> Pierre-Jean David, letter to Amelia Opie, 12 November 1829, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP17, Huntington Lib., San Marino. Opie had met David in 1802, when Opie and John Opie visited Paris; they became good friends in 1829 (MacGregor 104, quoting Brightwell Memorials 113). Correspondence in the Huntington collection shows that David was very complimentary about Opie's works and considered her a close friend.

<sup>321</sup> Feldman, "Amelia Opie," 527; Garside et al., eds, 586; Eberle, Introduction, Women, vol. 1, xxxvii; Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, The Amelia Alderson Opie Archive, Queen's University, Kingston (Ont.), Web.

<sup>322</sup> Oxford English Dictionary. Kelly's footnote: Gary Kelly, English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830 (Harlow: Longman, 1989) 85.

<sup>323</sup> Gary Kelly, "Opie, Amelia (1769–1853)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004) n.p. The only 1820s anonymous novel Kelly mentions, whilst stating the unlikelihood that it was Opie's, is Self-Delusion; Or, Adelaide d'Hauteroche ("Opie, Amelia" n.p.). MacGregor mentions the same (85). My arguments against Self-Delusion being an Opie novel were presented in my Introduction. Eberle and Shelley King have argued that Opie's passion is indeed 'amorous and erotic' in its nature, even if it remains passive, but both critics limit their arguments to much earlier writing of Opie's, and neither considers Much to Blame: Roxanne Eberle, Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 106-135; Shelley King, "Amelia Opie's "Maid of Corinth" and the Origins of Art." Eighteenth-Century Studies 37:4 (2004): 629-651.

<sup>324</sup> Harriet Devine Jump, ed., Silver Fork Novels, 1826-1841 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005) x-xi.

Magazine, and, later, had ‘a controlling interest’ in the Athenaeum, so he encouraged the popularity of the novels.<sup>325</sup>

Some critics confidently claim 1825 or 1826 as the beginning of the genre – arguing respectively for Robert Plumer Ward’s Tremaine or Benjamin Disraeli’s Vivian Grey – and the genre got its name from a derogatory remark by William Hazlitt in 1827.<sup>326</sup> Edward Copeland recently employed a narrower definition, which focuses on the topicality of the silver-fork novel – ‘social rivalries, political manoeuvring, fashion, newspapers, ephemeral print culture in general’ – in the context surrounding the Reform Act (1832), which meant the novels were difficult to appreciate without this immediate reference.<sup>327</sup> Much to Blame does not fit the genre seen from this angle. Opie makes a reference to Elizabeth Fry (1.79) which serves mainly to laud her friend’s philanthropic work, and to reveal the true sentiments of two characters, rather than serving a political purpose.<sup>328</sup> Opie is interested in reform, but hers is not a political interest that is particular to the debate surrounding the Reform Act. She seeks in this novel, though with much less seriousness than in her earlier novels, to draw attention to the perilous situation of women in the marriage market, much beyond the bounds of ‘the season’.

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<sup>325</sup> Richard Cronin, Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840 (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 11.

<sup>326</sup> Vineta Colby, Yesterday’s Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) 5; Peter Garside, “The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal,” The English Novel 1770-1829: a bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles. Vol. 2: 1800-1829, eds Peter Garside; James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 63; Cronin, 11; William Hazlitt, “The Dandy School,” Examiner (18 Nov. 1827), The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (London: Dent, 1934) XX, 146: quoted in Winifred Hughes, “Elegies for the Regency: Catherine Gore’s Dandy Novels,” Nineteenth-Century Fiction 50.2 (Sep. 1995): 191. In 1818, Opie had used silver forks to exemplify extravagance among the upper classes in a long narrative sequence: “Mrs Arlington, or, All is not Gold that Glitters” New Tales 1.169-171.

<sup>327</sup> Edward Copeland, The Silver Fork Novel: Fashionable Fiction in the Age of Reform (Cambridge: CUP, 2012) 3. Cronin similarly argues that the novels were ‘recklessly contemporary’, written merely ‘for the season’ (11) and no longer; for Muireann O’Cinneide, the novels were ‘preserving a record of a fleeting historical moment’: Muireann O’Cinneide, “The Silver-Fork Novel across Romantic and Victorian Views: Class, Gender and Commodity Culture, 1820-1841,” Literature Compass 4.4 (2007): 1236.

<sup>328</sup> All references to Much to Blame will be to the following edition, as it is the most accessible online version of a work which has not been reprinted since the nineteenth century: Much to Blame, 3 vols (London: John Templeman, 1824) Internet Archive.

Even if many of the most prominent examples of the genre appeared in or after 1825, some critical works give the silver-fork novel a wider timeframe, with Clare Bainbridge arguing how difficult it is to define the genre.<sup>329</sup> Copeland's earlier work also demonstrates how the rise of the silver-fork novel can be understood within the context of the rise of commodity culture in the Regency period, and it is here that Much to Blame finds its place, also as a commodity.<sup>330</sup> Much to Blame does not share all the characteristics of the developing silver-fork novel: it has no political interest, or personal scandal, and the tone remains light.<sup>331</sup> However, it shares some salient elements that at that point were developing into the silver-fork novel through its exploration of fashionable life. Lady Morgan's comments in O'Donnel: A National Tale (1814), both that she was writing about 'people of fashion' (1.22) and that she wanted to present something 'which simply bears out the "flat realities of life"' (Preface 1.ix), indicate a prevailing interest in fashionable society in literature of the time, and an interest in wanting to write the kinds of characters one might encounter in real life. For Opie, this element of fashion was an end in itself: she wanted to use the novel form to explore the fashionable world for the last time.

Although Opie's novel did not deal in real-life scandal, and she did not let her heroines experience any lasting scandal through sexual transgression, Much to Blame did explore the limited and exclusive world of aristocratic Regency society that was typical of the silver-fork novel.<sup>332</sup> Opie offered moral comments as necessary for a novel dealing in scandal but did not use them to make large or far-reaching social commentary. Opie's narrative attitude in Much to Blame is very

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<sup>329</sup> Alison Adburgham, Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature 1814-1840 (London: Constable, 1983); Kelly, English Fiction 85; Clare Bainbridge, "Noble Bastards: The Silver-Fork Novel, Politics and History," diss., U of Exeter, 2003, 8; Edward Copeland, "Opera and the Great Reform Act: Silver Fork Fiction, 1822-1842." Romanticism on the Net 34-35 (May-Aug. 2005); O'Conneide, 1227-1240.

<sup>330</sup> Edward Copeland, Women Writing about Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820. Cambridge: CUP, 1995) 242.

<sup>331</sup> Lady Morgan's O'Donnel: A National Tale (1814) discusses Irish politics; Lady Caroline Lamb's Glenarvon (1816) was a direct attack on Lord Byron, her former lover, for having snubbed her, and Lady Bury's Conduct is Fate (1822) is a bleak account of a loveless marriage following an elopement, and the murder of the heroine's supposed lover by her husband.

<sup>332</sup> Winifred Hughes, "Silver Fork Writers and Readers: Social Contexts of a Best Seller." NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction. 25.3 (Spring 1992): 328. Cronin quotes from Byron's London cantos at the end of Don Juan (1824) to illustrate the small group of people silver-fork novels discussed (109).

different from that of her previous novels. For example, her aristocratic characters' behaviour strikes the reader as fashionable hypocrisy, but the narrator offers no moral comment on such behaviour. Rather, we are encouraged to enjoy the characters' lively manipulation of social rules. The length, intricacy and comparative frivolity of this novel demonstrate Opie's engagement with the novel as a commodity much more than she had before, which illustrates her ambivalence about relinquishing the novel form as she moved towards the Quakers. Yet despite being "on holiday" from her more usual approach, her heroines' religious thoughts and expressions remind us that Opie's personal religious development at this time could not simply be left out.

Much to Blame is a very busy novel of aristocratic society which follows the coming of age of two young friends – Lady Julia Villeroy and Lady Helena Fortescue – and the just rewards for Julia's governess (then Helena's monitress), Sophia Brightwen, for her patience and piety. Julia, it seems, is to be the novel's heroine, despised and ill-treated by her stepmother. But once her governess's 'simple, unobtrusive, but heart-felt piety' (11) has been introduced, and Julia has been saved from a dog by a dashing stranger, Opie can introduce the more interesting and forthright female character in Helena Fortescue. The dashing stranger proves to be Helena's brother (Marcus) and quickly becomes Julia's beloved; incognito in a stage coach, Helena meets Lord Restormel, who will become her love interest.

The plot follows, through many twists and turns, the paths of these two relationships. Julia's focuses more on Marcus's learning to trust women again after being jilted, whilst Helena's considers the degrees to which she tests Restormel, insisting, for instance, on her enjoyment of other men's flattery once they are engaged (3.197-199; 3.201-202). Marcus's acquaintances – Miles Mansfeldt and Lucy Tyrawley – plot to prevent Marcus's marriage to Julia, so Julia spends much of the narrative displaying her fortitude and patience. Helena, on the other hand, is joined by a wayward childhood friend – Norah Netherby – who encourages Helena to continue to test Restormel with her wild behaviour. Epistolary interludes between Julia and Helena reveal that Sophia's first love is free to marry, and Helena presents the information as though she wishes to base a novel on it. After many misunderstandings, and further manipulative attempts to prevent both couples marrying, Julia and Helena are united to their husbands on the same day, following brief periods of contrition by all for any misunderstandings, and any lack of religious

faith. The concluding sentiments about good mothering and punishment for villains are perfunctory and not very convincing.

The novel contains many elements one would expect to find in a woman's coming-of-age narrative, being built, like its eighteenth-century prototype Evelina, upon a series of episodes that test the heroine's reactions to worldly excitements.<sup>333</sup> Where the reader can be confident that Evelina will learn from these episodes, there are two main reasons why the reader cannot be so confident with the heroines here. The monitress, Sophia Brightwen, is frequently absent, and the main characters, even Sophia, are painted in such shades of grey. Helena seems to learn little from frequent tutorials, and Julia, instead of being a counterweight, shows her inclination all too often to join in the fun. But improper behaviour from Evelina would have had lasting consequences, which the reader soon learns will not face Opie's heroines here.

My discussion focuses on selected scenes from the novel which explore the heroines' behaviour and their progression to maturity, in the context of fashionable aristocratic life. These scenes show how much more light-hearted Opie was in her presentation of moral issues in this novel. Opie's references to the novel as a form and to novel-writing in Much to Blame are explored, as they allow us to appreciate Opie's attitudes to novel-writing at a time when she was, publically at least, preparing to relinquish it.

Opie devoted a lot of time early in the novel to the representation of Julia's first ball (1.161-182), revealing some of Helena's and Sophia's mischievous traits at the same time. Opie used this scene to make some quite pointed criticisms of fashionable society through the character of Miles Mansfeldt, simultaneously revealing the dangerous draw this character has on Helena. Julia is typically unaware of etiquette, upsetting her favourite, Marcus Fortescue, by talking at length with one of his friends. Helena, it is revealed, 'with Miss Brightwen' was 'watching with evident pleasure the uneasy countenance of her brother as he beheld the happy pair' (1.163), with Helena baiting Marcus by commenting on Julia's bright eyes and flushed cheek, concluding 'whatever that Adonis said, it was no doubt very delightful!' (1.165).

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<sup>333</sup> Edward A. Bloom, ed., Evelina, by Fanny Burney (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1968) xviii.

Owing to Marcus's whims and jealousy, Julia finds herself dancing with Miles Mansfeldt, but she 'was too unsophisticated, and too unversed in the obliquities and caprices of fashion to relish the eccentricities, or as she denominated it, the assurance and vulgar familiarity of Mr. Mansfeldt' (1.169). The narrator indicates a correlation here between fashionable sophistication and vulgarity, and Mansfeldt does not disappoint. Having excited a laugh from Julia for the 'queerness and impudence of this speech' (1.172), he concludes: 'there, I knew I should catch you at last, you will admire me, pretty face, beyond any thing in the world in time; and if you behave well, perhaps I may make you the fashion' (1.172).

Julia has better principles, and considers Mansfeldt's manner 'vulgar and too familiar' (1.173), but the dangerous potential for a girl new to society is made clear by this encounter. Sophia, Julia's mistress, asks 'why is a man of such offensive manners tolerated in the circles in which I see him?' (1.176), and the story of Mansfeldt which follows provides more criticism of the decadence and immoral potential of high society:

He knew that, as the worn out, because ever pampered, palate of the epicure requires deified biscuit and fried bones to provoke it to fresh exertions, – so the worn out sensibilities, and the indolent indifference of idle men of fashion, requires the odd, the uncommon, and the queer to rouse their torpid faculties into sufficient exertion to enable them to lounge pleasantly through the day, and that a man who can make them laugh at his own expense, or that of other people, is sure of becoming to them a necessary of life. (1.177)

Helena, for her part, says 'she found Miles Mansfeldt in possession of some sort of power, a sort of patent place about fashion's court' (1.179), and the narrator shows that Julia seems resistant to the power of fashion, but that Helena might fall. Helena's discussion with Sophia after the ball reveals the latter's faith in Julia's religious upbringing contrasted with Helena's. Sophia simply states 'Julia's piety and sense of right would enable her to bear up against trials which might, perhaps, prove too much for you' (1.186), something achieved 'merely by making her a Christian, a practical Christian, and teaching her the duties of submission to her heavenly Parent: and the obedience to the will of a nominal earthly one' (1.186-7).

As Helena fears for herself in the absence of such teaching, Opie brings to a close a scene that has demonstrated many of the principal concerns of the novel: the dangers of fashionable society and the immorality within, alongside a pious heroine and a more capricious heroine, who may yet succumb to the temptations of fashionable society. One marked difference in Opie's narrative here compared to her more recent novels is the pace of the action. Where Opie had given much time to instructive reflections in past novels, there is a sense in Much to Blame that there is simply no time to pause, and that the hurtling, entertaining plot takes precedence over instruction and moralising.

A later scene sees Helena travelling incognito with Julia in a stagecoach (1.232-290), and there is development in the degree of bad behaviour Opie would have Helena exhibit. Equally interesting here, though, is how attractive Opie has this behaviour appear to a fellow disguised aristocrat. When Helena appears on a horse to join the coach, without having asked leave to go – 'I chose to think it unnecessary' (1.235) – Julia is excited by her travelling incognito (1.234). Helena's objective is clear: 'now to look for adventures' (1.235). Seeing that the man sleeping in the coach is unlikely to stir, Helena concludes 'if he goes thus all the way to town I shall have derived no fun from my expedition' (1.237). So she whips him around the ankle to rouse him (1.237), exciting firstly 'a frown of dignified reproof', then 'an arch smile dimpled the corner of his mouth, which he turned away to conceal' (1.238). In the stagecoach, Julia demonstrates many of her virtuous qualities, and Helena more of her competitive and wayward ones. The latter is 'proud' and 'conscious of her own consequence' (1.239), which leads the stranger to reflect that she must be 'used to play queen on the stage' (1.251-252); she demonstrates her 'pride and her petulance' (1.258), and adopts a 'tone of pique' (1.274) when the stranger seems to prefer Julia. But the stranger, as he leaves, indicates instead that he prefers the challenge that Helena's character represents: 'he suddenly seized the ungloved hand of Lady Helena, and while she angrily struggled to withdraw it, he pressed it to his lips, and jumped out of the coach' (1.277). Helena's later self-examination has less to do with her inappropriate behaviour than with her realisation that the stranger was Lord Restormel, her brother Marcus's friend, whom she had already thought herself destined to marry (1.284-5). This self-examination is one example of the instruction that Opie provides in the novel: it often comes from a character's fears

about reputation, not from a basis of sound principle, and it does not last, either in the characters or the narrative.

Having revealed some of Helena's impropriety, Opie gives this character an opportunity to redeem herself and to show her inner worth in a further scene. Restormel has discussed Helena with his mother, but Lady Restormel has already had reason to form a poor opinion of Helena from her wayward behaviour as a younger woman (2.8). When Lady Restormel's carriage overturns close to Helena's house (2.135), Helena finds herself the sole carer of this woman who despises her, but it is clear that Helena nurses Lady Restormel out of the goodness of her heart and not to further her cause with Restormel:

Certain it is that during the hours which Lady Helena passed by the bedside of Lady Restormel, she experienced some feelings of finer and more exalted satisfaction than she had ever experienced in her life, and never, never did her lips breathe out addresses so full of fervour and of thankfulness to her Creator. (2.145)

When Lady Restormel is out of danger, and the servant is credited with the night-nursing that Helena herself had performed in secret, Helena's feelings are not those of disappointment at the lack of acknowledgement, but of profound happiness that she has been the means of saving Lady Restormel's life (2.147). Given how little seriousness Helena generally gives to her actions, her religious reflections are all the more striking. But Helena cannot be expected to apply religious thought to all areas of her life at this point, and she quickly lapses again. Opie demonstrates in these moments that she is, indeed, morally invested in the work, but she conveys the moral message much more lightly amid entertainment. It was precisely this type of writing that Opie knew she would never be able to write again if she joined the Quakers.

Helena is interested in being seen to do right, and not in doing right because her principles dictate it. She relishes in sharing with Julia (in a letter) that 'I amused myself, as you have often seen me, with jumping over this gate' (3.1), then, 'delighting in my recovered agility, I went over and over' (3.2). But she is mortified when she realises that Lady Restormel might have observed her (3.4). The appearance of Helena's 'evil genius' (3.71), Norah Netherby, a cousin she has spent

much time with in childhood, foresees a trial of Helena's character, especially since Lady Restormel is at that point a guest in their house.

Yet when Helena and Norah then vault a fence and are witnessed by Lady Restormel, her reactions are surprising, as she concludes that 'the pastime itself, however absurd, is comparatively a trifle, and not worth animadversion' (3.92). There is a sense here of aristocratic laxity, even aristocratic hypocrisy, revealed again when Lady Restormel overhears Norah mimicking her and fails to offer Norah sound instruction because she is flattered that Helena rebuked Norah herself (3.118-9). It is the mistress Sophia's return which provides Helena with some much-needed help with Norah. When Norah tries to get Helena in trouble with Lady Restormel by implying (maliciously) that Helena had a penchant for hunting in her youth, Sophia is there to confront Norah, saying 'lie is a vulgar word; I mean to say, that you are now romancing' (3.106). With the introduction of Norah, Opie seemed to indicate where the boundaries of proper and improper behaviour were to be drawn. But Opie also gave examples of the dangers of aristocratic laxity, as Lady Restormel fails to control Norah except by resorting to mimicking her behaviour (3.119-120), where Sophia has success through gentle chastisement.

As Julia and Helena (and then Norah) find themselves in London without guidance, this part of the narrative is firmly set in the fashionable world, where all is commodity and competition. Opie stresses Helena's physicality. After having vaulted a hedge, Norah and Helena 'amused themselves with riding races' (3.123) on asses that the family has just acquired, and Norah even convinces Helena that they should ride to a review on them (3.122). Opie lessens the gravity of such impropriety – especially given that more than one person is injured when an ass goes out of control (3.129) – by making of the episode a moral dilemma. Sophia herself defends Helena's motives, as Helena and Norah were leaving space in a barouche for the Miss Nanbys, whose recent financial ruin would otherwise exclude the possibility of their attending the review (3.136). Helena displays appropriate remorse, but before too long, her physicality is again foregrounded as she finds herself waltzing (3.231-232). This final activity sees Opie push Helena further and further towards scandal, as if testing to see where the final straw will be. A closer look at the advice that Lady Restormel has given Helena reveals a lot about the hypocrisy of aristocratic values, the type of moral lesson Opie wants to present, and the small world in which such a lesson will be acted upon.

Waltzing was ‘the fashionable craze’ in the 1810s: the close contact between the partners as they danced the rather exhilarating steps occasioned strong opposition to the waltz from many quarters (Adburgham 7-8).<sup>334</sup> Lady Restormel, when advising Helena – by now engaged to Lord Restormel – confidently (and erroneously) asserts that ‘waltzing I know you never indulge in’ (3.193). But the context of this assumption makes it clear that, even if Helena were renowned for her waltzing, Lady Restormel would excuse her. Where Opie had devoted many tens of pages to the depiction of social events, or the adventure in the stagecoach, for instance, she allotted a mere four pages to Lady Restormel and Helena’s conversation about the latter’s conduct. Lady Restormel reassures Helena first of all, following Helena’s care for her, that ‘I felt myself pledged, even by my self-love, to excuse or overlook your faults if ever they should force themselves upon me, and if I, the severe Lady Restormel, approved you, who should dare to question the propriety of my son’s choice?’ (3.190). Lady Restormel demonstrates her aristocratic laxity here, as well as her influence in the small circles in which they move: it is not how you behave, but who you know that matters.

Her advice then turns to ‘trifles having serious results’:

Dress, for instance, a handkerchief too open, a tucker too low, a petticoat too short, a manner too flirting with other men, dancing with other men – waltzing I know you never indulge in; but should Restormel, justly or not, venture to find fault with your dress or your manner, I earnestly hope you will not let your woman’s pride induce you to disregard what he says, but that you will think that noble heart worthy the surrender even of your better judgement on some points. (3.193)

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<sup>334</sup> Ruth Katz discusses the development of the waltz, a dance which brought people from different social classes together, and ‘made possible a kind of ‘escape’ from reality through the thrilling dizziness of whirling one’s way in a private world of sensuality’: Ruth Katz, “The Egalitarian Waltz,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15.3 (June 1973): 374-375. The dismissal of the waltz as immoral by such a fashionable character as Byron in his poem “The Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn” (1813) indicated how seriously the dangers of the waltz were thought to be, although, in Byron’s case, he was partly jealous he could not easily partake owing to his club foot.

Instead of taking such advice, Helena proceeds to do exactly what Lady Restormel warns against, enjoying the flattery of other men, and excited by the prospect of the waltz with a Lord L– (3.198-199). A letter from Sophia at this point puts Helena’s behaviour in perspective. She writes, ‘my sweet girl, what is become of your understanding? what guardian of your principles, lost in the whirl of London I suppose; and your principles, for want of this guardian are running riot: pray get out of the whirl as fast as possible’ (3.201). Yet still Helena will not compromise, and her intention to go to a ball given in her honour by Lord L– brings Restormel’s jealousy to its peak. Helena is forthright and declares ‘do you mean to say that I know not right from wrong, honour from dishonour, as well as yourself? My lord, I will be in no man’s leading-strings. I am myself the guardian of my honour, and do not need so insolent a monitor!’ (3.203). Instead of reflecting on any behaviour that might have induced Restormel’s later coldness to her, Helena responds by waltzing in public with her cousin (3.231-2), drawing the attention of the entire room.

The reader might expect some shock and dismay from Lady Restormel at this point. But instead, she is full of praise for Helena. She assures her that she would have prevented Lord Restormel breaking off their engagement, which he did only owing to mislaid correspondence, not actual conviction (3.294), and urges her son on her deathbed to marry Helena (3.297-298). The silver-fork novel has been considered a form of conduct book, but here Opie seems far more interested in providing entertainment than conduct literature.<sup>335</sup>

Opie’s preoccupation with Helena’s physicality, culminating in the waltzing scene demonstrates how Helena is liable to be compromised, and the possibility for sexual transgression seems increasingly present. But, come the end of the novel, the reader may just as well suppose that Helena, as she declared, did indeed know right from wrong well enough, and no harm was done. Both Helena’s behaviour and

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<sup>335</sup> Kent Puckett, Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel (New York and Oxford: OUP, 2008) 22 (n.25); Cheryl A. Wilson, Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) 1. Conduct books were prevalent in the eighteenth century – from James Fordyce’s Sermons to Young Women (1765) and Dr John Gregory’s A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters (1774) to Hester Chapone’s Letters on the Improvement of the Mind (1773) and Catherine Macaulay’s Letters on Education (1790). By the early nineteenth century, ‘feminine ideals expressed by conduct books “passed into common sense”’ and the novel became a more palatable form of conduct literature: Lynne Vallone, Disciplines of Virtue: Girls’ Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1995) 82.

the misunderstandings that follow are much more exaggerated than those Opie had considered in Dangers of Coquetry (1790). In the earlier novel, the heroine was tortured by her coquettishness, and the implications of a coquette's bad behaviour were seen to be far-reaching and tragic as both the heroine and her husband were sent to their deaths. Opie moved the misogynistic coquette theme of the late eighteenth century to a context in Much to Blame where a young woman is asserting a certain right to flirting within a closed group of people: both the social climate and fictional conventions had changed in the intervening decades.

Helena finally takes solace in religion when Restormel breaks off their engagement (3.246), but the subject is dealt with far from solemnly. Julia chances upon the very penitent who had been contriving to prevent her marriage to Marcus, and Julia and Helena's subsequent visits there show how religion is used here partly to promote plot development. Even here, Opie's tone is light, and lightened in particular by Helena's dialogue, as she asks Julia to explain her moved countenance:

“Have you had a vision to tell you you are soon to be removed to Heaven?”

“No, Helena; but I have reason to think that I have been chosen as the humble instrument to send another sinner thither, and that makes me weep, though I am a fool to weep for what I am glad of.”

“And pray who is this brand plucked from the burning?” (3.307)

Opie frequently lightens the tone through Helena's dialogue. To Julia's emotive reflection on finding out that her unpleasant stepmother has bequeathed her a fortune, Helena responds, ‘Mercenary wretch! no doubt you are glad ... for I see now you were legacy-hunting –’ (3.332). But parts of the plot – the ridiculous nature of the misunderstanding on Lady Restormel's deathbed, for instance, where she urges Restormel to marry Helena but he understands the complete opposite (3.297-298) – also point towards the general joviality of the novel. There are parts of instruction in the novel, like Lady Restormel's advice to Helena, but they are brief, and the principles do not last, in either the characters or the narrative. In the end, the heroines are rewarded after short periods of contrition (about nothing in particular: it seems more of a formality) with all they desired.

The concept of drawing from life is evoked by Opie in Much to Blame in the attention she gives to writing novels based on life experience, and this attention should be briefly analysed, especially since Opie was offering these points as she was preparing to give up novel-writing herself. She included a motto from Sterne on the front page of each volume: 'lessons of wisdom have never so much power over us as when they are wrought into the heart through the ground-work of some story which interests our passions' (n.p.). The motto in itself is conventional enough, a commonplace of sentimental literature in the age of Richardson and Sterne. However, if we trace its continuation within its original context in Sterne's sermon, we see that it calls to mind, while hiding from plain view, the problems of this commonplace for anyone strictly committed to the truth. Sterne's motto continues, 'Is the heart so in love with deceit that ... we must cheat it with a fable, in order to come at truth?'.<sup>336</sup> In some respects, the silver-fork novel, insofar as it referred to real people and real events, might escape that particular criticism. In Much to Blame, Opie alluded to the novel's suitability as a medium for drawing from truth. She set up the novel, partly, as a discussion of the representation of love in fiction versus the appreciation of love in "real" life (in the novel). Julia has, as a young woman, been allowed to read everything in her father's library (1.18), but hearing the history of her mistress Sophia's unfortunate attachment has a stronger effect:

There, before her eyes, she beheld a love-lorn maid, telling a tale of faithful and hopeless attachment, weeping too as she told it, and looking interesting beyond all description: this reality was far more dangerous than any fiction could have been. (1.19)

Opie then played with assumptions about a heroine's typical behaviour in a novel, as Julia envisages how much her recent dramatic rescue might promise, providing another example of Opie's jovial tone:

An adventure, a young and handsome deliverer, and, perhaps, a lover!  
at least there was an object to love, and Julia believed she loved – but

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<sup>336</sup> Sermons 20.186. Quoted in Tim Parnell, "The Sermons of Mr. Yorick," The Cambridge Companion to Laurence Sterne (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) 72.

though she tried to be very unhappy, certainly sighed deeply and audibly; she ate heartily, slept well, and grew fat, in spite of her wounded heart. (1.19)

Helena later writes to Julia to tell her of Sophia's possible romance with a certain Lord Aston (whom she later marries), saying:

I tell you what Julia, I am resolved to turn author and write novels – what with my own adventures in a stage-coach! and those of other persons well known to me, I have already materials sufficient – only '*le vrai in est [sic.] pas toujours le vrai semblable,*' and I have such a romantic and improbable incident to relate! *en attendant*, let me warn you to expect to see advertised, Romantic Incidents! a tale, in two volumes, by a lady of high distinction. (2.104)

Opie said little more in Much to Blame about the right place for the reading or writing of novels, but these small snippets imply that there is nothing harmful to be expected from novels. Having indicated herself, with her quotation from Sterne, Opie's desire to 'interest the passions' in this novel, and then providing a narrative that focuses much more on entertainment than instruction, the reader cannot fail to see a departure from Opie's usual approach. In the small details, one can observe a writer who is prepared simply to let little points of instruction go unmentioned, behaviour uncorrected, in the interest of not interrupting the flow of the narrative, of the entertainment.

I think Opie enjoyed writing this novel. I think the way she portrayed Helena going yet further, not learning from her "mistakes" and not listening to advice mirrors the kind of freedom Opie was wallowing in here, a freedom she would have to relinquish if she joined the Quakers. Joseph John Gurney's approbation of Madeline indicated to Opie the type of novel she would have to write if she were to be allowed to entertain the prospect of writing novels at all as a Quaker. In stark contrast to Madeline, Opie threw caution to the wind in Much to Blame. Hers was the wallowing of no responsibility, not needing to moralise overly much. But that meant she did not invest in her characters or in real moral messages anywhere near as much as before. Opie was relishing the novel form as a commodity, evoking the idea of

female reading at the beginning, but in a character (Julia) who would not suffer for having read everything available to her, and dipping into the idea of the more flamboyant female character (Helena) writing novels because she has seen real-life situations that inspire her so to do. Opie put Helena's flamboyance in context through the introduction of Norah Netherby, the childhood friend, but there was no apparent need to have Norah receive her comeuppance at the end. Opie was having a final fling with the novel form in Much to Blame: it seems appropriate that she would choose an up-and-coming trend in novel-writing to explore to the full the novel as commodity rather than moralistic tool.

We do not know when Opie was writing Much to Blame, or how long the gap was between her presenting it to the publishers and its finally coming out. In her letter to Sir John Gurney fifteen years after the publication of Much to Blame, Opie conveyed her dismay that the publication could not be cancelled: she was preparing to become a strict Quaker, but she simply could not afford to cover the publishers' expenses to cancel something that had already been prepared for publication (21 June 1839). The same letter does not seem to suggest, however, that Opie was overly dismayed at having written such a work. She wrote, on the contrary, that 'had I done by it all I ought I believe with my critic & confidant that it would have been my best--father excepted--'.<sup>337</sup> Opie reflected thus many years later, after expressing bitterness in Detraction Displayed that writers (especially female ones) who sought to instruct should be vilified, and perhaps preferring the idea of writing for entertainment. The juxtaposition of Much to Blame and The Father and Daughter – Opie's frivolous final fling with the novel, and the gravely sentimental novel which launched her career (in 1801) and assured her reputation throughout her lifetime – is revealing in itself. It implies a thwarted aspiration in Opie, by joining the Quakers, to fulfil all her potential as a novel writer, from the sentimental, serious and heavily moralistic, to the entertaining and more moralistically light-hearted. An examination of Opie's correspondence with Joseph John Gurney and Elizabeth Fry shows that Opie's decisions regarding joining the Quakers and giving up the novel form were not as easy for her (or as easily explained) as has been suggested.

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<sup>337</sup> Reproduced with permission from Professor Paula R. Feldman. There is no indication who this 'critic and confidant' was, but I speculate that it was Pierre-Jean David d'Angers, who often mentioned Opie's works in their correspondence, normally in very flattering terms.

The relationship between Opie's anonymous publications and her burgeoning Quaker faith has not been considered in detail in recent criticism and it requires analysis. Opie held a precarious position between advocating complete honesty in Illustrations of Lying (1825) and withholding the whole truth about her literary career not only in her correspondence (with Elizabeth Fry in particular) but through the very publication of anonymous works. Opie would use Quaker language in public at exactly the same time that the publishers asked her to pay to cancel Much to Blame. Yet her circumstances at the time would suggest not that poverty forced her to go ahead with publishing the novel, but rather her sense of identity as a writer. This precarious position further demonstrates Opie's ambivalence about relinquishing her position as a celebrated writer.

Correspondence with Joseph John Gurney and Elizabeth Fry; joining the Quakers officially and concurrent publications

Opie's letters with Gurney, Fry, and her publications around the time of her official conversion attest to the dilemma she was experiencing between the Quakers and the world. Some of this dilemma related to the nature of her spiritual belonging, some of it more specifically to her identity as a writer. Not only was Opie unsure, but she also displayed some dishonesty to Fry in particular as she moved towards official conversion. My analysis here shows that, despite suggestions that Opie's conversion was relatively simple, her struggles were indeed profound. She did make progress: her spiritual doubts gradually became more specifically Quaker. Her writing habits also shifted, with more Quaker-appropriate literature and less of a focus on her literary career. But at the same time as she made a grand gesture to give up novel-writing, she published Much to Blame anonymously. There was an attachment to writing that Opie had to relinquish in a way that she could not share with her Quaker friends, so she kept it quiet. Her simultaneous publication of a work, however, that condemned withholding the truth as lying further illustrates her profound struggle at this time.

In some letters it may appear that Opie's conflict between an attraction to spiritual faith and an attraction to the fashionable world was not too problematic. Opie writes to Gurney on 9 January 1823 of feeling 'a sort of repose such as I have longed for for years':

Something which when in the world, and its most dissipated scenes I wished to feel, but in vain, yet it was something which I thought I was formed for, and should enjoy one day – tho' how I was to get it, I knew not – but it has come to me at last, through trials, and conflicts – a peace which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away.<sup>338</sup>

She goes on to clarify, though, that she is not speaking of something she considers specifically Quaker at this point, but of 'a peace not to be derived from belonging to any one particular set of Christians however superior, but from firm faith in Christ himself' (9 Jan. 1823). A year later, a letter to Fry shows that Opie is still not sure that she is moving towards the Quakers particularly.<sup>339</sup> Brightwell's scoring out on this letter, the second of only two extant letters to Fry of this period, has been discussed in Chapter 1. The letter warrants further analysis owing to the spiritual and career deliberations of which it gives evidence. In between Brightwell's crossings out, Opie mentioned an attraction to the Methodists, but Brightwell edited Opie's conclusions:

##### #to# join another sect of worshippers, with whom many of my relations on the mother's side have been united for generations past; viz. the Westleyan [sic.] Methodists – and so impressed have I been with this idea, that #####<sup>340</sup>

Brightwell's markings also obscure the nature of further spiritual doubts, as Opie wrote about wanting to see foreign countries, 'and it might be far better for me to travel ##### to apply for Membership –' (19 Jan. 1824).

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<sup>338</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 9 January 1823, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/335, Library of the Society of Friends, London. Reproduced with permission from the Library of the Society of Friends. Opie dates this letter in the Quaker way – '1<sup>st</sup> Mo 9<sup>th</sup> 1823, 6<sup>th</sup> Day evening' – but she does not systematically date all of her letters (even to Gurney) in this way from this point.

<sup>339</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Elizabeth Fry, 19 January 1824, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP48, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

<sup>340</sup> Reproduced with permission from the Huntington Library.

Opie was not only unsure about where exactly she was heading, but, in a ‘sort of confession letter’ to Gurney, also suggested that she might have been rushed into adopting certain Quaker attitudes:

I often look back with wonder at the unexpected, and impulsive celerity, and celerity unintended, and almost against my will with which I divested myself of much of my worldly trappings, and assumed in a degree, the plain dress.<sup>341</sup>

A potential commitment to plain Quaker language posed a further problem: using ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ and dispensing with honorific titles was difficult in the worldly circles in which Opie moved. Gurney shared with Fry in a letter that ‘Amelia goes on steadily. Her present cross is language – a sore one I believe’.<sup>342</sup> This time, though, Opie did not write about being rushed into something, rather of her own inadequacy. She discussed with Fry how uncomfortable she felt in using Quaker language because she considered herself too sinful to use it, and feared that she might never be allowed to join the Society (19 Jan. 1824).

Opie’s principal stumbling block, however, was surely her disinclination to give up novel-writing and her position as a popular writer in the world. In the same ‘confession’ letter to Gurney, Opie alluded to the conflict between writing for the world and joining the Quakers:

One conflict I have, the only great one, which I have laid before William Forster, but cannot before thee, lest thou decide against my wishes and I know my mind is not yet prepared to acquiesce in thy opinion –  
(4 May 1823)

There is little doubt that Opie knew Gurney’s opinions on novel-writing (and novel-reading) at this stage. In his Observations on the Religious Particularities of the Society of Friends of 1824, Gurney lauded the high standards of the Friends

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<sup>341</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 4 May 1823, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/337, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>342</sup> Joseph John Gurney, letter to Elizabeth Fry, 20 Dec 1823, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/3/383, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

‘respecting the importance of an entire abstinence from those customs, prevalent in the world, which are necessarily impregnated with moral evil’, including ‘the reading of useless, frivolous, and pernicious books’.<sup>343</sup> An autobiographical excerpt from his Memoirs sees Gurney write that Opie ‘gradually discovered that all her vanities, her position in the world, and her novel-writing, in which her reputation was high, must be laid down at the foot of the cross of Christ’.<sup>344</sup> Opie’s correspondence with both Gurney and Fry indicates that this discovery was indeed gradual and problematic.<sup>345</sup>

In a letter of December 1823, Opie assured Fry – in case she had heard something to the contrary – that her forthcoming novel The Painter and his Wife was not going to be published. Opie wrote ‘I have *felt* the sacrifice, but I do not *repent* of it. I must, however, also own, that here I stick – advance I do not – but then I trust, I do not go back’.<sup>346</sup> Before a brief discussion of The Painter and his Wife, it should be noted that, despite Opie’s sense of being stuck, her experimentation with lots of different forms of fiction gives a sense of her awareness of moving away from the novel or from other imaginative fiction. From 1823 to 1839, for the first time since her anonymous “The Nun” of 1795, Opie published eighteen short tales in annuals, journals and periodicals. She had published four volumes of tales between 1806 and 1820, but she decided at this point to experiment with individual tales. A brief look at the five short tales Opie published between 1823 and 1825 gives a sense of moving generally to more fact-based, illustrative anecdotes, rather than the purely imaginative pieces she had presented in her tale volumes.<sup>347</sup> In these short tales,

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<sup>343</sup> Joseph John Gurney, Observations on the Religious Particularities of the Society of Friends (London: J. and A. Arch; York: William Alexander and Son; Norwich: S. Wilkin; Edinburgh: A. Constable and Co., 1824) 306.

<sup>344</sup> Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, ed., Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney; with Selections from his Journal and Correspondence, vol.1 (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander, 1854) 235.

<sup>345</sup> Opie’s letter to Gurney of 4 May 1823 is the last one in the Gurney correspondence (in the Library of the Society of Friends, London) before 1826, therefore the last one before Opie’s official acceptance in 1825. The next extant letter makes it clear that there were letters written in between, but they are not in the archive. It is impossible to know therefore whether they might have contained more sensitive material, and might have therefore been destroyed. Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 7 September 1826, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/338a, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>346</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Elizabeth Fry, 6 December 1823, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP47, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

<sup>347</sup> These short tales are “The Shipwreck. A Tale Founded on Fact,” The European Magazine and London Review 83.1 (London: Lupton Relfe, April 1823) 297-303; “False or True; or, The Journey to

there is a sense of Opie wanting to come out and try another place where her works might be appropriate, not having published tales like this in periodicals before. After 1825, none of these tales would be based purely on the imagination.

In March 1825, Opie also published a collection of tales for children entitled Tales of the Pemberton Family, which are simple, overtly didactic tales that conformed to the type of ‘tales for youth’ that Kelly discusses (English Fiction 98-104). The two sons are guided by their parents, Sir George and Lady Pemberton to become good Christians, through exercise of good judgement, charitable work and other virtuous behaviour. The tales are lively, with a lot of dialogue and realistic characterisation, but the moralising is always very explicit and unambiguous. The collection relates sequential events, so there is the opportunity to trace the gradual increase in the young boys’ virtuous behaviour. Opie seems to have been testing the boundaries of fiction: if it were as moral and didactic as this, perhaps it would be more compatible with her growing Quaker sensibilities.

The work that stands out, however, in Opie’s progression towards the Quakers is Illustrations of Lying in All its Branches. Although published in January 1825, a full year after the second of the two extant letters to Elizabeth Fry, an 1822 extract (signed ‘Philo-Veritas’) suggests that these principles were already very important to Opie.<sup>348</sup> Illustrations of Lying is a non-fiction work in which Opie presents a taxonomy of lies and investigates the dangers of all of them, normally illustrating them with a fictional tale. The work is therefore an interesting mixture between foregrounding the importance of honesty – which the Quakers prize very highly – and testing the appropriateness of fiction, or perhaps presenting fiction as something that has its didactic purpose. It is in the context of the honesty lauded in this work and Opie’s dishonesty – as she publically gave up one novel but published another anonymously – that Opie’s literary struggles are best appreciated.

Opie’s correspondence with Fry shows that it was important to her to draw special attention to her grand gesture of giving up her work in progress: The Painter

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London,” The European Magazine and London Review 83.1-84 (London: Lupton Relfe, June 1823) 505-16; (July 1823) 20-33; “A New Tale of Temper,” Friendship’s Offering (London: Lupton Relfe, 1824) 66-93; “A Tale of Disobedience; Or, the Mysterious Chamber,” Friendship’s Offering. (London: Lupton Relfe, 1825) 155-84; “The Tale of Resignation; Or, The Gold Heart,” Friendship’s Offering (London: Lupton Relfe, 1825) 209-236.

<sup>348</sup> Amelia Opie, “Observations on Lying,” The European Magazine and London Review 83 (Sep. 1822): 101-5. Signed ‘Philo-Veritas’.

and his Wife.<sup>349</sup> Recent criticism has referred to this novel as a manuscript ready for publication (King and Pierce Introduction Father 48). But MacGregor, who had access to the original as part of the Carr Collection, writes that this work was not a 'completed manuscript' (86).<sup>350</sup> The plan of the novel also indicated, in spite of the title, that the narrative was not based on the lives of the Opies:

The manuscript of the tale, found among Mrs. Opie's literary remains, consists of ten letters and few pages of straightforward narrative. This fragment is sufficient to give an idea of the general plan. The situation is that of two young women in love with the same man. Eudora Villars is the usual type of virtue and prudence; Marcia Delaval, with her extravagance, her disregard of convention, her uncontrolled emotions, is patterned closely upon Corinne. (MacGregor 86)

MacGregor supplies other information which would suggest that Opie, 'by refusing publication, gave up a thousand pounds copy money', a gesture that proved to MacGregor that Opie had made a conclusive decision to turn from novel-writing to the Quakers (86).<sup>351</sup> Opie's reference to Fry to the 'sacrifice' she has 'felt' takes on a new significance when it is known how much money Opie needed to part with. It also lends a different perspective to Opie's much later justifications to Sir John Gurney for her anonymous publication of Much to Blame, of which MacGregor did not know. In this letter of 21 June 1839, Opie wrote that she could not afford the £300 the publishers wanted to retract the work – '60 or 90 L I could have commanded, but 300 I could not' – but she does not make any references to these other financial sacrifices, which would have been demanded at the same time.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> It may have been a grand gesture for Opie to give up her work in progress, but it does not seem to have been as large a concern for Elizabeth Fry: there is no reference to Opie's struggle in Fry's diaries of this period. Elizabeth Fry, *Diary*, vol. XI, 13 November 1822 – 6 January 1825, ms, S 265, Library of the Society of Friends, London; Elizabeth Fry, *Diary*, vol. XII, January 1825 – June 1826, ms, S 266, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>350</sup> I discussed the missing Carr Collection in my Introduction: although some letters have turned up in various archives, all the manuscripts are still missing.

<sup>351</sup> MacGregor cites Mary Russell Mitford with regard to the money: A. G. K. L'Estrange, ed., The Life of Mary Russell Mitford, London: Richard Bentley, 1870, vol. II, 198-9.

<sup>352</sup> Reproduced with permission from Professor Paula R. Feldman.

MacGregor writes that ‘barely a month after her [6 December 1823] letter to Mrs. Fry, Mrs. Opie took the decisive step. She first used the “plain” language to a stranger who called upon her (hitherto she had used it only in addressing Friends), and soon afterwards appeared in Quaker dress’ (87).<sup>353</sup> In Opie’s letter to Sir John Gurney she wrote that the publishers came to demand their money ‘the very day I first spoke the plain language’.<sup>354</sup> With Opie’s first public use of Quaker language taking place at exactly the same time she had to make a decision whether or not to retract Much to Blame, it seems logical that she would have mentioned the novel to Fry, considering how important it was to her to focus on the sacrifice of The Painter and His Wife. But Opie made no mention to Fry of Much to Blame when she appeared to feel the need so categorically to mark her withdrawal from novel-writing by relinquishing The Painter and his Wife. It is not clear whether Opie would have seen the advertisement for Much to Blame in the Quarterly Review of January 1824 before she wrote her letter of 19 January 1824 to Elizabeth Fry, but there is, again, either no reference of the work in this later letter, or Brightwell’s editing has prevented it from being deciphered.

Brightwell’s editing teases the reader most with regard to Opie’s attitudes about giving up her literary career. Opie wrote:

To say the truth, much as I should like to belong to a religious Society, and much as I see, or think I see the hand of my gracious Lord in leading me to whom have been given so many ties to a worldly life in the various gifts, bestowed on me, (I mean accomplishments as they are called) to communion with a sect which requires the sacrifice of them almost in toto, thereby trying my faith to the utmost, still  
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In Memorials, Brightwell completed the final clause, writing ‘still I feel no necessity for haste in doing so’ (192), with MacGregor politely following suit (83). But these words, on my examination, do not correspond to the shapes of Opie’s original words underneath. Opie’s aborted utterance here and the apparent need to edit it

<sup>353</sup> MacGregor quotes Brightwell’s Memorials here (192-4).

<sup>354</sup> Reproduced with permission from Professor Paula R. Feldman.

<sup>355</sup> Reproduced with permission from the Huntington Library.

both speak of Opie's doubts about committing herself to the Quakers and about relinquishing her literary career as she knew it.

Opie's literary career had slowly been shifting. Her correspondence at this time also shows some movement in her declared view of herself as a writer. In January 1822, Opie wrote to Lady Caroline Lamb, saying that she would read Lamb's manuscript if still required, but that she did not normally do so. One of the reasons Opie gave strongly indicates that her literary career, in her mind, was by no means over, as she stated that reading manuscripts might lead her to be suspected of plagiarising others in her future writing.<sup>356</sup> But in 1824, Opie wrote a letter to an unidentified correspondent, stating simply that she could not help the recipient with the publication of a manuscript.<sup>357</sup> The shift here in helping others with their literary careers, especially where the 1822 letter gives a strong sense of Opie's own literary identity, demonstrates some of Opie's development as she moved towards official acceptance to the Quakers.

When it came, though, the lack of certainty for so long in Opie's own mind meant that the world was not prepared for her decision. Opie's "conversion" was publicised some time before she joined the Quakers officially, with one anonymous commentator considering with quite a degree of surprise that 'Mrs. Opie, the bright-eyed, Bacchante-like Mrs. Opie, the highly-gifted authoress of poems, novels, and songs, has actually turned Quaker'.<sup>358</sup> This comment indicates not only the almost hedonistic fashionable reputation Opie had in the world, but also the severity people attached to the Quakers: the reactions of her friends – discussed at the beginning of the next chapter – attest to these attitudes. But it was in August 1825 that Opie officially joined the Friends. Gurney clearly thought it was the right decision and the right time for Opie. When her father, Dr James Alderson, was very close to his death in October 1825, Gurney wrote to Fry that, given Opie's understandable grief, her

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<sup>356</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Lady Caroline Lamb, 22 January 1822, ms, 861, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

<sup>357</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to C. M., 1824, ms, 861, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

<sup>358</sup> "To Correspondents," The York Herald, and General Advertiser 1763 (19 June 1824): n.p. Another publicised comment over a year later would indicate that people were becoming used to the idea, stating only 'it is said that Mrs. Opie has desired to be admitted a member of the Society of Friends' directly after a story about a very large strawberry: "Tuesday's Post," Berrow's Worcester Journal 6393 (14 July 1825): n.p.

decision to become a Quaker could not have come at a better time.<sup>359</sup> Opie would not publish anything else until Detraction Displayed in 1828; its similarities to The Only Child (1821), Opie's first anonymous novel, warrant the discussion of these two works together here.

*The Only Child; or, Portia Bellenden (1821) and Detraction Displayed (1828)*

This epistolary novel consists chiefly of very long letters written by the heroine to a French nun, Sister Constance, providing a principally retrospective account of Portia's life up to her marriage. It presents an interesting analysis of what faced a woman who had been given a classical (male) education at the turn of the nineteenth century. Less predictable than many of Opie's novels, the message is not always clear. Portia's education is considered essential by her father, but repellent by her ward, Sir Frederic Bethune. As a complete egotist, Portia compares unfavourably with her benevolent and more feminine cousin, but is the clear superior of Lady Susan Vachell, a less educated woman whom Bethune decides to marry. Since Portia uses her education for show, and then to bring about the downfall of Lady Susan, the reader may be unsure about whether Opie wishes to support a classical education for women or not. Detraction Displayed makes Opie's views clearer.

In Detraction Displayed, Opie provided a taxonomy of different forms of detraction, defining detraction as 'to draw or take from, *alias* to depreciate' (111) and declaring that its 'province' is 'to lessen the merit of persons, objects, and things, by severe comments, by finding fault, by ridicule and by mimicry [sic.]; relating degrading anecdotes of those whom he wishes to lower' (111). Opie made her aims very clear:

I intend to shew the *origin* of this besetting sin; to describe its habitual style, and the situations which are most likely to lead into the practice of it; to divide into classes the different species of detractors; and humbly to suggest such hints, or self-government in conversation, as

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<sup>359</sup> Joseph John Gurney, letter to Elizabeth Fry, 12 October 1825, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/3/416A, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

may, if acted upon, preclude even the desire to indulge in detraction.

(4)

A longer quotation is necessary to demonstrate one of the closest connections between The Only Child and Detraction Displayed. In 'On Detraction', Opie explained that, owing to their different educations, men and women would invariably end up 'relating degrading anecdotes' about others because they have almost nothing else to talk about:

Amongst the benefits to be derived from general education, and the utmost cultivation of the mind, amongst all classes, I consider a probable diminution of detraction as one of the greatest advantages. For when education and acquirements become so general, that the most modest of women need not fear to talk of what she knows, and can converse on books without the dread of being considered a blue stocking; the tone of conversation will insensibly become raised. At present, it is (may I dare to assert it?) the ignorance of women in general, and the narrow views in men occasioned by the long habit of considering women as unfit for rational conversation, which fills provincial society, most especially, with detraction; for the women when alone, and the men when they join the women, have no general objects on which they can converse, after "la pluie et le beau-temps" have been sufficiently discussed, except the gossip of the day, and observations on the persons, dress, manners, and morals perhaps, of their associates.

*Detraction* is the readiest and the easiest theme, therefore it is to be preferred; but were both sexes to be taught to feel that it is disgraceful not to be willing and able to converse of better things, (and this conviction must be the result of universal education,) one's neighbours' faults and follies, distresses, disgraces, or their more unwelcome success, would cease to be brought into discussion, even in the confidence of a tête-à-tête, as the only means of killing time; and detraction, with its mischievous effects on those who are its narrators,

on those who hear it, and on those who are its objects, would be driven away from society with the contempt and aversion it deserves. (114-5)

In an examination of The Only Child alongside Detraction Displayed, I extend Eberle's argument – that 'the novel can be read as critical of formally educated young women who possess neither the conventionally feminine virtues of modesty and piety, nor the practical skills of housewifery' (Introduction vol. 4 x) – and bring in Opie's clear arguments in favour of universal education in Detraction Displayed to examine how and why she kept these principles more subtle in The Only Child. Opie depicted a heroine in Portia who does not ultimately have to sacrifice the benefits of her classical education, but rather her egotistical relationship to it, an egotism Opie decried in 'On General and Particular Competition' (5-26) and 'On Precedence' (78-95) in Detraction Displayed. The very unappealing character of Bethune also has to make significant changes to his attitudes to be worthy ultimately of Portia: Bethune's dislike of female learning is an attitude Opie would see disappear for the good of humankind in a chapter on 'Authoresses, Blue-Stockings, Medical men, Converts to serious Religion' (240-303). Opie's focus on Portia's need for forgiveness at the end does not indicate that she should give up writing, which Opie's comments on authoresses and bluestockings from the afore-mentioned chapter in Detraction Displayed illustrate.

Eberle has provided the most recent criticism of The Only Child, a little-known Opie work. She considers this novel to be 'formally in the pliable epistolary tradition common to pedagogical tracts and Jacobin novels of the period' (Introduction vol. 4 x). Opie's dedication of the novel to the Marquis of Lansdowne (1780–1863) – a whig politician who fought for the ending of the slave trade, better rights for dissenters, and law reform – and the novel's setting in 1802 indicate further Opie's engagement in this novel with liberal, reformist ideas.<sup>360</sup> Opie made topical references to

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<sup>360</sup> C. J. Wright, "Fitzmaurice, Henry Petty-, third marquess of Lansdowne (1780-1863)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, eds H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) n.p. John Opie, who was notoriously thrifty, finally agreed to take Opie to Paris in 1802. This visit had a huge impact on Opie – 'none could have set forth with greater eagerness than the Opies' to 'see for themselves the results of the Revolution' (MacGregor 37) – and Opie's allusion to her own trip in Temper (1812), set in 1802, had very pointed references to the French Revolution. Opie would serialize her 'Recollections of a Visit to Paris in 1802' between 1831 and 1832, having planned to

Constance's convent having been destroyed and Portia offering to shelter her in England (149), then being forced to return to England herself 'in order to avoid being detained according to the iniquitous decree of the rulers of France', a country now 'at war with her own' (152). By situating the novel in this tumultuous period, yet by making such a fleeting reference to it, Opie was engaging subtly with the radicalism of the 1790s, in which her character would have passed her most formative years. Mr Bellenden's decision to give his daughter a classical male education (and to be so proud of it) in the 1790s indicates his position as a liberal, maybe even a Jacobin. A discussion of Opie's portrayal of Portia's education alongside her portrayal of Bethune's disgust at such an education for a woman must therefore be undertaken with this topicality in mind.

From an anonymous novel set in a period Opie identified with radicalism, and dedicated to a liberal politician, a reader might expect a more unequivocal advocacy of universal education than that which Opie presents in The Only Child.<sup>361</sup> Opie praised Bluestockings highly in Detraction Displayed:

Like their predecessors they are women who improve their minds, by the acquisition of useful knowledge, as well as, or instead of, shewy accomplishments, and who are willing, when occasion serves, to join in discussing useful subjects, modestly desirous to bring their minds into collision with those of the wiser sex, that they may profit by their remarks, on what has engaged their own attention; and by that means improve even the hours which are appropriated to social intercourse. Surely, no rational woman ought to be averse to resemble the original of such a portrait as this. (261)

Detraction Displayed has received almost no critical commentary, but my analysis here of The Only Child and Detraction Displayed illustrates Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg's brief observation that:

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write about her visits in 1829 and 1830-1831, but finding herself obliged to write about the 1802 trip instead.

<sup>361</sup> The novel could be read as a rewriting of Adeline Mowbray – an alternative female education that goes wrong, only with a story that ends happily – but my focus here does not give room for such an analysis.

Detraction Displayed (1828) is a very unusual polemical document that rescues the term “Bluestocking” from its derogatory association with “women on display.” In the process, Opie uses the term to refer both to the historical group and to learned women in general, as a proto-feminist catchphrase.<sup>362</sup>

The Only Child points towards the type of education Opie lauded in the above quotation from Detraction Displayed, but owing to Portia’s egotism and love of display, her education has gone awry. In this novel, Opie also sought to dissociate her bluestocking heroine from the position of “woman on display”, and, with the heroine’s humbling and deserving happy end, was successful. The novel opens *in medias res*, with Portia, distraught from her recent rejection by Bethune, explaining to her mistress Sister Constance how her education has brought her to this nadir. In her letter, she explains how Mr Bellenden had decided to ‘devote himself wholly’ to his daughter’s education, endeavouring ‘according to a plan of his own, to make me a Dacier in learning, and a Sappho in poetry’ (9):

Alas, dear well-meaning but deluded parent! what did all these infinite pains end in! Not that I can assert positively that if I had not been thus educated I should not have been the miserable being which I am, but I cannot be blind to the certain effect which the consequences of my education had on my destiny. (10)

Opie incorporated elements of the moral-evangelical novel into her anonymous novel here. Although my analysis has placed this novel outside its immediate timeframe, the publishing trajectory of Valentine’s Eve (1816), The Only Child (1821) and Madeline (1822) should be remembered. The beginning of The Only Child harks back to the beginning of Mary Brunton’s Discipline (1814). ‘In the spirit of the conduct book, but with the directness of an Evangelical tract’, the reformed heroine tells her story to warn other women to act differently (Vallone 94).

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<sup>362</sup> Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, “Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography,” Huntington Library Quarterly 65.1/2, Reconsidering the Bluestockings (2002): 8.

Opie's narrative did not work in this retrospective way, but that was her ultimate message, and she was working with a heroine, like Ellen Percy, whose strongest characteristic was her intelligence. This focus on intelligence indicated a different approach from the conduct book, which often preferred either a vivacious Betsy Thoughtless-like character, or an exemplary Lucilla Stanley (Vallone 94).

Portia is torn between her intelligence and her heart in The Only Child. Her struggle becomes most acute following her father's death. In one passage, she finds it impossible to engage with her company as a learned woman, knowing that Bethune, whom she loves, disapproves her learning. Portia has clearly been able to answer and converse on these topics in the past, but this scene conveys her profound distress as she finds herself unable to speak now that her father is not there to encourage her. This representation of the anguish experienced by a well-educated woman does not seem at all to correspond to what Opie would later advocate so strongly in Detraction Displayed.

But the objectives of Portia's education show why it was bound to go wrong. Portia explains that 'I was to be the proof of what a highly-studied education could effect; and, when educated, I was to be exhibited in all my powers, to an admiring world' (129). Opie wrote 'On General and Particular Competition' (5-26) in Detraction Displayed, stating that 'nothing is so likely to provoke a detracting spirit, and lead to traducing observations, as making any one the object of EXAGGERATED PRAISE' (83). Portia's education has all been to do with exaggerated praise, and encouragement from her father not only to 'self-love' (19) but 'self-worship' (22). Portia considers them both 'finished egotists' (68) in retrospect, but her father goes to his deathbed convinced that Bethune loves Portia and will marry her. It becomes clear, however, that Portia's egotism needs to be addressed in no uncertain terms before anything like that might happen.

When Fanny, Portia's half-sister comes to visit, Portia's egotism is particularly pronounced, but her sense of competition is also awakened as Fanny's good deeds foreground Portia's failures in this field. Having visited the poor, Portia's goals are seen not as philanthropic but competitive, as she writes 'I did not quit that cottage without the blessings of its inhabitants, and I resolved that my name should soon be as dear as Fanny's in the village' (73). Portia also fails to see where she herself is to blame, reacting immediately by writing a letter to Fanny, 'full of indignant feeling', because Fanny had 'neglected her duty to the poor, in not urging me to do mine'

(73). Writing of her goal to found a school, Portia again asserts ‘that it was her [Fanny’s] fault alone that it was not done before’ (73). Portia explains that her education meant she had very little contact with other girls (130), so she only grew up to see them as competition.

Here, again, Opie’s contemporaneous writing in the moral-evangelical genre is evoked. Bethune’s dislike for Portia’s showy learning suggests that he has been advised, like Charles in Hannah More’s Coelebs in Search of a Wife, that ‘you will want a COMPANION: an ARTIST you may hire’.<sup>363</sup> More wrote that:

A woman whose whole education has been a rehearsal, will always be dull, except she lives on the stage, constantly displaying what she has been sedulously acquiring. Books on the contrary, do not lead to exhibition. The knowledge the woman acquires in private, desires no witnesses; the possession is the pleasure. (Coelebs 189-190)

Opie shifted More’s focus. Opie also argued for books over accomplishments, but showed how books too could lead to exhibition, indicating that a woman might then succeed in modifying her love of show. Opie, like More, suggested that exhibition must not be the goal, and Portia suffers initially for having misunderstood that fact.

Once Bethune has married Lady Susan Vachell, Portia’s sights are again set on competition and opportunities to assert her superiority. Opie’s 1828 work did not limit this trait to women alone, writing that most men and women can surely remember a time in their lives when ‘they have gone into company, meaning to enter into general, and perhaps, *particular*, competition’ (17). Opie maintained that ‘the most abundant source of detraction is COMPETITION’ (5), therefore to be closely controlled. Portia’s competition is not even controlled effectually by her companion, Mrs Danby, who is otherwise a force for good in Portia, wishing to improve her piety, for instance (121). Portia makes sure she looks particularly fine to go to a ball where she will be compared to Lady Susan – the latter’s ‘supposed superiority’ is won over by Portia’s ‘intellectual superiority’ (161) – but Portia still goes home concerned that

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<sup>363</sup> Hannah More, Coelebs in Search of a Wife, 1808, ed. Patricia Demers (Peterborough: Broadview, 2007) 50.

Lady Susan may still consider herself the better woman. When Portia hosts a dinner party (206-8; 216-230) that far outshines the catastrophic one hosted by Bethune's wife (189-194), Portia's recognised superiority is not enough, and she contrives to have 'retributive justice!' (212) by using her poems to have Lord Annally seduce Lady Susan.

The appearance in the narrative, eventually, of a letter of reply from Sister Constance brings into sharp focus how little religion there has been in Portia's upbringing. Fanny's piety has been contrasted with Portia's lip service to Christianity early on, when Fanny refrains from quoting from 'the Book of Books', saying 'Oh! that the time may come when I may quote that eloquent language and be listened to, not with the smile of approving taste alone, but with deep conviction and a feeling of holy reverence' (77). Portia's first encounter with Sister Constance leaves a very strong impression on her, but she cannot accept Constance's suggestion of becoming 'a seriously religious character' (149), however much Constance's 'compassionate kindness' (149) is 'balm to this forlorn and humbled heart' (150). In Constance's first letter in the narrative, she urges Portia to tell Lord Annally to leave, reminding her that they are contriving to ruin a married woman, and that she should instead put her trials 'at the foot of the cross' (235). The letter comes too late – Portia has already sent more poems – but the religious sentiments here were echoed when Opie wrote 'On Precedence' (78-95) in Detraction Displayed, pointing out the need 'humbly to endeavour to annihilate that unchristian pride, which leads us weakly to desire precedence, and still more weakly to resent its being withheld' (90). Portia's egotism has brought her, ultimately, to the wilful ruin of another human being (two, in fact, once the plot has taken its course), to prove her superiority.

Elements of Portia's education have brought her to this point. But it is not clear that Opie intended the reader to hold Portia solely to blame when her influences, especially from her guardians, are taken into consideration. Growing up without a female role model, and with an over-indulgent father, her guardian is Bethune following her father's death. It is worth considering, therefore, the quite different influence Bethune might have had on improving Portia's demeanour. Early on, the narrator indicates to the reader Bethune's narrow-mindedness:

Bethune, who had really a horror of learned ladies, and a great fear of being rivalled by a wife, had the mortification of learning that the girl

who, in so many points of view, was a being worthy of his choice, was, from what he called a mistaken education, rendered in his eyes, wholly ineligible. (14)

Opie does not display mistrust of Bethune through the narrator alone. Both of the novel's 'conventionally ideal women' – Fanny and Sister Constance – indicate their disapproval of his attitudes (Eberle Introduction vol. 4 x). Fanny's reservations about Bethune's character provide a wealth of information about the importance to Opie of the acceptance of female learning. Fanny states to Portia:

The man of really superior intellect, and attainment, has nothing to fear from female competition, for the most highly cultivated, and most intellectual woman of her time, has disadvantages to struggle with which she can never wholly overcome; and such a man has a generous pleasure in encouraging the modest display of an intelligent and gifted woman. But it is evident, that Sir Frederic wishes to repress every indication of your talents and learning; and that they prevent, instead of assisting your entire hold on his heart; *therefore*, I do not consider him as a first-rate man, nor as worthy of you; for, never yet did I see narrowness of mind and strong prejudices, combined with the intellect of the highest order. (52-3)

When Opie gave the history of the Bluestockings in Detraction Displayed, her commentary of Hannah More's 'The Bas-Bleu; or, a Conversation' (1786) stressed that both men and women were originally part of the Bluestocking group.<sup>364</sup> Opie urged women to embrace the term bluestocking as one that indicated the positive nature of their learning (265-6). She remarked that men, as learning became increasingly available to women, would have less and less reason to fear a woman rivalling their intellect, with such a woman also making a better wife and mother (266). But Bethune's disgust at Portia's learning causes him to reject her, when he might, as her guardian, have given her advice on how to curb her egotism. His

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<sup>364</sup> In her short commentary on the poem, Feldman remarks that "The Bas-Bleu" 'advocates good conversation by intelligent women as an important moral and social force': British, ed., 469.

marriage to a completely inferior woman enables Bethune to realise how valuable Portia is. But even after her vastly superior dinner party – indicating her skills in housewifery – he tells Portia that her knowledge is ‘unnecessary and disadvantageous to a woman’ (135), disliking her conversing ‘with the learned, the literary, and the philosophical’ (137). Yet it is not only Portia’s superior education that supplies her with the means to ruin Lady Susan with her poetry, but also Lady Susan’s inferior education that makes it impossible for her to see the poetry for what it really is.

Opie did not include any poetry in the narrative, but her use of poetry as the vehicle of a woman’s destruction is pivotal to the novel. As Opie was considering retiring from her position as a glittering literary figure, she wrote a heroine who had to seek forgiveness for using her dangerously seductive poetry to ruin her rival (Eberle Introduction vol. 4 xii). But I do not think that Opie was thereby indicating that all of her own literary outlets had the same seductive power or potential. In The Only Child, Portia needs to make reparation not for producing the poetry itself, but for using it to malicious ends, especially having identified the weakness (partly educational) that will probably lead to its being effective. Opie’s chapter ‘On some of the most prominent subjects of Detraction, Authoresses, Blue-Stockings, Medical men, Converts to serious Religion’ (240-303) in Detraction Displayed gives some indication of how Portia’s writing might be considered here. The chapter opens with Opie citing herself as an example, feeling that she was ‘treading on difficult and dangerous ground’ (240-1):

I must frankly declare that had I known the pains and dangers which awaited me when I became a public authoress, nothing but a strong sense of duty, or the positive want of bread, could have induced me to encounter them. (241)

Opie’s idea of a duty to write, a duty to instruct, possibly also to entertain, had already been put to Gurney in a letter of August 1815 as a laudable aim.<sup>365</sup> This mention in Detraction Displayed of ‘duty’ indicates, even if she has relinquished the

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<sup>365</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 9 August 1815, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/329, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

novel form, that Opie might still consider it a duty to write for those who are still able. Poetry did not pose as much of a problem to the Quakers as novels: Gurney's A Journey in North America, Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie (1841) has poetry everywhere, mainly descriptions of the scenery he is witnessing, and poetry's proximity to hymns must also be considered. The kind of love poetry Portia was writing to help Lord Annally to seduce Lady Susan would not have been held in the same regard, but the conclusion to the novel gives no indication that one of the conditions for Portia's marriage to Bethune is her relinquishment of all poetry.

Portia and Bethune are not the only characters who need to reflect on their shortcomings. At the end of the novel, the human failings that the pious Fanny experiences are also shown, as she laments 'when, when, with all my professions of faith, shall I learn that charity which thinketh no evil, and not to be hasty in my judgments?' (320). Portia has told Bethune everything – 'a pure unvarnished tale delivered' (314) – and when Bethune writes to declare that he loves Portia more than ever, he encloses a song (323). I think the accompaniment of a song to this letter of forgiveness demonstrates the positive uses of poetry, and that Portia is not expected to give up poetry as part of her atonement. It is perhaps not as important that it is his poetry, and not hers, but more that it is a different type of poetry: Portia can start anew with a different application of her poetical skills. Portia's act of contrition brings her around to the importance of religion (314-6), and when she recovers from her almost fatal affliction, she asks Constance to pray that she might be bestowed with 'self-abasement and lowliness of heart' (325). Her declaration that Constance shall never more have cause to call her virtues 'pagan' (325) indicates that Portia has seen the need to modify her self-centred approach to life, but not that her poetry-writing needed to be relinquished.

Given Opie's very straightforward promotion of universal education in Detraction Displayed, it is surprising that The Only Child leaves the possibility for such a variety of interpretations about the value to a woman of a "male" education. Perhaps the ambiguity in The Only Child was owing to a belief that a good education might remain disadvantageous to a woman as long as it was not the norm. Eberle's reading of the scene in which Portia finds herself unable to converse on learned topics might translate to Opie's personal experience of negotiating her literary career, and her sense of loss as she prepared to give it up:

It is in Opie's representation of Portia's 'tearless, and almost convulsive agony' that we may detect, perhaps, the psychological costs of possessing a reputation for learning in the mid-Romantic period. Portia's mourning is of particular significance here, conventionally construed as for her father, it can just as easily be read as grieving for her lost authoritative self. (Introduction vol. 4 xi-xii)

Opie's reflections on authoresses in Detraction Displayed certainly give the impression of an awareness that she, Opie, had lost something, but also that there was a certain respect she had to be reconciled never to achieving. With the following quotation in mind, perhaps it is unsurprising that Opie preferred to provide instruction through entertainment in The Only Child (and even more so in Much to Blame), rather than aiming to present a work (like Madeline) where her instruction was less ambiguous, but the medium far less entertaining. This quotation also draws the reader's particular attention to Opie's Illustrations of Lying, and her comments thereon reveal quite a bitterness as she is preparing to leave her writing career behind:

But if the female writer who tries to amuse, and hopes to insinuate some serious morals truths through the medium of entertainment, be permitted to pass unavowed and unhated to her grave, it is far otherwise with those who endeavour to *teach* others; those who venture to drag besetting sins into the light of day, to call things by the right name, to denominate *permitted worldly policy*, the *spirit and practice of lying*, and to point out in all their deformity the *obliquities of temper*.

The author, but more especially the authoress, who presumes to do this, must prepare to be disliked, cavilled at, and depreciated; must be satisfied to be judged, without being even read through; must submit to be misquoted and misrepresented; and be deeply thankful, if she can find consolation under the trial inflicted, in the consciousness of having written from what she deemed the requirements of painful duty to her fellow-creatures. (244-5)

Opie went on to consider the very negative attitudes that are often held about authoresses, and her frequently sardonic tone reveals the degree to which she might not have agreed with the opinions she described. Opie wrote that ‘it may be said, that if the giver of all good has bestowed even on woman the power of writing, she is justified in exerting it’ (246). But she concluded that, even if writing anonymously and in seclusion, an authoress must expect criticism even from her nearest and dearest: “And so you are turned *authoress*,” will very likely be said to her with a sarcastic emphasis, while the poor conscious culprit feels as if she had really committed a crime’ (246). By the time Opie was writing Detraction Displayed, it had been made very clear to her that novel-writing was tantamount to criminal in Quaker eyes. It seems particularly sad that the struggles that led up to the publication of this work should have led her to leave such a grim portrayal of the career which she had so enjoyed and for which she had received so much acclaim.

### Conclusion

Of her decision to publish The Only Child anonymously, Opie explained simply ‘I had a mind to try the affect [sic.] of a tale published without a name’ (Opie to Sir John Gurney 21 June 1839).<sup>366</sup> She described the ‘considerable sensation’ it caused in Lord Lansdowne’s circles as speculations were made about the authorship (21 June 1839).<sup>367</sup> The public reaction to Madeline must have given Opie a stark realisation of what her commitment to the Quakers would mean, and she experimented with all sorts of forms of fiction to gauge how her career might develop without the novel being a part of it. A reviewer of Much to Blame commented that the tale ‘contains incidents enough for three or four of our common Novels’ (Morning Post 6 Aug. 1824), and the reader cannot help considering how Opie might have wished to make the very most of her anonymity and the possibilities available from a novel.

Turning to non-fiction, a review of Illustrations of Lying – sub-titled ‘Mrs. Opie and her “Fudge Family”’ – reveals that Opie had much to feel bitter about when she made her afore-mentioned remarks in Detraction Displayed:

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<sup>366</sup> Reproduced with permission from Professor Paula R. Feldman.

<sup>367</sup> Reproduced with permission from Professor Paula R. Feldman.

It has pleased Mrs. Opie, since she had turned Quakeress, to read a lecture to the world ... under the title of *Illustrations of Lying*. The world has been notoriously given to this vice; and, like a true lover of truth, she does not flatter it, but tells mankind pretty roundly that they are a generation of liars ... Let the woman of sin prefer rouge, but the lover of truth will use ruddle; let the man of fashion and the world still glue on his false coxcomb, the conscientious will betake himself to a Welsh-wig; and the gallant Marquis, who has a make-believe leg, will walk about, if he is ingenuous, with a corkscrew in his calf!<sup>368</sup>

But the correspondence presented here to Joseph John Gurney and Elizabeth Fry would suggest that Opie's commitment to the Quakers, although not arrived at easily, was a commitment that had been well considered, and it was a relief when she finally became an official member of the Society of Friends.

Detraction Displayed was the final new book-length prose work Opie published. She had made her choice to join the Quakers and she knew she could not write novels any more. But Detraction Displayed indicates that Opie considered that there was still a lot she had to say, and without any need to cloak it in the appealing trimmings of a novel. The resulting work is therefore one of the most direct and radically reform-promoting works that Opie ever penned. An analysis of Opie's Detraction Displayed illustrates the extent to which Opie was committed to reform, especially in female education, and with regard to female writing. Opie engaged at her least ambiguous with serious questions of reform, where one might have assumed that a retirement from the fashionable world (through her Quaker conversion) would have suggested a retirement from the addressing of these serious and radical topics. Opie seems to be reminding people that the Quakers also belong to a Dissenting tradition of reform in many of their guiding principles.

In Much to Blame, Opie had pushed the boundaries of the novel of society further than she had ever let herself, and she produced a novel that might have been one of her best, she later reflected (Opie to Sir John Gurney 21 June 1839). But it was the least appropriate approach for Quaker sensibilities: perhaps nothing could

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<sup>368</sup> "Newspaper Chat," The Examiner 893 (13 Mar. 1825): n.p.

have made it clearer to her that her time as a novel-writer was over. The strong sense of anger that can be felt in Detraction Displayed surely indicates Opie's bitter disappointment to have to leave the public sphere as a writer with a work so little representative of her long and illustrious career, and in which she even demonstrates why such a departure was necessary.<sup>369</sup>

It is unsurprising that Opie did not feel the need to write further works of this sort. She felt, perhaps, that she had said all she needed to say publically to a Quaker audience, and that she simply did not want to produce anything else like this for the wider public, who had so enjoyed the brighter Mrs Opie. But her reform interests would continue to be vital to her, and there is strong evidence of her continuing interest in reform in the following chapter.

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<sup>369</sup> Nor was Detraction Displayed successful: see Appendices C and D for information about Opie's earnings from her works.



## Chapter 6

### The Public Face of Opie; Republications, and more White Lies...

Chapter 5 has shown Opie involved in a great struggle of life commitment. She was falling between two stools, being pulled towards the Quakers on one hand, and the fashionable world (including “pernicious” literature) on the other. But such was only the surface expression of a deeper tension within her, arising from the fissure between who she felt permitted to be and who she aspired to be. Her words quoted in Chapter 5 about Much to Blame – ‘it would have been my best--father excepted--’ – speak volumes about a deep yearning to be able to use fully her love of – and gift for – writing, and to be able to reflect therein the complexities of her personality.<sup>370</sup> This part of her true self could not be fully reconciled with her duty to religious commitment as she saw it – a duty she regarded no less passionately than her love of writing – and it was a conflict that never left her.

Opie stopped writing novels after joining the Quakers officially. She wrote short tales, and presented these short works as far as possible as being factual: she did not compile any collections of tales in this period. She did, however, revise some of her earlier novels for republication, and was closely involved in negotiating with the publishers, even though in some of her letters she pretended that she had not authorised reprinting. Opie managed, despite conflict and sometimes equivocation, to maintain her belief in the moral value of fiction. The revisions she made to Adeline Mowbray for its 1844 republication also indicate that she was still concerning herself with the best way to express her ideas about women's social position in fictional form. A number of factors contributing to this continued commitment to fiction are suggested here: the extent to which Quaker life was compatible with active social commitment; the influence of Victorian social fiction, especially Dickens'; and the influence, especially through James Fenimore Cooper, of a more liberal attitude to fiction among American Quakers. This period shows that Opie never relinquished her belief in the moral value of fiction, including the novel.

After Detraction Displayed, Opie published a final volume of poetry in 1834 (Lays for the Dead) and otherwise published only short tales in annuals and

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<sup>370</sup> Amelia Opie, Letter to Sir John Gurney, Baron of the Exchequer, 21 June 1839, ms, Paula R. Feldman, University of South Carolina. Quoted with permission from Professor Paula R. Feldman.

periodicals. She was in many ways a committed Quaker, wearing the strict dress and addressing people in plain Quaker language. Her reform interests continued – she worked in hospitals, workhouses, and prisons and was very active in the antislavery cause – which is unsurprising given how committed the Quakers were to questions of reform.<sup>371</sup> Opie's 1840s republications indicate that she was also keen to uphold her literary reputation in a new generation.

This period in Opie's life has received little attention in recent criticism, especially regarding Opie's republications. Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, Margaret Eliot McGregor, Clive Jones, and Gary Kelly provide valuable biographical accounts, but only Shelley King and John B. Pierce, and Anne McWhir really engage with Opie's 1840s republications.<sup>372</sup> They analyse the textual changes to Adeline Mowbray in particular, and I build on this analysis. King and Pierce quote some extracts of letters to Simon Wilkin (a publisher friend of Opie's, and Cecilia Lucy Brightwell's uncle) and of a letter from the publisher J. W. Grove regarding the 1840s republications, but do not examine them.<sup>373</sup> C. B. Jewson provides quite a thorough account of Opie's interactions with Wilkin regarding the 1840s publications, but there are elements which require further examination.<sup>374</sup> Extracts have been published of Opie's 1844 letter to Gurney defending her decision to republish her works, and defending fiction more generally, and I provide a transcription of the letter in its entirety here so that its

<sup>371</sup> Augustus J. C. Hare, The Gurneys of Earlham (London: George Allen, 1895) 2.14.

<sup>372</sup> Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander; London: Longman, Brown, & Co., 1854 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed); Brightwell, Memoir of Amelia Opie (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1855); Margaret Eliot MacGregor, Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend (Menasha (WI): The Collegiate Press, 1933); Clive Jones, "The Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)," diss., OU, 2001; Gary Kelly, "Opie, Amelia (1769–1853)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004-14); Shelley King, and John B. Pierce, eds, Adeline Mowbray, 1805, by Amelia Opie (Oxford: OUP, 1999) 269-272; Anne McWhir, ed., Adeline Mowbray, 1805, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2010) 285-294.

<sup>373</sup> King and Pierce cite from the following letters in an appendix to The Father and Daughter: Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 18 January 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/139, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 3 February 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, MS. 4281/140, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 24 May 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/141, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; J. W. Grove, letter to Amelia Opie, 26 August 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/142, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 27 August 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/143, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, The Father and Daughter, with Dangers of Coquetry, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 259-261.

<sup>374</sup> C. B. Jewson, Simon Wilkin of Norwich (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1979) 106.

context might be better appreciated.<sup>375</sup> Brightwell did not touch on this episode of Opie's life at all, neither in the Memorials (1854) nor the Memoir (1855), despite her family relationship with Wilkin and her professional relationship with Josiah Fletcher, a bookseller and printer friend of both Opie and Brightwell, and Wilkin's business partner. Opie's letters to Fletcher have been virtually ignored in criticism. They form an invaluable part of my discussion – alongside Opie's 23 February 1844 letter to Joseph John Gurney defending her actions, and her letters to Wilkin – about the importance to Opie of these republications and what it suggests about her ongoing commitment to fiction.<sup>376</sup> The correspondence to all three friends shows that Opie, despite her writing against lying in Illustrations of Lying (1825) and her short tale "White Lies" (New Tales vol. 2 (1818)), could not escape the human trait of 'white lies' as she negotiated very different correspondents.

I examine how successfully Opie adapted to a Quaker lifestyle, arguing that – whilst keeping her toes dipped in the fashionable world – Opie made a relatively smooth transition to life as a Quaker. Her past reform concerns – French republican enthusiasm, for instance – found a place alongside contemporary reform concerns, particularly her ongoing interest in the antislavery cause. Opie may have been influenced by Gurney's developing Quaker theology, and what she witnessed about Quaker attitudes to fiction beyond those of Gurney, most especially through her friendship with the American Quaker novelist James Fenimore Cooper. I also examine how Opie reacted to the altered literary climate of the 1840s in England, with her reading Charles Dickens, for example. Opie had retained an active interest and belief in the moral value of fiction despite joining the Quakers, and she acted more according to her own sense of what was right and appropriate than any Quaker dictates concerning fiction.

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<sup>375</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 23 February 1844, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/380, Library of the Society of Friends, London. Quoted in part by Jewson (Simon 106); Clive Jones (333-334); Kelly ("Opie, Amelia" n.p.); King and Pierce (eds, Father 261-262); MacGregor (120-121).

<sup>376</sup> The Wilkin Letters are held at the Norfolk Record Office (MS 4281). The 'Josiah Fletcher Papers', as I name them, are also held at the Norfolk Record Office (MS 5252), and they are letters from Opie to Fletcher and his wife (Sarah) which Fletcher formally housed in a special copy of Brightwell's Memorials. The catalogue therefore lists them as 'Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie' (MS 5252). I discuss the implication of Fletcher's decision here.

Opie: a fashionable Quaker

Brightwell's Memoir (1855) – the more religious of her two biographical accounts of Opie – provided a picture of Opie as a convinced and contented Quaker following her official acceptance:

The union that subsisted between her and the Friends with whom she had united herself, was a true and efficient one, exerting an abiding and happy influence, and having a deep hold on her affections as well as her principles. (92)

Yet Brightwell seemed quite happy that Opie's fashionable life continued. The quotation above comes from a chapter in which Brightwell considered Opie's visits to Paris in 1829, and 1830-1831. Brightwell acknowledged how some Quaker friends were uneasy about these trips: 'they feared lest she should be "drawn away from the simplicity" of faith and manners, which must ever characterize the true Christian in his intercourse with the world' (Memoir 92). But, whilst stressing always the benefits and superiority of Opie's Quaker faith over the "world", Brightwell implied even in this religious account of Opie's life that Opie's ability to give freely to all who asked for her attention was a laudable trait:

Those who best knew Mrs. Opie will readily comprehend how it was that she could, in a manner somewhat peculiar to herself, and partly perhaps resulting from her early habits, as well as from her natural temperament, take so lively an interest in all the varied forms of life and society. (Memoir 93)

In my analysis here of Opie as 'a fashionable Quaker', I take as my basis that Opie, by joining the Quakers officially, was not expected simply to retire completely from the fashionable world. Gurney implied – we do not know exactly when – that such a sacrifice would be necessary:

No person had drunk deeper of the cup of fashionable life than she had. Admired for her amiability, her talents and her accomplishments,

she was received in London at the houses of many of the nobility, and wherever she went, she was a welcome guest. But she gradually discovered that all her vanities, her place in the great world and her novel-writing in which her reputation was high, must be laid down at the foot of the cross of Christ.<sup>377</sup>

Yet Gurney's failure to check Opie on her behaviour indicates that he was a lot more tolerant of Quakers moving in the fashionable world than this quotation would suggest. Gurney himself even considered standing for parliament once Quakers became eligible after the Reform Bill passed in 1832: although he acknowledged the idea that his becoming a politician might be incompatible with his position as a Quaker minister, he was not truly convinced by the objection.<sup>378</sup> Gurney was already a member of the Norfolk and Norwich Literary Society alongside Wilkin in 1818 – Gurney had helped to pay for Wilkin's training as a printer and publisher – so he was certainly moving in the literary world at this time (Jewson Wilkin 47-48). One point on which Gurney would not relent, however, was Opie's republishing of novels, as this chapter investigates.

Opie's friends' reactions to her official commitment to the Quakers indicate the ways in which Opie had (or had not) changed as they perceived it. MacGregor, in her 1937 biography, provided a neat summary of these reactions, and it is worth reproducing here:

Miss Mitford, who had not seen Mrs. Opie, "that excellent and ridiculous person,"<sup>379</sup> since the change, sent her bit of gossip to her friend, Sir William Eford:

She is all over Quakerized, as you know – to the great improvement, as I hear (for I have not seen her) of her appearance. It is certainly a pretty dress. She thee's and thou's

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<sup>377</sup> Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, ed., Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney; with Selections from his Journal and Correspondence (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander, 1854) 235.

<sup>378</sup> Edward H. Milligan, "Joseph John Gurney (1788-1847)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004) n.p.

<sup>379</sup> 'L'Estrange, *The Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford*, II, 39.' MacGregor's footnote (88n).

people; calls Mr. Hayden 'friend Benjamin'; and directs to the Rev. William Harness after the same fashion, 'William Harness, Hampstead.' With all this, she is just as kind and good-humoured as ever, and Mr. Hayden told me that, in about a quarter of an hour's chat, she forgot her thee's and thou's, and became altogether as merry as she used to be.<sup>380</sup>

For Miss Mitford the subsequent mingling of gay parties with May [Yearly] meetings indicated that Mrs. Opie never got over "the hankering she had after her old artistic and literary world." She thought, moreover, that after this time Mrs. Opie declined both in taste and intelligence.<sup>381</sup> Crabb Robinson felt that "her becoming quaker gave her a sort of a éclat," though he believed "she was not conscious... of an unworthy motive."<sup>382</sup> Southey thoroughly commended the "transition." He had seen Mrs Opie as late as 1824 when she was seriously contemplating the step and felt that it was "both a natural and a happy one," though he would have been "better pleased" if she "had not consented to corrupt the King's English."<sup>383</sup> And as the years passed Mrs. Opie was still an object of interest and conjecture. S. C. Hall was of the opinion that she "never got, perhaps never tried to get the world out of her heart";<sup>384</sup> Harriet Martineau still saw "a spice of dandyism in the demure simplicity of her dress";<sup>385</sup> Miss Sedgwick fancied that "the fashionable little train to her pretty satin gown

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<sup>380</sup> Mitford was probably referring to the painter Benjamin Haydon here: I mention the prominent position of Opie in his 1840 painting "The Anti-Slavery Society Convention" in my discussion of Opie's antislavery activity in this period of her life. MacGregor footnotes 'L'Estrange, *The Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford*, II, pp. 198-199' (89n).

<sup>381</sup> 'L'Estrange, *The Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford*, III, p. 293.' MacGregor's footnote (89n)

<sup>382</sup> 'Crabb Robinson, *Diary*, II, 277.' MacGregor's footnote (89n).

<sup>383</sup> 'C. C. Southey, *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, VI, 68.' MacGregor's footnote (89n).

<sup>384</sup> 'S. C. Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life*, II, 187.' MacGregor's footnote (89n).

<sup>385</sup> 'Harriet Martineau, *Journal*, II, 277.' MacGregor's footnote (89n).

indicated how much easier” it was “to adopt a theory than to change one’s habits.”<sup>386</sup> (88-89)

Opie’s adopting of Quaker language understandably affected her correspondence. Clive Jones identifies three clear stylistic strands from the mid-1820s: Opie’s letters to Quakers, which were in plain speech with much discussion of faith; her correspondence with cousins, which was witty, gossipy and familial; and the worldly offerings she exchanged with aristocratic friends (288-289). But Opie’s tendency to modify the extent of her Quaker language to serve particular ends also indicates a certain fluidity between these strands.<sup>387</sup> Some of Opie’s letters around the time of her official decision (in 1825) to join the Quakers, even to non-Quakers, demonstrate the enthusiasm of a new convert. In a letter to Eliza Alderson, a cousin, she mentioned her joy at having made that decision, especially when faced with the imminent death of her father, and a letter to a further cousin Tom Alderson in 1826 was a lot more measured and religious in tone than earlier, more frivolous letters had been.<sup>388</sup> When writing to Sarah Rose, a fellow Quaker, there is some sense soon after her official decision of her enthusiasm and interest in writing about the faith to a fellow believer. But when in Paris in 1830, Opie wrote to Rose predominantly of the volatile political situation in that city at the time.<sup>389</sup> In 1831, Opie wrote to Rose of her meeting with the French Queen, Marie-Amélie, in a letter that is full of honorific titles and fashionable news, with very little religion excepting that Opie ‘found the Queen a very pious-minded woman’.<sup>390</sup> Opie’s acquaintance and activities at this time

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<sup>386</sup> ‘Catherine Sedgwick, *Letters from Abroad*, I, 198.’ MacGregor’s footnote (89n).

<sup>387</sup> Patricia Howell Michaelson, *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 164.

<sup>388</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Eliza Alderson, 30 August 1825, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP226, Huntington Lib., San Marino. Amelia Opie, letter to Tom J. Alderson, 15 September 1826, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP76, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

<sup>389</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Sarah Rose, 13 December 1830, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP54, Huntington Lib., San Marino. Two earlier letters of Opie to Sarah Rose from Paris similarly discuss more worldly than religious affairs: Amelia Opie, letter to Sarah Rose, 24 July 1829, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP52, Huntington Lib., San Marino; Amelia Opie, letter to Sarah Rose, 30 November 1830, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP53, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

<sup>390</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Sarah Rose, 7 March 1831, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP55, Huntington Lib., San Marino. Brightwell quotes this letter in *Memorials* (281-283), but does not identify the recipient.

demonstrate that she was very much enjoying the best of both the Quaker and the fashionable worlds at this time, and her letters also reveal that she had Quaker friends who seemed to have no particular concerns about Opie's fashionable social life.

Opie was not even receiving consistent messages from Gurney about how her behaviour might be inappropriate. Between 1837 and 1840, Gurney went on missionary journeys to North America, and, upon his return, he compiled a collection of letters entitled A Journey in North America, Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie (1841). There is virtually no reference to Opie in this work, except by way of explanation in the first letter. Gurney writes that he is glad of the opportunity to record 'some recollections' of his 'late long and interesting visit to America', proposing to do so 'in the form of letters, and I avail myself of our old and intimate friendship, in freely addressing these letters to thyself'.<sup>391</sup> It is clear that Gurney used his friendship with Amelia Opie to employ the letter format more convivially to recollect his journey to the United States and Canada. But his choice also implies an acknowledgement of the harmless nature of Opie's engagement with the world at this stage, and even a strategic decision by Gurney to enable friends (and Friends) to identify more easily with the work. Since it was printed for private circulation (by Fletcher) it seems unlikely that Gurney would have chosen Opie as the recipient if she had not still been in his favour and that of their Quaker acquaintance.

The reactions of Opie's fashionable friends to her becoming a Quaker – as MacGregor expressed them through her quotation from Mitford – demonstrate that there was a degree of surprise to some that Opie could be a Quaker and still be enjoying fashionable life so much. Such misconceptions have not gone away: Ann H. Jones found it necessary to comment of Opie that, despite her conversion, 'she never became bigoted'.<sup>392</sup> Perhaps, on the contrary, Opie's decision to join an apparently retired, virtuous sect gave her the platform for her reformist activity – antislavery reform in particular – that she could never rely solely on fiction to provide. After all, it was in Detraction Displayed that she found the best platform for her feminist views about universal education, for instance. Having focussed mostly on

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<sup>391</sup> Joseph John Gurney, A Journey in North America, Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie (Norwich: Printed for Private Circulation, by Josiah Fletcher, 1841) 1.

<sup>392</sup> Ann H. Jones, Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 76.

her novels in this project, her reform interests can get missed, since they were made a focus much more in her poems and her tales.<sup>393</sup> One exception is Opie's treatment of madness in Father and Daughter (1801): a letter to Gurney of 8 August 1839 promoting the foundation of a humane, Quaker-run 'Lunatic Asylum' in the south of England indicates Opie's ongoing interest in humane treatment for the insane.<sup>394</sup> In joining the Quakers, Opie found an opportunity, having essentially given up writing for the public, to focus all the more keenly on her reformist activities.

This opportunity to move forward was accompanied in Opie by strong associations with her past reform concerns, as well as with her past as a writer. The degree to which Opie hankered after the past in these final decades of her life demonstrates a sense that Opie really had lost something when she turned to the Quakers and stopped writing novels. I firmly believe that Opie rejoiced in what she had found with the Quakers, which was an authentic sense of spiritual belonging, but it could not simply replace what she had lost. I think that part of her almost obsession with the past at this time can be linked to her sense of loss, and fond memories of her life as it had been when she had been writing for publication.

Although Quaker radicalism in general had not extended to support for the French Revolution, their fundamental basis in reform meant that Opie did not necessarily perceive any incongruity between her Quaker faith and her enthusiasm for French republicanism in the 1830s and 1840s. Not only had she set her 1821 anonymous novel The Only Child in 1802, partly in France, but on Opie's 1829 visit to Paris, she 'felt ambivalent about the restored monarchy and awe-struck at the sight of a guillotine once more erected in public' (Kelly "Opie, Amelia" n.p.). Opie's 1829 visit to Paris is worth mentioning here because of the wealth of influential people she met there, but also because of the way Opie consistently looked back to compare her visit then with her visit (with John Opie) in 1802. She met General Lafayette in 1829, saw Pierre-Jean David d'Angers again, with him making a

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<sup>393</sup> "The Negro Boy's Tale" (Poems 1802) and "The Black Man's Lament; or, How to Make Sugar" (1826) addressed Opie's antislavery interests; Opie's anti-war principles (very strong with the Quakers) were represented by "The Soldier's Return" (Simple Tales vol. 3 1806) and The Warrior's Return, and Other Poems (1808); "The Robber" (Simple Tales vol. 1 1806), "Murder Will Out" (Simple Tales vol. 4 1806) and "Henry Woodville" (New Tales vol. 2 1818) portrayed an inadequate justice system.

<sup>394</sup> King and Pierce, eds, Father 346-348.

medallion of her, and, in 1836, a marble bust.<sup>395</sup> MacGregor writes that ‘Napoleon in 1802 had chilled Mrs. Opie’s republican ardour. Lafayette in 1829 awakened her old enthusiasm’ (107). When she came to serialise her “Recollections from a visit to Paris in 1802” between July 1831 and February 1832, she started her account by stating how she had intended to write about her 1829 trip, but found it impossible to talk about the 1829 trip without discussing the 1802 one.<sup>396</sup>

Opie’s behaviour in reaction to the July Revolution in 1830 further indicated her continued interest in public affairs, comparing the situation then with the aftermath of the French Revolution:

She rushed to Paris and was in such a state of uncontrollable enthusiasm, all the visions of human perfectibility which the friends of her childhood had associated with the French Revolution rushing on her brain, that while sitting in the boulevards she sang in her clear, brilliant soprano, Fall, tyrants, fall!<sup>397</sup>

Opie’s journals frequently showed her republican sympathies, revealed, for example, in her notes of a visit to a school in Paris in 1830:

I fancied that I beheld a race of young republicans ... and when, after a very good liberal address from the mayor of the *arrondissement*, in a tricolor sash and scarf, those young voices burst into songs of joy and praise, I felt my eyes fill and my heart beat! (Brightwell Memorials 265)

A ‘public affair’ that remained relevant to Opie throughout this time was the antislavery cause. Although Britain had celebrated Abolition in 1807, various British

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<sup>395</sup> Opie had met David in 1802, and they became good friends in 1829 (MacGregor 104, quoting Brightwell Memorials 113).

<sup>396</sup> Amelia Opie, “Recollections of a Visit to Paris in 1802.” The Lady’s Monthly Magazine, or Mirror of the Belles-Lettres, Fine Arts, Music, Drama, Fashions &c. 4.19 (July 1831): 1.

<sup>397</sup> Charles X (of the Bourbon monarchy) was overthrown in the July Revolution, and his cousin, Louis-Philippe took his place. The July Monarchy of 1830-1848 took its name from this revolution. Gertrude Townshend Mayer, Women of Letters (London: R. Bentley & Son, 1894) 2.82. Quoted in Kelly, “Opie, Amelia,” n.p.

antislavery concerns were still relevant, alongside those in America, where Abolition was only achieved officially in 1865:

Across the first half of the nineteenth century activists focused, in chronological order of concern, on the abolition and its enforcement of foreign and British slave trades to British territories, suppression of the international slave trade, slave registration in British territories to measure the demographic impact of abolition, gradual and then immediate emancipation of colonial slaves, the ending of apprenticeship of former slaves and the universal emancipation of slaves.<sup>398</sup>

The Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1820, and Opie soon became a member. Opie was an active abolitionist throughout her life, as her letters, works and actions reveal. This involvement was captured most famously by Benjamin Haydon in his painting of the 1840 international Anti-Slavery Society Convention: Opie is one of the only recognisable women present.<sup>399</sup> Opie also remained fascinated by the English court system, and she often attended court in Norwich, sometimes daily, to observe cases.<sup>400</sup> She wrote in the 1840s of her ongoing interest from a personal, humanitarian point of view:

Whatever be the cause of the pleasure I take in attending [court] on these occasions, I hope it is an innocent gratification; ... and it is my conviction, that whatever brings us acquainted with, and interested in, the affairs and well-being of our fellow-creatures, in their varied stations

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<sup>398</sup> David Turley, "Anti-Slavery Activists and Officials: "Influence", Lobbying and the Slave Trade, 1807-1850," *Slavery, Diplomacy and Empire: Britain and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975*, eds Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2009) 91 n.1.

<sup>399</sup> Clive Jones, 310; Eberle, Introduction, vol 1, xxxviii.

<sup>400</sup> Her sensibilities and general opposition to the death penalty prevented her from observing trials for capital offences. Ann Frank Wake, "Indirect Dissent: "Landscaping" Female Agency in Amelia Alderson Opie's Poems of the 1790s," *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers*, eds Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 265.

and positions in society, may have a beneficial influence on our hearts, minds, and characters. (Brightwell Memoir 184)

In becoming a Quaker, Opie made some big changes to her lifestyle. She dressed in Quaker dress, and used Quaker speech, and essentially gave up writing for the public, excepting a small amount she considered to be within a “Quaker framework”. But her reform principles, such a big part of her life, were only strengthened by her conversion. In so many other little things, she remained ever the fashionable person she had been.

### Opie adapts to shifting Quaker attitudes to fiction in England and America

The “Quaker framework” within which Opie was working appears to have been largely of her own devising, according to various Quaker influences at the time. Following Gurney’s strict guidelines, no doubt, Opie explained in a letter of 1827 to S. C. Hall why she could not contribute to a literary annual:

Since I became a Friend I am not free to what is called ‘make a story,’ but I will write a *fact* for thy annual, or any little matter of history, or truth, or a poem if thou wishest, but I must not write pure fiction; I must not *lye*, and say, ‘so and so occurred,’ or ‘such and such a thing took place,’ when it did not.<sup>401</sup>

But this letter should not be taken as a reliable indication of her continuing views. Mrs S. C. Hall, who edited many annuals with her husband, made an interesting observation on this letter to S. C. Hall once Opie had died. She extended the above quotation to include Opie’s ‘dost thou understand me?’ and admitted:

We never did, as we confess, quite understand the delicate distinction which Mrs. Opie made between fact and fiction; we were only convinced of one thing, that she believed in it herself; she earnestly

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<sup>401</sup> S.C. Hall, A Book of Memories of Great Men and Women of the Age, From Personal Acquaintance (London: Virtue, 1871) 169n. Quoted in Kelly, “Opie, Amelia,” n.p.

and truly believed she was simply writing a fact, when it was evident to others she had the smallest possible ground to take her data from, and then illustrated and embellished it according to her own lively and overflowing imagination, which she must always have had "hard work" to keep in their moderate bounds.<sup>402</sup>

This "confession" is a useful approach to adopt when considering Opie's prose fiction, especially from this period in her life. From 1828, in any case, Opie had changed her mind about 'making a story' for annuals, and she produced 13 pieces of prose fiction for annuals, journals, and periodicals.<sup>403</sup> While Opie, probably to appease those of her Quaker friends who mistrusted works of the imagination, claimed that her tales were based on fact, these claims sound conventional and unconvincing. However unconvincing, such attempts to stick to the principle of writing fact-based fiction demonstrate how eager Opie was to adhere to Quaker rules, especially as she had understood them from Gurney. It does not appear, however, that Opie was as strict about her reading, and some other Quakers also seem to have been less strict than Gurney on this score.

Even before she republished early works in the 1840s, Opie did not apparently consider the novel taboo as strictly as she had before. Or perhaps the taboo was more to do with writing than reading. In 1838, she wrote to her cousin Henry Perronet Briggs asking whether he or any of his 'literary friends' knew who Elizabeth Elton Smith was, since she had written 'a very clever book' entitled The Three Eras of Woman's Life.<sup>404</sup> Opie identified the 'drawback' of the work – that the heroine of 20 seemed too 'eloquent and enlightened' for her age – but considered that 'there is character in the book'. The concluding sentence to the letter seemed to make it clear that Opie did not consider this novel-reading incongruous with her Quaker lifestyle, writing 'Farewel [sic.] – it is almost Meeting time'.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Mrs S. C. Hall, "Memoirs of Amelia Opie," The Courier (15 April 1854): n.p.

<sup>403</sup> Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, The Amelia Alderson Opie Archive (Queen's University, Kingston (Ont.)): "Works"; "Annuals &c"; "Prose Fiction". Apart from "The Nun" (1795), all Opie's short tales appeared under her own name.

<sup>404</sup> Elizabeth Bruce Elton Smith, The Three Eras of a Woman's Life (London: Richard Bentley, 1836).

<sup>405</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Henry Perronet Briggs, 20 October 1838, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP 154, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

The way in which Opie wrote to Fletcher about being under an obligation to buy a friend's novel, however, makes the reader aware of possible differences in Opie's approach to different recipients. She wrote to Fletcher: 'I am bound by fetters not to be broken to buy a novel in 2 volumes by a fashionable friend of mine. I bought her first – would it had been her last. It is called *Ellen Braye* –'.<sup>406</sup> The evidence does indeed suggest that this friend – Miss Blackwell – had published her first novel the year before.<sup>407</sup> If Opie had bought the first one, it is interesting that her principles should only concern her the second time around.

The Journals of Caroline Fox, 1835-71 offer an interesting indication of Opie's reading in the 1840s, and also suggest that some Quakers were less strict than Gurney on the question of novels. Caroline Fox's mother was a first cousin of Elizabeth Fry and Joseph John Gurney, and Fox visited prisons with Fry. Fox was not a strict Quaker – she described herself as a 'Quaker-Catholic (an inclusive Quaker)' – but her rigorous journal-keeping stemmed from her Quaker upbringing, as well as her note-taking.<sup>408</sup> Near where the family lived, people referred to two chimneys (from a former mine) as Anna Maria and Caroline after the sisters' tall, straight, Quaker dress, so Caroline had clearly been influenced by strict Quakerism in some areas of her life (Monk ed. 21).

Although Fox's journals were 'trimmed' for publication, the entries concerning Opie give a sense of no need to show reservation.<sup>409</sup> Fox wrote on 2 June 1842 that Opie 'is having her swing of London excitement' (127), and more intriguingly, on October 22 1843, that Opie 'reads Dickens voraciously' (148).<sup>410</sup> Dickens may not have been a novelist exclusively, but he published 'the great transitional novel' Martin Chuzzlewit monthly from December 1842 to June 1844, so Opie was most

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<sup>406</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 27 June 1841, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/12, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>407</sup> At the Circulating Library: A Database of Victorian Fiction, 1837-1901, n.p., web.

<sup>408</sup> V. E. Chancellor, "Fox, Caroline (1819-1871)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004) n.p. Wendy Monk, ed., The Journals of Caroline Fox, 1835-71 (London: Elek Books Ltd, 1972) 13; 16.

<sup>409</sup> Monk, ed., 15. Sheila Wright explains that the published journals of most Quakers faced a rigorous editorial process, 'first, by the editor who was often a family member ... and second, by the London Morning Meeting committee for publications', established in 1673: Sheila Wright, "'Gaining a Voice': An Interpretation of Quaker Women's Writing 1740-1850," Quaker Studies 8.1 (2003): 39.

<sup>410</sup> Kelly quotes these two citations in "Opie, Amelia," n.p.

probably enjoying this Dickens work.<sup>411</sup> Fox's lack of elucidation or explanation about the type of work being read would suggest that she did not consider the reading of novels anything to be frowned upon. Opie, then, seems not to have abandoned engagement with the novel in this period. She also read Jane Eyre soon after publication, and knew early on – through Harriet Martineau – that Charlotte Brontë had penned it.<sup>412</sup> Opie herself did not write anything new, but she revised earlier works to engage with the new literary climate. As Fox's journals show, some appreciation of this new literary climate could be found in the Quaker community in England too.

This project has focussed particularly on Gurney's attitudes to fiction, since the development of Opie's Quakerism was influenced by Gurney more than anyone else. Some Quakers were as strict as he, others less so. At the same time, female Quaker ministers found a form of feminist expression in their journals, which became increasingly novelistic in style. As Gurney and others emphasised the importance of the Holy Scriptures in a more Evangelical Quakerism – considered by some as a worldly threat to orthodox, quietist views – Gurney may have found it necessary to differentiate between good reading (the Scriptures) and bad reading (novels). A comparison with American Quakers shows that there does not seem to have been any particular problem with fiction-writing as a Quaker in America, and the influence on Opie of James Fenimore Cooper was significant.

Quakers generally placed much value on the reading of fellow Quakers' journals. Anne Deborah Richardson (1832-1873) provided in her journal an insight into English Quaker attitudes to the novel. At her Quaker school, novels were prohibited indiscriminately, with autobiographical Quaker works promoted instead. Richardson considered these journals 'dreary works, which I used to devour for the sake of the thread of narrative which ran through them'.<sup>413</sup> The development of the

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<sup>411</sup> Michael Slater, "Dickens, Charles (1812–1870)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (OUP, 2004-14): n.p.

<sup>412</sup> Ann Farrant, Amelia Opie: The Quaker Celebrity (Hindringham: JIG Publishing, 2014) 335. When Brontë was attacked for the 'alleged immoral tendency' of her novel, Opie apparently commented that 'it did not appear to her immoral, but certainly coarse and indelicate in some parts': Diary of Cecilia Brightwell 1842-1866, Norfolk Record Office, MS 69. Quoted in Farrant, 335. What Opie thought of Brontë's decision to use a male pseudonym is not recorded in this source.

<sup>413</sup> Anne Deborah Richardson, Memoir of Anne Deborah Richardson (Newcastle upon Tyne: J. M. Carr, 1877) 5. Quoted in Wright (37).

journal form by female Quaker ministers from 1740-1850, though, shows how this form – still edited and published by the Society – tended gradually to become more novelistic over this period. The spiritual commentary became combined with comments about personal ministerial experiences, news from other Quaker groups, correspondence to friends and family, and ‘even such prosaic matters as the weather, the state of the roads and scenery’ (Wright 49). The backdrop of these changes was the changing position of female Quaker ministers in England, and divisions between evangelical Quakers – including Gurney – and the Quietists, who supported orthodox Quaker doctrine. Evangelical doctrine gave the scriptures a lot of importance, challenging the orthodox belief in the Inner Light as the foundation of Quaker faith. Sarah Lynes Grubb was one of the female ministers who warned about doctrinal changes, arguing in 1833 that the Society was ‘fast levelling us with the world at large!’.<sup>414</sup>

Such opposition to the influence of Evangelicalism on Quaker doctrine – from Mary Capper, for example – had already led Gurney to speak out against female ministers:

It is far indeed from being an indication of life and soundness in the body at large, when the stronger sex withdraws from the battles of the Lord, and leaves them to be fought by those whose physical weakness and delicacy have an obvious tendency to render them less fit for the combat.<sup>415</sup>

Implicit in the writings of female Quaker ministers at this time was a recognition that the emphasis on the scriptures – St Paul in particular – threatened to undermine their authority as ministers (Wright 48). I think that Gurney’s struggle to assert the importance of reading the right sort of material – divinely-inspired Holy Scriptures – might have made him even stricter about the condemnation of more

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<sup>414</sup> Sarah Grubb, A Selection from the Letters of the late Sarah Grubb (Sudbury: J. Wright, 1848) 291. Quoted in Wright (47n). Wright notes that ‘Quaker women had a long tradition of writing letters ... in the sure knowledge that they would be included in their journals’ (47n), so the letter and journal form can be considered synonymous in this regard.

<sup>415</sup> Joseph John Gurney, Observations on the Religious Particularities of the Society of Friends (London: J. and A. Arch; York: William Alexander and Son; Norwich: S. Wilkin; Edinburgh: A. Constable and Co., 1824) 227. Quoted in Wright (48).

frivolous reading, the mere results of a creative human imagination. His condemnation had some effect on Opie's practice after her conversion, but her reading of novels, for instance, suggests that she was not entirely convinced. A comparison with Quaker attitudes in America may indicate a reason why.

American Quakers seem to have had more lenient doctrine than English ones in many matters. Commenting on Rebecca Jones of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting – a prominent figure who promoted the foundation of a Women's Yearly Meeting in the latter half of the eighteenth century – Wright comments that, 'as an American, she was possibly advocating a somewhat liberal interpretation of the Society's doctrine' (46). A more liberal attitude does seem to have been in place regarding fiction, since a recent work on the influence of Quakers on American writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century does not even mention any particular Quaker attitudes to fiction.<sup>416</sup> The American writer we need to focus on here is James Fenimore Cooper, not only as a novelist of Quaker heritage, but as Opie's friend. Cooper was frequently considered to be "the American Scott" and he was greatly indebted to Scott with regard to narrative style and characterisation.<sup>417</sup> He is best known for his "Leather-Stocking" tales, historical narratives set mainly in between pre-Revolutionary and early nineteenth-century America, and their hero Natty Bumppo, who came to be considered the best and most influential Quaker in American literature.<sup>418</sup> Through this creation, Cooper emerged as a Quaker writer who was finally defending the group through influential, sympathetic Quaker characters, which too few American Quaker writers had managed before him.<sup>419</sup> The way in which Canby discusses Quaker writers reinforces the idea that strict prohibitions to fiction-writing were not in place for Quakers in America in Cooper's time.

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<sup>416</sup> James Peacock, "'What they seek for is in themselves': Quaker Language and Thought in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century American Literature," *Quaker Studies* 12.2 (2008).

<sup>417</sup> Stephen Railton, "James Fenimore Cooper," *The Cambridge Companion to American Novelists*, ed. Timothy Parrish (Cambridge: CUP, 2013) 3.

<sup>418</sup> The first of the five "Leather-Stocking" tales was *The Pioneers* (1823); the last was *The Deerslayer* (1841). The second of these tales – *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) – was a nineteenth-century bestseller. Henry Seidel Canby, *Classic Americans* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1932) 97; 114. Quoted in David Sox, *Quakers and the Arts: 'Plain and Fancy'* (York, England: Sessions Book Trust, and Richmond, Indiana, USA: Friends United Press, 2000) 38; 42.

<sup>419</sup> Canby, 185, quoted in Sox, 42.

Through David d'Angers, Opie met Cooper at Cooper's request when they were both visiting Paris in 1830: 'Let us go and see the author of Temper ... I have a profound admiration for her works' (MacGregor 110).<sup>420</sup> Brightwell records (from Opie's journal of 20 December 1830) that 'Fenimore Cooper called on me; a most interesting interview! I read him a manuscript' (Memorials 272). There is no more evidence of Opie having read Cooper's works, nor do we know what kind of manuscript she had to read to him in 1830: possibly one of her draft "Recollections from a visit to Paris in 1802", which she serialised between July 1831 and February 1832. The friendship that Cooper fostered with Opie may have been a contributory factor in Opie's developing attitudes to the novel as seen through Quaker eyes. She may have come to consider that the Quakers had the potential to see the novel as a possible force for good, as she always had. Gurney's encouraging comments about Opie's friendship with Cooper may also have inspired her to think that his attitudes to the novel might be changing.

Gurney's letters home during his missionary journeys often included small parts to lots of different people, and one letter of 27 June 1839 described his visit to Cooperstown – Cooper's family estate – and his time there with Cooper and his wife. Gurney explained to his children (John Henry and Anna) that he had met 'A Opie's friend James Fenimore Cooper, the famous novellist [sic.] – sometimes called the Walter Scott of America'.<sup>421</sup> Gurney described how he and a friend had called 'to invite him and his family to the meeting appointed for the evening – and they broke away from a gay party in order to attend it' (27 June 1839). There is certainly much to suggest that Cooper was not a strict Quaker, with references more often to the influence of his Quaker heritage on his writing or that of others.<sup>422</sup> But Gurney's derogatory comments about the Hicksites (who appear to have been more lenient than mainstream Quakers in North America) in his Journey would suggest that Cooper was not a Hicksite, however prevalent they were in America at the time.

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<sup>420</sup> MacGregor cites the '*Carr MS.*, David d'Angers to Amelia Opie, 15 February, 1852' (110n). This source has now disappeared.

<sup>421</sup> Joseph John Gurney, letter to J. H. and Anna Gurney, 27 June 1839, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/3/718, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>422</sup> George Dekker, James Fenimore Cooper: The Novelist (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 6; Sox 38; Alan Frank Dyer, ed., James Fenimore Cooper: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism (New York, Westport (Connecticut), and London: Greenwood Press, 1991) xiv; 48-49; 67; Peacock, 197.

Gurney provided evidence of Cooper's Quakerism here, without mentioning any apparent discrepancy between him being such a celebrated writer and being a Quaker, and without expressing any concern that he should unduly influence Opie. Cooper's more liberal attitude to fiction, and Gurney's apparent tacit acceptance of it, may have contributed to Opie's later willingness to defend fiction and to assert her literary identity in the meantime.

In 1837, Opie signed the "Address of certain writers of Great Britain to the Senate of the United States in Congress assembled" requesting the enactment of a copyright law between Great Britain and the United States.<sup>423</sup> This document explained how the want of such a law injured the reputation of the authors, allowing booksellers not only to set their own prices but also to alter the content of the works, all the while preventing any financial gain to the authors from the sale of their works. 'The case of Walter Scott' was then cited, giving an example of an author very popular not only in Great Britain but also in America, who died in pecuniary misery when money from American sales might have prevented such an end. Opie was the fourth signatory on this address, which included Isaac and Benjamin Disraeli; Charles Lyell; Harriet Martineau; Maria Edgeworth; the Countess of Blessington; William and Mary Howitt; S. C. Hall and Mrs S. C. Hall; Robert Southey; Joanna Baillie, and Mary Mitford in a list of dozens.<sup>424</sup> By signing this document, Opie demonstrated her ongoing identity for herself as a writer, and a sense of the need to preserve her reputation, as well as a sense of her right to receive money from the sale of her works in America. It is important to consider Opie's interest in money at this point, given both her unfortunate financial situation (which becomes clear) but more significantly her implication to Gurney in the 1844 letter shortly for discussion that money was no incentive for her 1840s republications. The recent republications of Opie's works in 1838 perhaps made her desirous of achieving a similar Complete Works in England from a financial point of view. But when referring to the American Complete Works in her letter justifying her English republications to Gurney (23 Feb. 1844), Opie also indicated that the English reprint gave her 'an opportunity of

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<sup>423</sup> "Address of Certain Authors of Great Britain to the Senate of the United States in Congress assembled," 2 February 1837, ms, HM11234, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

<sup>424</sup> On his first journey to America in 1842, Dickens also lamented the non-existence of such a copyright law in more than one public address (Slater n.p.). "The International Copyright Act" would only come into force in America in 1891.

correcting whatever I deemed amiss in the said publications', and that she was 'pleased to have an opportunity of doing in England what I wished I could have done in America' (23 Feb. 1844).

The reference to Walter Scott in this "Address to American Congress", and Opie's American republications remind us of the degree to which British and American audiences were reading the same works at this point. Cooper's success was partly due to his ability to transfer to the American novel the character and narrative archetypes to which readers of English books had become accustomed (Railton 3). Dickens, like Cooper, provides another example of a writer with huge Anglo-American popularity around the mid-nineteenth century. On his first visit to America in 1842, Dickens had been completely swamped with admirers, but his impressions of the country ultimately left him sour on that trip (Slater n.p.). The partly-American setting of Martin Chuzzlewit indicates further that people in Britain and America at the time 'shared a single imaginative horizon', although the way Dickens portrayed America and Americans in that novel would hardly have endeared him to his New-World readership.<sup>425</sup>

It was in this context that Opie decided to republish her works in England. Opie may well have considered that these writers were committed to 'the novel of purpose', acknowledging that social reform was something that charged along in parallel in Britain and America (Claybaugh 31; 2). Where Opie could observe Quaker writers like Cooper prosper as novelists in America, and could see the novel as a potentially acceptable platform for her many reform concerns, she may have found another defence in her mind for novel-reading and novel-writing.

### 1840s republications

MacGregor wrote of a complete edition of Opie's works having been published in America in 1838 (120), and Opie's letter to Gurney defending her actions made reference to this publication (23 Feb. 1844). No such edition seems to have been published in England, although Opie's letters suggest it might have been planned. The most recent editions of both Father and Daughter and Adeline

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<sup>425</sup> Amanda Claybaugh, The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2007) 3. Patricia Ingham, ed., The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit, 1843, by Charles Dickens (London: Penguin, 2004) xviii-xxi.

Mowbray provide the most accurate information about not only what Opie was republishing in the 1840s, but how the texts of these two novels were changed by Opie for these later publications.<sup>426</sup> “A New and Illustrated Edition” of The Father and Daughter appeared in 1843 for Longman, but Opie’s letters reveal that this publication was part of a plan by Grove and Son – new publishers for Opie – to reprint all of her works, by this point mostly out of print. Indeed, a further edition of The Father and Daughter was published by Grove in 1845. In 1844, “A New and Illustrated Edition” of Adeline Mowbray appeared (with two of Opie’s earlier tales), published by Longman but printed by Grove.<sup>427</sup> A letter to Wilkin regarding Opie’s corrections for the Grove editions of The Father and Daughter and Adeline Mowbray also indicated the particular importance Opie attached to the revisions of the later novel:

I should also be glad to ascertain whether he did receive ye books time enough to correct the faults. I corrected in pencil in the Father and Daughter & more especially in A Mowbray – the latter alterations I should be very unhappy not to have made – & would willingly pay for a cancel to have these made. Those in the 1st book are comparatively unimportant.<sup>428</sup>

I analyse how Opie revised Adeline Mowbray – as one of the only works we actually know she revised, in a long list of works planned for republication – to make it more appropriate for Victorian sensibilities. Apart from removing ‘all mention of the great Name, & other blemishes’ (Opie to Gurney 23 Feb. 1844), I think Opie was encouraged by the concept of ‘Dickens the entertainer’ not to need overly to

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<sup>426</sup> King and Pierce, eds, Father, 57; 363-367; McWhir, ed., 37-38; 285-294. Other reprinted works included “White Lies” (New Tales, vol. 2, 1818); “Appearance is Against Her” (Tales of Real Life, vol. 2, 1813), and The Stagecoach and Other Tales, which was a new publication made up of the tales used to furnish examples of various different lies in Illustrations of Lying (1825), without the moral instruction provided in the original.

<sup>427</sup> The two tales were “Welcome Home” (New Tales vol. 4 (1818) ) and “The Quaker and the Young Man of the World” (New Tales vol. 3 (1818)).

<sup>428</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 27 August 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/143, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Reproduced with permission from the Norfolk Record Office. Opie removed eleven exclamatory phrases with irreligious overtones in The Father and Daughter; the other changes were mostly stylistic.

moralise, and wished to engage her readers' sympathy in this new literary climate.<sup>429</sup> She went back to her original 1805 text and did not include changes she had made in 1810 which made Adeline and Glenmurray seem more culpable. In the 1844 text, Opie also removed a reference to the possible positive influence on Adeline of Rousseau's *Julie*, a decision that sheds light on how Opie was modifying her work for a new audience.

There was a general focus on 'cleaning up' the text in Opie's revisions, which indicate her sensitivity to the sensibilities of her new audience (King and Pierce eds *Adeline* xxxiv). She removed references to 'Lord' and 'God' and oaths throughout, for instance, even in expressions like 'Lord bless me!' (49) or 'Thank God' (86), but I do not think these omissions were made to accommodate her Quaker friends. Opie wrote in her justification to Gurney about 'my own books (which Friends never read, & know nothing about)' (23 Feb. 1844), so I think these particular omissions were a question of taste personal to Opie's own Quaker sensibilities.

There are larger changes in accordance with 'cleaning up' the text which indicate that Opie was working from both the 1805 and 1810 texts to revise in 1844. One such episode includes the verbal and physical assault Adeline suffers from two strangers in the street. Adeline has just left the office of the lecherous lawyer Langley, from whom she has been seeking help in finding her marriage certificate, and two men recognise her as the 'sweet creature' who formerly lived with 'that crazy fellow, Glenmurray' (203). The original 1805 text reads thus:

"How do you do, my fleet and sweet girl?" said one of the gentlemen, patting her on the back as he spoke: – Adeline, roused at the insult, looked at him proudly and angrily, and walked on. "What! angry! If I may be so bold, (with a sneering smile,) fair creature, may I ask where you live now?"

"No, sir," replied Adeline; "you are wholly unknown to me."

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<sup>429</sup> Jon Mee, *The Cambridge Introduction to Charles Dickens* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010) 1-19.

“But were you to tell me where you live, we might cease to be strangers; but perhaps your favours are all bespoken. – Pray who is your friend now?”

“Oh! I have but few friends,” cried Adeline mournfully.

“Few! the devil!” replied the young templar; “and how many would you have?” Here he put his arm around her waist: and his companion giving way to a loud fit of laughter, Adeline clearly understood what he meant by the term “friend”. (204)

In 1810 and 1844, Opie modified the text to read:

“How do you do, my fleet and sweet girl?” said one of the gentlemen: – Adeline, roused at the insult, looked at him proudly and angrily, and walked on. “What! angry! If I may be so bold, (with a sneering smile,) fair creature, may I ask where you live now?”

“No, sir,” replied Adeline; “you are wholly unknown to me.”

“But were you to tell me where you live, we might cease to be strangers; but pray who is your friend now?”

Here, as his companion gave way to a loud fit of laughter, Adeline clearly understood what he meant by the term “friend”.<sup>430</sup>

Apart from making the text more suitable for Victorian sensibilities, these adjustments also show how Opie was removing the correlations in the text between Adeline and a common prostitute, therefore maintaining more of a focus on her naivety and otherwise virtuous existence. This revision, as well as 45 others where Opie edited the 1810 and 1844 edition in exactly the same way would indicate that she was working partly with the 1810 text, even if she may have been working principally from the 1805 text.<sup>431</sup> If she was working with both texts, then those

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<sup>430</sup> Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray; Or, The Mother and Daughter. A Tale* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844) 221.

<sup>431</sup> These revisions are often single words, but sometimes phrases, and sometimes long passages of text, and occur on the following pages of the McWhir edition: 79; 88; 103; 109; 119 (two revisions); 124 (two revisions); 132; 135; 139 (three revisions); 143; 151; 160; 166; 167 (two revisions); 177;

occasions when she chose to adhere to the 1805 text rather than 1810 can be seen as positive choices. They indicate that she was interested in keeping the ambiguity of the 1805 text, and allowing her readers to come to their own conclusions about the culpability of Adeline and Glenmurray.

There is a short passage reiterating the shortcomings of Glenmurray in 1810 which does not appear in the 1844 text (52), but a much longer and significant 1810 revision was not chosen for the 1844 text. At the end of Chapter 10 in the 1805 and 1844 texts, Opie wrote of Adeline and Glenmurray that ‘their attachment was cemented by one of the strongest of all ties – the consciousness of mutual benefit and assistance’ (103). In 1810, Opie added:

But the connexion that is founded on a guilty disregard of sound and positive institutions cannot long be productive of happiness, even though the reasonings of perverted intellect and the persuasions of self-love have convinced the offending parties that such an union is wise and virtuous.

Adeline and Glenmurray, while secluded from society, might fancy themselves happy, and be so perhaps in some measure, although they had violated those sacred ties by which society’s best interests are kept together: but as soon as society could resume in any way its power, and opportunity of operating on their happiness, that happiness must necessarily vanish; as a dead body which has been preserved from decay by being entirely excluded from the external air, moulders into dust immediately on being exposed to its influence.  
(McWhir ed. “Textual Variants” 288)

This addition gave a very different conclusion to the chapter, and focussed on the vicious nature of the lovers’ union outside marriage, arguing that they were necessarily doomed to a life of unhappiness. Elizabeth Gaskell’s decision in Ruth (1853) to allow her fallen heroine to die – of an illness, like Adeline – indicates that the question of how to redeem fallen women was still a concern in Victorian

literature. The excessive degree of Ruth's penitence, though, suggests that Gaskell, like Opie before her, found unsatisfactory a certain literary "need" to kill off a fallen woman. Opie's decision not to stress Adeline and Glenmurray's culpability in her 1844 text indicates her engagement with the 1840s literary climate, which saw 'a defense of the novel already informing the early reception of Dickens: the novelist had special force as an agent of *sympathy*, who might elicit and shape a reader's understanding of lives seemingly remote from her own'.<sup>432</sup> Opie was more interested in keeping the ambiguity in her original text, rather than telling her readers how they were to interpret Adeline and Glenmurray's situation.

There is one particularly significant passage which occurs in both Opie's original 1805 and revised 1810 text, but which was removed for the 1844 edition. Opie referred to Rousseau's Julie as a novel that might have encouraged Adeline to see the value of marriage, had she been allowed to read it to the end. Adeline has been in her stepfather Sir Patrick O'Carrol's library looking for something to read, but, finding novels and not being accustomed to novel-reading, Adeline finds nothing to her taste. In the 1844 text, Opie wrote:

But Adeline, unprepared by any reading of the kind to receive and relish the poison contained in them, turned with disgust from pages so uncongenial to her feelings; nor did her eye dwell delighted on any of the stores which the shelves contained.

Disappointed in her hopes of finding amusement in reading, Adeline had recourse to walking. (Adeline 1844 67)

The 1805 and 1810 editions read quite differently:

But Adeline, unprepared by any reading of the kind to receive and relish the poison contained in them, turned with disgust from pages so uncongenial to her feelings; nor did her eye dwell delighted on any of the stores which the shelves contained, till she opened the *Nouvelle Heloise*; and as soon as she had read a few letters in that enchanting

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<sup>432</sup> Adams, James Eli, "A History of Criticism of the Victorian Novel," The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel, ed. Deirdre David (Cambridge: CUP, 2012) 63.

work, she seated herself in the apartment but the moment before become disgusting to her; and in a short time she forgot even Glenmurray himself, – or rather, she gave his form to the eloquent lover of Julie. But, unfortunately, the bride [Mrs Mowbray] came in while her daughter was thus pleasantly engaged; and on being informed what her studies were, she peremptorily forbid her to read a book so pregnant with mischief; and though she had not read it, and consequently could not justly appreciate its character, she was sure, on the word of others, that such reading was improper for her daughter.

In vain did Adeline venture to say that Julie, like the works of Glenmurray, might be, perhaps, condemned by those who had never read a line of it. The book was prohibited; and Adeline, with a reluctant hand, restored it to its place.

Had she read it, the sacrifice which the guilty but penitent Julia [sic.] makes to filial affection, and the respectable light in which the institution of marriage is held up to view, would have strengthened, no doubt, Adeline's resolution to obey her mother, and give up Glenmurray; and have led her to reconsider these opinions which taught her to think contemptible what ages and nations had been content to venerate. But it was decreed that every thing the mother of Adeline did should accelerate the fate of her devoted daughter.

Disappointed in her hopes of finding amusement in reading, Adeline had recourse to walking. (93)

This long omission removed a reference that had lost some of its immediate poignancy. Rousseau – as a sentimental hero of fiction-writing (in Julie) or a draconian suppressor of women in his educational writings (in Emile) – was a problematic figure topical to turn-of-the-nineteenth-century debate, but not as much in the 1840s. The subtleties in particular of Opie's apparent endorsement of Rousseau – where Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays had signalled the dangers of reading Julie – yet Opie's implied criticism of him as an educationalist and parent (in the character of Mrs Mowbray) would have been lost without this immediate context. The 1844 text unfortunately leaves the reader with the impression that Opie might have shared the idea that novels contained only 'poison', even though she was using

the novel form to send that message, where the longer original puts the possible 'poison' of novels in the context of Rousseau's ambiguous relationship to the novel as exemplified in Julie.

Although Opie's Quaker friends would not have read her works, Quaker sensitivity is still an important point. As a committed Quaker, Opie did not want to present a novel – precisely the fictional medium that the Quakers most disapproved – as a possible measure which might have prevented Adeline's fall. I think Opie wanted to remove such a facile solution in order that she might more deliberately strengthen her focus on how impossible it is for a woman to come back from dishonour, however possible Opie might wish it to be. If this change in emphasis intensified Adeline's point that death is preferable to a dishonourable existence, it is not because of an increased interest in the religiosity of the novel as McWhir implies, but because Opie wanted to highlight, again, how unsatisfactory a situation that is for women (Introduction 31-32). The 1810 passage about how Adeline and Glenmurray's marriage-less union destined them for misery – quite rightly identified by McWhir as a religious passage – was not included in Opie's 1844 revision (Introduction 29). Opie was interested in her revisions not in making the novel more religious, but in maintaining as much of the ambiguity present in the 1805 text. The removal of the Rousseau reference simultaneously removed a problematic and out-of-date connection, and helped Opie to keep Adeline's situation ambiguous: it removed a possible facile solution to Adeline's predicament.

The 1844 edition shows Opie's ongoing interest in Adeline Mowbray as a novel that benefits merely from a few alterations to make it speak more clearly to a new audience about the plight of a virtuous woman led astray, for whom a reintegration into respectable society should not prove impossible. The way Opie revised the text in 1844 pointed towards a decision to revisit this work with the ambiguity present in the first edition, and with more of a sense of leaving unanswered questions of female emancipation. At a point where the ambiguities and complexities of reconciling a Quaker life with republications really came to the fore in Opie's life – as the following discussion of Opie's letters to Wilkin, Gurney and Fletcher demonstrates – there is certainly a case for Adeline Mowbray as a novel that best epitomises Opie's struggle in the 1840s, however hastily the 1844 text may have been prepared (McWhir Introduction 31; 38).

Opie's letters to Simon Wilkin, Josiah Fletcher, and Joseph John Gurney

This section considers Opie's correspondence with Wilkin, who had printed many of Opie's works, and with Fletcher, initially a pupil of Wilkin's who, from 1830, had been in a publishing partnership with Wilkin (Jewson Wilkin 65; 63). Both men advised Opie on the republications, which would meet with such disapproval from Gurney, as a transcription of the entire letter from Opie to Gurney defending her actions demonstrates shortly here (23 Feb. 1844).<sup>433</sup> Despite their partnership, it becomes clear from the correspondence that Wilkin and Fletcher's individual attitudes to Opie as a literary figure differed greatly, with very different impressions left in their respective archives. By the time Opie decided that republishing her fictions was not against Quaker commitments, she was not afraid to defend this position even to Gurney, but she implied to him no interest in money from the transactions. The Wilkin correspondence, however, reveals Opie's mercenary interest in republishing, which she did not discuss with Gurney, assuring him indeed that she had received no money. The letters to Fletcher pretend that she did not authorize Grove's republication of her works, when she evidently did: the letters to Wilkin reveal that Fletcher himself was well aware of such authorization. These correspondences demonstrate Opie's struggles to negotiate her belief in the appropriateness of fiction with three quite different people to whom she related differently-focussed accounts of her involvement and motivations.

The Simon Wilkin Letters indicate a close relationship between Wilkin and Opie. The first letter in the archive at the Norfolk Record Office – concerning the publication of Detraction Displayed – is very jolly and friendly in tone, but also shows Opie's confidence in placing a work with Wilkin as she writes 'I dislike the idea of having a work printed by anyone but thee –'.<sup>434</sup> Opie then comments that 'JGG thinks London may need to be resorted to' (19 March 1828) in order that the work might be out in time for Yearly Meeting. This comment shows not only how well Opie knows Wilkin – that she can cheekily induce him to be swift by citing the competition

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<sup>433</sup> Gurney knew Wilkin, having supported him financially. Through Wilkin, Gurney also knew Fletcher. With Wilkin and Fletcher both being Baptists, the three men also shared a connection in nonconformity.

<sup>434</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 19 March 1828, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/118, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Jewson also cites this letter, Wilkin, 65.

– but also reminds us how involved Gurney still was with Opie’s writing career at this point.

The archive strongly supports the idea that Wilkin acted in some way as Opie’s literary agent with regard to the Grove republications. Opie expresses in the Wilkin correspondence just how many works she might be considering for the republications by Grove. She mentions wanting Wilkin to send Grove a list of her ‘writings’ - 31 or 32 volumes in total, she believes – but to include also four volumes that were published anonymously, ‘one of them at least, in one volume, for which without a name I got one hundred pounds’.<sup>435</sup> The detail about the money received would identify this work as The Only Child (1821), as well as Opie’s comment that ‘it was much admired in a high circle’ (26 January 1842). Other comments also point towards more of an involvement in fiction than might have been appropriate at this juncture as Opie writes ‘I have thought of publishing with my name, and altering the catastrophe’ (26 January 1842). Opie expresses interest in a project with Grove, also since she wants to find a publisher for a volume or two of ‘Miscellanies’ (26 January 1842), and in a later letter she refers to sending up her Simple Tales (1806); Tales of Real Life (1813); a volume of New Tales (1818); Madeline (1822); Valentine’s Eve (1816), and a volume of Tales of the Heart (1820).<sup>436</sup> In a further letter still, Opie states her wish to reprint Tales of the Pemberton Family (1825), so it seems that the scope of Grove’s reprints was quite extensive in Opie’s mind.<sup>437</sup> This willingness to embrace Grove’s project for her works is important to keep in mind when later letters to Fletcher suggest that Opie was not happy with their ideas or what they had done.

A recurrent theme in the letters is Opie’s poverty, expressed, for instance, when requesting Wilkin’s assistance in procuring payment for a book from a friend, writing ‘He says the book is for a charity – but does not Charity begin at home? – Do say what is required of me – I would not be mean, and exacting, but though neither “dumb, nor deaf”, I am poor’.<sup>438</sup> In the first letter to discuss the idea of publishing with

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<sup>435</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 26 January 1842, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/138, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>436</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 27 August 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/143, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>437</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 24 January 1844, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/144, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>438</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 31 July 1828, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/123, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

Grove, Opie writes ‘well – but I know not what to say to such a poor remuneration for Copyright and I must take time to consider’ (26 Jan. 1842). In the Wilkin letters selected for publication by King and Pierce, it is Opie’s attitude towards appropriate remuneration that seems to be the focus. In the first of these letters, Opie writes that ‘Josiah Fletcher and I have just had a long consultation together’, with him encouraging her to ask Wilkin for a favour. The following quotation is necessarily long because it is essential to observe the degree to which Fletcher was implied in Opie’s early decision-making about the Grove project, given the letters he would choose to place in his archive:

A private transaction it is to be at present at the least and entre nous. All my egregiously sublime and delightful works for such they undoubtedly are, are quite out of print in England and alas! I can’t obtain a [cent] from America where there is a whole new set published in 1828 ( – but this is by the by – ). About two months or more ago, I received a letter from Grove and sons booksellers in Trinity Street Borough, asking my leave to reprint my works (no doubt Josiah says in the small edition now going) and offering to give me a certain number of copies for myself – I replied that I would consider the subject and on consulting Josiah, he said he would enquire the character of the Groves’s – he learnt they were respectable people, and he agreed with me that it was a duty I owed myself to let [the] new edition be printed, as it would give me an opportunity of making corrections and leaving out what I might wish to leave out and so on – and as I had no scruple against doing this I resolved to say yes – today the Groves have written requesting an answer as soon as is convenient and I therefore write to thee requesting thee to see them quickly if possible, and negotiate for me – Josiah says copies are a poor remuneration, and I think so too.<sup>439</sup>

In the next letter, three weeks later, Opie had again ‘consulted with Josiah’, coming to the conclusion she should ‘decline entirely friend Groves’s proposal to part

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<sup>439</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 18 January 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/139, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Quoted in King and Pierce, eds, 259. Reproduced with permission from the Norfolk Record Office.

with my copyright especially as the rights of copy are now by law certified and established'.<sup>440</sup> What she then wrote considered not only the importance of money to Opie, but also the intention of publishing The Only Child (1821) under her name:

But as I have no means of selling the sets that he is inclined to give me, I had rather have two sets given me, and a small sum in money ... than accept a larger number of copies and that all – when I have ascertained exactly the new copyright law, and am assured of a right given me by that, which I am not now sure of, I shall know whether I can not reprint with my name, a tale published in 1821 without my name, being even suspected by [the] publisher – and I think it might be an advantage to friend Grove to publish that – But that is a future consideration – (3 Feb. 1843)<sup>441</sup>

The next letter sees an even more forthright and business-like Opie, who has returned to Grove what she 'means to insert in the document to be signed'.<sup>442</sup> Opie makes reference here to her cousin, Henry Perronet Briggs, from whom she had requested a loan of £100 in April 1834, with their acknowledged understanding that she would pay him back with 5 percent interest, making an identical request just over three months later.<sup>443</sup> Almost ten months after that, Opie included a 5 pound note in her letter to Briggs, signalling that this should cover the remainder of her debt.<sup>444</sup> But it is clear from her reference to giving Briggs her works in the following letter (almost a decade later) that she still had regular arrangements to borrow money from him. Her reaction to the proceedings with Grove was the following:

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<sup>440</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 3 February 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/140, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Quoted in King and Pierce, eds, 259-260.

<sup>441</sup> Reproduced with permission from the Norfolk Record Office.

<sup>442</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 24 May 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/141, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Quoted in King and Pierce, eds, 260.

<sup>443</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Henry Perronet Briggs, 24 April 1834, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP 119, Huntington Lib., San Marino; Amelia Opie, letter to Henry Perronet Briggs, 27 July 1834, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP 123, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

<sup>444</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Henry Perronet Briggs, 6 May 1835, Correspondence of Amelia Opie, ms, OP 129, Huntington Lib., San Marino.

But there is not one word of any payment to me – and I can't go about with a donkey to sell the copies he is willing to give me – This must not be – I can't think it right to give Briggs my works pour l'amour de ces beaux yeux –

To be sure I am getting & shall get nothing by the departed children of my brains, while I live – So while benefiting him, I am not unbenefiting [sic.] myself. Should I not consult my lawyer? Thy beaufrere – The good man runs a risk, I know – but still my love of money makes me wish to have money, rather than books and in the end, he, by giving me so many copies diminishes his profits on [the] Edition.<sup>445</sup>

Opie then made an interesting reflection which King and Pierce do not record. She wrote:

One thing I must say

I cannot bear to mix up things spiritual with things secular – and wish to let the matter rest till YM [Yearly Meeting] is over – on 2<sup>nd</sup> day Monday week and Tuesday week, we might confer again – In the meanwhile if he liked, as I mean he should print the books, he might begin the father and daughter.<sup>446</sup>

Opie had a clear sense of her Quaker allegiance, but also how this transaction might not fit into that framework. Fletcher was also still part of the proceedings, and Opie wrote again to Wilkin in January 1844 citing Fletcher's advice for the ongoing project.<sup>447</sup> This is the final letter in the Wilkin correspondence, where Opie officially closes 'my West End London book! and so much the better, my best feelings and emotions say for me!' (24 January 1844). Whatever impression Fletcher

<sup>445</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 24 May 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/141, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Quoted (with ellipses) in King and Pierce, eds, 260. Reproduced with permission from the Norfolk Record Office.

<sup>446</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 24 May 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/141, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Reproduced with permission from the Norfolk Record Office.

<sup>447</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 24 January 1844, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/144, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

might later want to give, Opie was definitely involved in the republications with Grove, and she was well aware of what she was doing. The citation above would also suggest, however, some conflict in Opie, which comes to the fore in certain later letters to Fletcher.

Opie refers to ‘Josiah’ Fletcher in her letters to Wilkin on numerous occasions, which is unsurprising given their business partnership (Jewson Wilkin 63). Nevertheless, the letters from Opie to Fletcher have quite a different emphasis from those to Wilkin, which may be in part owing to the nature of the Fletcher archive. Approximately fifty blank pages were bound into a pristine copy of Brightwell’s Memorials, where Fletcher then placed a selection of his correspondence with Opie.<sup>448</sup> He provided this introductory statement:

The following are a few – (a very small proportion indeed) of the notes and scraps I received from Mrs Opie during the many years I knew her. Many of them vividly recall, even now, – interviews and conversations and they form to me a valued memorial of her kind regard. They are for the most part arranged chronologically to page 46. Then follow a few without date and unarranged – then a few addressed to my wife (see especially page       ) <sup>449</sup>                      July 17<sup>th</sup> 1860

It seems clear, then, that Fletcher aligned himself with Brightwell and her account of Opie’s life, and it is difficult to know how much more of an impartial account we may have had about Opie’s 1840s republications had Fletcher not selected and placed his letters in such a partisan manner.

Opie referred in an early letter in this collection to giving ‘my friend S Wilkin’ more of her manuscript for Detraction Displayed, commenting in a letter of 1833 that Wilkin had not visited, which was probably in relation to Opie’s forthcoming Lays for

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<sup>448</sup> Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/1-58, catalogued as ‘Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie’, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>449</sup> This space was left blank by Fletcher. Fletcher’s very distinctive rendering of the figure ‘8’ indicates not only that he wrote this introductory paragraph but also that he numbered the letters in the collection himself. Reproduced with permission from the Norfolk Record Office.

the Dead (1834).<sup>450</sup> Opie commented in February 1843 that she had had a letter from 'S Wilkin that I will show thee' which, given the content of her letters to Wilkin at that time, would probably concern her remuneration for the Grove republications.<sup>451</sup> It may be regarding the same subject that Opie asked Fletcher to call on her because there was something 'I want to discuss with you as a dear friend, which you always have been'.<sup>452</sup> But there are no letters in the Fletcher archive from the 1840s which refer explicitly to the Grove republications. When such letters do appear in the archive, it is much later (1850), and Opie's comments seem quite different from those to Wilkin, but also incongruous with what she has said to Gurney in her 'defence of fiction'. In this case, a chronological discussion of this correspondence seems necessary, so Opie's letter to Gurney should be presented before the remainder of the Fletcher papers.

Opie's correspondence with Gurney had been unremarkable in this period. The two letters preceding this one in the Gurney Archive at the Library of the Society of Friends were to Gurney in Darlington (17 Oct. 1842) and in France and Germany (11 Aug. 1843), and are affectionate letters about his travels.<sup>453</sup> The letter that follows Opie's letter defending her republications in the archive was written to Gurney's son, John Henry (1 Apr. 1844): it is a very short letter and makes no mention of her republications.<sup>454</sup> A letter to Gurney came not long after (7 Apr. 1844),

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<sup>450</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 14 April 1828, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/1, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 31 October 1833, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/3, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. The Fletcher correspondence deals with procurement of stationery, works, and advice on Opie's poetry in particular. Like the Wilkin correspondence, there are frequent references to Opie's poverty.

<sup>451</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 31 October 1833, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/14, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 3 February 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/140, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 24 May 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/141, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>452</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 5 November 1844, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/18, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>453</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 17 October 1842, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/378, Library of the Society of Friends, London; Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 11 August 1843, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/379, Library of the Society of Friends, London. This correspondence seems rather sporadic: we must bear in mind that, most of the time, Opie and Gurney were both in or near Norwich and could meet instead of corresponding.

<sup>454</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to John Henry Gurney, 1 April October 1844, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/380A, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

when the family was in France again, but there is no mention of her republications here either, and the tone is light and convivial.<sup>455</sup> Opie's letter defending her republications was written over eight sides, in two small booklets. By Opie's standards, it is perhaps slightly sloppy, but there are not many crossings out, and it was clearly re-read for certain small superscript additions. It does not appear to have been written particularly quickly, nor are there any real signs of agitation, distress, or urgency. It appears here for the first time in its entirety, in order that its context – both with regard to the entire letter contents, and in comparison with the Wilkin and Fletcher letters – might be better appreciated.<sup>456</sup>

Bruton Street

2<sup>nd</sup> Mo 23<sup>rd</sup> \_ 44

My dearest friend,

Thy letter received this morning is worthy thee and most kindly expressed, but it is a true bill that has been brought against me.. & I must abide the consequences – the most painful far to me whatever be the result is, that I have given pain to thee by permitting to be done what I felt an act of justice to myself = ----  
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My tales were out of print (my works is the proper word) and heartily glad was I when I found there was a decree for a reprint, as it would give me an opportunity of correcting whatever I deemed amiss in the said publications -----

I knew there was an entire new edition of these printed rather recently in America & I was pleased to have an opportunity of doing in England what I wished I could have done in America ---

I never thought, nor do I now think that in doing this I have at all violated my engagements as a Friend. I promised never to write things of the same sort again, nor have I done so = but though I freely admit that novel-reading as it is contemptuously called, (& with some justice) has a tendency to make young persons disinclined to serious, & more instructive reading, & is therefore pernicious I never said, because I never thought that works of fiction were never to be read – on the

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<sup>455</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 7 April 1844, Gurney MSS, ms, TEMP MSS 434/1/381(a), Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>456</sup> Images of this letter are presented in Appendix E.

contrary, I believe simple moral tales the very best mode of instructing the young & the poor = else why do the pious of all sects & beliefs spread tracts in stories over the world – And why did the blessed Saviour teach in parables? -----

My own books (which Friends never read, & know nothing about) are, in my belief moral tales – & many many proofs have the kind & candid given me of the good they have occasionally done – These books, however full of errors, will survive me and in many languages, --- (some of them at least -) and when a few weeks (now months) ago, I thought my days were numbered I remembered with comfort that I had nearly executed the task I had undertaken – & felt no remorse of conscience for having assisted the printer \_ nor did I think myself responsible to any human being for having undertaken that task – I considered myself responsible to my God & my conscience. I had prayed much on the subject when, near a year ago, the application was made to me, & after some weeks [sic.] consideration I agreed to the proposal --- I got no money whatever \_ by it – only the pleasure of knowing<sup>457</sup> that all mention of the great Name, & other blemishes are to be expunged in the new edition. I never thought, & therefore never said that I disapproved “the Genius” [sic.] because if I had I must have told an absolute falsehood – & often have I debated this opinion with dearest Priscilla<sup>458</sup> \_\_\_ On the contrary, I have often felt gratitude to the Most High for having given me a talent by which as I have reason to believe, I have been permitted to do some good, to those who seek for amusements & probably wish for instruction in tales like mine\_ -----

“Tales” is the proper name for my little works \_\_\_ They are not (scarcely one of them) full of character, α story enough for a novel –

It seems to me very strange that the advertizement should never have met thine eyes sooner \_ \_ But no – as it now is, I think it was not originally - or - certainly not so widely circulated, nor can I assert that I knew my editorship or my aid as a corrector would have been so perniciously brought forward as it is now is [sic.] -----

Many of my religious friends & more than one Friend have said they thought I had done right \_ & a pious lady whom I never saw & who is the editor of serious books has written to me expressing her pleasure at this re-print - -----

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<sup>457</sup> The first booklet (380a) ends here, and the second booklet (380b) starts.

<sup>458</sup> Priscilla Gurney was Joseph John Gurney and Elizabeth Fry’s sister. She, along with Gurney, provided strong Norwich-based Quaker support for Opie.

Till thy note came, my mind was quite easy, & satisfied, & is now disturbed only by the consciousness that I have given pain to thee \_

I hope I have written clearly but I have coughed all night nearly, & have not long been rouzed by thy note from late morning slumber. If my visit at Ham-House is not forbidden after having been twice most kindly pressed on me, I go thither on 2<sup>nd</sup> day on my way home ---- rather unwillingly, lest, I prove a burden – except that I do hope once more to see thy precious --- sister Fry \_ --- ---<sup>459</sup>

24<sup>th</sup>

Yesterday I received a note from a Rachel G saying she will come for me on 2<sup>nd</sup> day. I dread turning my back on this house for ever! My second home!  
[sic.] –

But it must be gone through – Cough mixture has given me a good night. I do not feel that I have anything more to say in answer to thine dear Joseph – therefore – as I must rise, & dress I will hasten to conclude -.

With assurance of warm, & grateful love to thee, & thine & eminent hopes that I may be permitted to return to N- in health, and safety -

Thy loving friend

A Opie

(Up the spine of side 5, Opie wrote 'I am going to Hudson this morning at one in hopes to catch Margaret for a few minutes', and up the spine of side 8, Opie wrote 'I hope to find my darling granddaughter at Earlham'.) (23 Feb. 1844)<sup>460</sup>

The first thing to consider here is how quickly Opie responded to Gurney's letter of disapproval (of which there is no trace). This letter to Gurney reveals a lot about Opie's justification of these re-publications, her defence of fiction, and the implications as she sees them as a Quaker. Opie is very clear that she does not consider the republications to go against her Quaker commitments 'at all', and she is also very clear about the concept of merit in fiction, citing Jesus and his parables.

<sup>459</sup> Ham House was the residence of Samuel Gurney, another of the Gurney siblings.

<sup>460</sup> Reproduced with permission from the Library of the Society of Friends, London. Hudson Gurney was part of the Keswick branch of the Gurney family, a first cousin of Joseph John and good friends with Opie. In Opie's letters, she affectionately referred to Gurney as 'my son', so the 'granddaughter' mentioned here was Gurney's daughter, Anna.

Her reputation is clearly important to her, with her referring to how these works will 'survive me and in many languages'. She writes about having 'prayed much', also regarding her 'Genius', which she considers a God-given talent, allowing her to provide amusement as well as instruction. It appears also that most people, even Quakers, have seen no contradiction between these republications and Opie's Quaker faith, except Gurney.<sup>461</sup>

After the main body of the letter, Opie moves very quickly to mention having a cough, and the idea of leaving her house. Although the subject of the letter is clearly predominantly Gurney's reaction to the republications, perhaps restricted to the subject in order that Opie might send her reply as soon as possible, the extra parts she adds are not only reminders of their close friendship but also a grounding of the more serious subject matter, which is thereby stripped of some of its gravitas. When she states towards the end of the letter that she does not feel she can add any more in reply to Gurney's letter, it is very clear that, as far as Opie is concerned, the subject is closed.

There are three particular statements Opie makes which must be kept in mind when considering the Fletcher letters. Opie states here that she was 'heartily glad' to hear of the interest in publishing her earlier works; she does not consider the republications to go against her Quaker commitments 'at all', and she felt 'no remorse of conscience' in helping the printer, all sentiments which will be refuted in letters to Fletcher. But there are other comments Opie makes here which suggest that Opie cannot share with Gurney exactly how she feels about her career and her decision to republish. First of all, she refers to having written tales but no novel, when it is clear that Much to Blame was a novel and that Opie considered Temper to be a novel also, quite apart from all the works of Opie's which we now categorise as novels.<sup>462</sup> Her statement 'I got no money whatever \_ by it' then shows that her monetary incentive in republishing – so clearly expressed to Wilkin – is not something she considers relevant for Gurney. Opie declared 'only the pleasure' of removing blemishes from the works in this letter to Gurney, but if that had been her only incentive, she surely would not have minded being paid in copies of her works. Where she insisted to Wilkin time and again that she required proper remuneration,

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<sup>461</sup> Opie does stipulate, though, that Quakers would not come into direct contact with her works.

<sup>462</sup> Joanne Tong, "The Return of the Prodigal Daughter: Finding the Family in Amelia Opie's Novels," Studies in the Novel 36.4 (Winter 2004): 465.

she felt she could not share with Gurney how financially important these republications were to her.

The first letter in the Fletcher archive which considers the 1840s publications explicitly indicates discomfort which does not tie in with what Opie had written both to Wilkin and to Gurney himself. It was 1850 by then, and a friend of Opie's had seen an advertisement for her republications. Opie wrote to Fletcher in consternation 'Where, and what can this mean? Is it the printer in Trinity Street [Grove] who has so advertised? Don't they know what it can mean?'.<sup>463</sup> Her letter to Gurney in 1844, however, had suggested that she was completely at peace with the idea of the republications. Later in 1850, Opie wrote another letter to Fletcher which seemed to be in complete contradiction to her acknowledged involvement with the Grove republications in both the Wilkin and the Gurney correspondence:

Dear Friend,

I dare not let such a note go to my Co, nor do I think they deserve it. I could not in conscience ever authorize a complete edition of my books and Grove's was prompted unknown to me - and then I contrived to correct erase and alter what I disapproved. I never did or could understand - what bargain they made with my Co - but the 1<sup>st</sup> edition did not sell ... I own to my shame that I was so restricted by friends and my Quaker prohibitions that I was so alarmed when Grove first owned what he had done that I could not bear to think or enquire much on the subject - I have no reason to say or believe that the Co entered into an engagement to reprint my entire works - .<sup>464</sup>

The short note that accompanies this letter in the archive, written the following day, implied that Opie really did consider her 'Co' – Longman's, in theory – at fault in these proceedings.<sup>465</sup> But the 'long note' to Fletcher which Opie mentioned here was

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<sup>463</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 23 January 1850, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/32, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>464</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 13 March 1850, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/34, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Reproduced with permission from the Norfolk Record Office.

<sup>465</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 14 March 1850, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/34, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

not included in the Fletcher archive. Opie's letters to Wilkin, and even her letter to Gurney, tell such a different story on this count. Not only were her interactions with Grove direct, with no reference being made to Wilkin of the involvement of her 'Co', but she clearly showed interest to Wilkin in the republications of a great many of her works.

A further undated letter again implies a contradiction between what Opie wrote to Wilkin and to Gurney:

My tales etc written and published before I was a Friend, I could not with honor publish, and I was much chidden for Grove's publication – Detraction which no one bought, and the Illust ns [superscript] which had quite a run in america – I am at liberty to publish if I chuse to do it – I have leave to object to whatever I like not in dear JJG's MS, – and I expect to be able to blot out all I disapprove – .<sup>466</sup>

Opie may well write here that she was 'much chidden for Grove's publication', but her letter to Gurney defending her actions would suggest that this chastisement was not one which weighed on her excessively, and she implied in her 1844 letter to Gurney that she did, indeed, 'with honor' and a sense of justice republish these earlier works. This letter is the final one in the archive to Fletcher – the remainder being to his wife – and in the rest of this letter, Opie expounded her views on Mary Magdalen at length, discussing the Bible and biblical accounts. To the next letter, addressed to Sarah Fletcher, Opie added a huge amount of extracts from doctrine she had copied out, asking whether they would sell.<sup>467</sup> It seems that the lasting impression of Opie Fletcher wished to leave was one of a devout Quaker, somehow

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<sup>466</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, n.d., Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/48, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich. Reproduced with permission from the Norfolk Record Office. The preceding letter is dated 30 June 1853, but the reference to altering 'dear JJG's MS' – Gurney's autobiography, published posthumously by his wife – would suggest that this letter was written before 26 February 1850, when Opie told Fletcher that 'E.P.Gurney has done all I could desire relative to her life of her husband and all is to be altered or omitted as I may wish – a great relief to my mind': Amelia Opie, letter to Josiah Fletcher, 26 February 1850, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/33, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>467</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Sarah Fletcher, 28 April 1852, Josiah Fletcher Papers, ms, 5252 T133F/49 and 50, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

wronged or coerced into republishing what she thought wrong. Opie's letters elsewhere suggest a different story, and the nature of the heavily abridged Fletcher archive (with its location) would suggest that access to the complete letters might have given a different impression. The 1850 letters to Fletcher imply, nonetheless, that Opie was somewhat confused about how the Grove publications had come about and her involvement in the process. They indicate a clear sense of remorse, but the nature of the Fletcher archive suggests in and of itself that he was not telling the whole story.

### Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Opie had one foot in the past, but was aware of a sense of progression, especially in the way the Quakers might be adapting to fiction. Although she only wrote short, fact-based tales in this period, the influence of Cooper – a novelist with Quaker heritage – and of Dickens and Charlotte Brontë may have inspired her to engage with the contemporary literary scene and to assert her reputation there.

The republications seem to have brought Opie's sense of conflict to a head. Driven partly by poverty, but assuredly also by a sense of dignity, justice, and her reputation, she sought to make the most of an opportunity afforded her, and did so in a confident, business-like manner. Understandably, therefore, her defence of her actions to Gurney was similarly confident and well-reasoned. There is, perhaps, an element of 'white lying' in the two different approaches Opie adopts to Wilkin and Gurney, but this human tendency is only really noticeable in the context of her very strongly professed principles against lying. What becomes more difficult to appreciate is the context in which Opie wrote the 1850 letters to Fletcher, which stand in such clear contradiction to the earlier letters to Wilkin and Gurney.

The white lies about Opie's life continue to be numerous here, starting, of course, with Brightwell's complete omission of Opie's republications and the reactions, which lends a very different impression of Opie's attitudes to fiction. As Mrs S. C. Hall remarked, Opie's flexible use of the terms "fiction" and "fact" was a small case of white lying, although Opie was deemed here always to have acted according to her sense of what was right. The different approaches Opie adopted towards Wilkin, Gurney, and Fletcher with regard to the republications suggest that

Opie found it difficult to manage her ongoing commitment to fiction, especially the novel, when she had been told for so long that such a commitment was inappropriate. Opie unfortunately appears in her letters to Fletcher in 1850 to be either in complete denial, or wilfully misleading.

What we will never know is the degree to which Fletcher himself was wilfully misleading in the compiling of his archive. His allegiance to Brightwell and her Memorials could not be clearer, but there is also a real sense of having a one-sided story from the archive itself. We cannot deny that Opie wrote the letters of 1850, but we cannot know whether there were letters nearer the time of the republications which demonstrated to Fletcher (as they did to Wilkin) that Opie wholeheartedly approved the project with Grove. The mere existence of the 1850 letters to Fletcher illustrates just what a conundrum it was for Opie to attempt to continue her literary career whilst a professed Quaker. She felt perhaps that she might never be able to express freely her belief in the positive uses of fiction, especially the novel, as well as to receive her just deserts.

## Conclusion

Throughout my account, it has been clear that Amelia Opie lived at a time of momentous transformation. Born into the seething cauldron of the Enlightenment in Norwich – a strong centre of Dissent which would be named both the ‘Athens of England’ and the ‘City of Sedition’ – she experienced the effects in England of the French Revolution and ‘Pitt’s “Reign of Terror”’.<sup>468</sup> She was politically active in the 1790s; she had started to go to the assizes as a girl, and still attended in her 70s and 80s.<sup>469</sup> She demonstrated a commitment to social justice through her writing and actions throughout her lifetime, promoting the rights of women (including education), arguing for improvements in the justice system and in the treatment of the insane, and, perhaps most prominently, for Abolition and further Anti-Slavery causes.

Opie deftly navigated a path for herself through an often hostile environment. As a female Dissenting writer, she made a very cautious beginning, experimenting freely within the protective circles of Norwich and London, but committing herself to little. She demonstrated a keen understanding of the types of literature with which she might make the most effective impression, and she appreciated the changing styles, contexts and conventions of these literary genres as her career developed. Coming out in society at fifteen, following the death of her mother, she greatly enjoyed fashionable life, especially the various excitements that London afforded, and appreciated the varied social circle to which her liberal father had given her access. There are no easy answers concerning Opie’s motives, influences or decisions as she navigated her friendships with William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Inchbald, Joseph John Gurney, Elizabeth Fry, William Hayley, James Fenimore Cooper, Josiah Fletcher, Simon Wilkin, and hosts of others, as well as traversing events over which she had no control, like the French

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<sup>468</sup> David Chandler, ““The Athens of England”: Norwich as a Literary Center in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43.2 (Winter 2010) 173; Kenneth R. Johnston, “Whose History? My Place or Yours?: Republican Assumptions and Romantic Traditions,” *Romanticism, History, Historicism*, ed. Damian Walford Davies (New York and London: Routledge, 2009) 97.

<sup>469</sup> Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, *Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie, selected and arranged from her Letters, Diaries and Other Manuscripts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander; London: Longman, Brown, & Co., 1854) 23, 337; Paula R. Feldman, “Amelia Opie”, *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era: An Anthology* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1997) 523; Amelia Opie, letter to Lady Boileau, 25 August 1853, ms, MS 6181 Boi 63/5/85, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

'revolutions' of 1830 and 1848. This project shows that 'white lies' – that very human trait – was one way Opie found to cope with the Scylla and Charybdis of the obstacles and inspirations in her life.

This project exposes Cecilia Lucy Brightwell's 'white lies' – lies which appear darker and darker in comparison to Opie's navigational white lying – as it details Brightwell's treatment of Opie's manuscript material to compile her 1850s biographical accounts. Given that many of the sources on which Brightwell relied are still missing, this project demonstrates the continuing need to rely on her narratives, but points to the required caution in so doing. My use of manuscript letters – in this context, especially those to Joseph John Gurney, William Hayley, and Elizabeth Fry – reveals the degree to which Brightwell ignored the deep struggles that Opie experienced in moving towards the Quakers and relinquishing fiction-writing. Brightwell, as a biographer, might not have been expected to go into any detail about Opie's literary works. But her blanket refusal to acknowledge that Opie faced any difficulty in relinquishing writing, also ignoring the 1840s republications, gave a distorted approach about Opie's commitment to fiction which I challenge, demonstrating Opie's ongoing investment in and justification of fiction-writing.

King and Pierce have recognised that one of the most intriguing aspects of Opie's life post conversion is 'her conscious struggle to mediate an identity which could include both her talents as a writer and her personal faith'.<sup>470</sup> Though acknowledged, this aspect was not examined in detail before this project, which has offered not only an in-depth reading of Detraction Displayed (1828) but also the first detailed examination of Opie's 1840s republications in their context.<sup>471</sup> Equally interesting, and also under-explored before this project, is Opie's struggle between her talents as a writer and her personal faith in her long period of religious investigation before joining the Quakers (1814-1825). By juxtaposing archival and literary analyses, this project brings out the significance of Valentine's Eve (1816) and Madeline (1822) in relation to Temper (1812) – a slightly better-known Opie novel – and their wider literary and religious contexts. Neither of these aspects –

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<sup>470</sup> Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, The Collected Poems of Amelia Alderson Opie (Oxford: OUP, 2009) lii.

<sup>471</sup> Clive Jones comes closest to the level of detail required, but he does not examine the religious side of Opie's life as profoundly as my project, and the republications receive very little attention: Clive Jones, "The Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie," diss., OU, 2001.

Opie from 1814 to 1825, and Opie after 1825 – really find any meaning unless they are placed within the context of the whole of Opie’s literary career and her religious affiliations throughout her life, which I do here in order that a sharper idea might be attained of the significance of Opie’s entire literary contribution.

A sense of Opie’s religious life before she became a Quaker is essential for its impact on her earlier literature to be appreciated, and for her 1825 decision to be given its proper religious context, both of which I investigate. Two anonymous works were not known to Clive Jones – The Only Child; or, Portia Bellenden (1821) and Much to Blame (1824) – and my investigation of these, including the first critical analysis of the 1824 novel, provides much more depth to an analysis of Opie’s pre-conversion struggles.<sup>472</sup> My analysis of The Only Child in relation to Opie’s 1828 Quaker work Detraction Displayed also shows a sense of continuity in Opie’s thought before and after her official conversion. The close analysis I provide of Opie’s 1840s republications – alongside her correspondence with her publisher friends Josiah Fletcher and Simon Wilkin, and her Quaker mentor Joseph John Gurney – reveals Opie’s ongoing, though complicated, commitment to fiction and the novel form in her later years.

This project helps scholarship to move further away from the study of Opie as a writer of one novel, Adeline Mowbray (1805), and its Jacobin / anti-Jacobin relationship to Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. Not only is this achieved by a greater focus on Opie’s later works and analysis of archival correspondence in the context of her religious struggles, but also through the exposure of the potentially damaging influence of Brightwell’s 1850s biographical accounts of Opie. This project invites scholarship to ask whether, indeed, Adeline Mowbray marks the heart of Opie’s achievement. My focus on Adeline Mowbray in the discussion of Opie’s 1840s republications is owing to the degree of revision it required in Opie’s mind, in contrast to The Father and Daughter (1801), not because it otherwise deserves special attention in the context of the 1840s reprints. Opie’s approach for the republications seems to have been chronological: she made it clear to Simon Wilkin that she wanted to republish all of her works, and even acknowledge The Only Child, ‘altering

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<sup>472</sup> Nor does Ann Farrant mention these anonymous works in her recent biography: Amelia Opie: The Quaker Celebrity (Hindringham: JG Publishing, 2014).

the catastrophe'.<sup>473</sup> But we only have evidence, as far as the novels are concerned, that Opie's first two were revised and republished.

Adeline Mowbray is certainly a strong candidate for Opie's greatest achievement, both artistically and contextually. But Opie's much more successful The Father and Daughter (1801) – which has recently received critical attention as a literary landmark of the first half of the nineteenth-century – might also be read as 'the criticism of Wollstonecraft and Godwin that wasn't', quite beyond its sentimental treatment of insanity in the context of King George III, and its consideration of the fallen woman.<sup>474</sup> Temper (1812) – Opie's most lucrative novel – seems to me a little safe to be considered Opie's strongest contribution; Opie was perhaps stronger when she engaged in pathos, and the novels with happy endings (only Temper, Madeline and Much to Blame) failed therefore to show Opie at her best. The last of these novels is worthy of consideration, nevertheless, owing to the degree of wit Opie managed to bring to the narrative. But the plot – or rather, plots – seem over-complicated, as Opie was trying to pack as much into her final novel as she possibly could.

For me, Valentine's Eve (1816) stands alongside The Father and Daughter and Adeline Mowbray to mark the heart of Opie's achievement. It has literary merit, but it also reveals Opie's struggles as she tried to marry religious commitment with the novel. Its surprisingly tragic ending poignantly represents the degree of Opie's difficulties as she prepared to take one of the most important decisions of her long life, and the novel therefore traces significant elements of Opie's development as a writer. It also presents a sustained critique of the way in which people who actively lived their Christian faith were mocked in society. The principle of religious tolerance had always been an important one to Opie, but she was nowhere more vocal about it

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<sup>473</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 27 August 1843, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/143, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 24 January 1844, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/144, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; Amelia Opie, letter to Simon Wilkin, 26 January 1842, Simon Wilkin Letters, ms, 4281/138, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>474</sup> Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, The Father and Daughter, with Dangers of Coquetry, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003) 11. Susan Staves, Eleanor Ty and Katherine Binhammer have also recently worked on the novel: Susan Staves, "British Seduced Maidens," Eighteenth-Century Studies 14.2 (1980-1981): 109-134; Eleanor Ty, Empowering the feminine: the narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812 (Toronto and London: U of Toronto P, 1998) 133-144; Katherine Binhammer, The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800 (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) 138-175.

in her novels than in Valentine's Eve. Her trenchant criticism provides an insight into the role of religion in English society in the early nineteenth-century.

It is difficult to ascertain how typical Opie's experience might have been (as a developing Quaker) between the "world" and the 'Inner Light', given that she was already a famous fiction-writer, popular in the "world", when she became a Quaker. The idea of Quakers writing fiction was a problematic one in the first place. Where critics have maintained that the Quakers condemned fiction as lying owing to their honesty principle, this project presents a much more nuanced discussion of the relationship between the Quakers and the Arts.<sup>475</sup> It shows that the problem was not so much with fiction as a medium, but with the promotion of certain values and theories that were incompatible with the Holy Truths of the Scriptures and Divine teachings. I point out that the recent critical accounts which explore Quaker restrictions to the reading and writing of fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been written from within the Quaker community, and without a particular focus on writers (or writers of fiction) who might have been affected by these restrictions.<sup>476</sup>

My more precise delineation of Quaker attitudes to fiction allows for a finer appreciation of how Quakers might have navigated fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which will help interdisciplinary scholarship more broadly to analyse the relationship of the Quakers to the Arts. A next step might be to examine Quaker attitudes to poetry in the same timeframe. Opie is obviously a possible subject, but Mary Howitt also presents a very interesting case study, especially since she moved from the Quakers to join various different Christian groups before settling on Roman Catholicism.

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<sup>475</sup> Betty Hagglund, rev. of The Collected Poems of Amelia Alderson Opie, eds Shelley King and John B. Pierce, Quaker Studies 16.2 (Mar. 2012) 235; Clive Jones, 297; King and Pierce, eds, Collected Poems, lii; Gary Kelly, "Opie, Amelia", n.p.; Anne McWhir, Introduction, Adeline Mowbray, 1805, by Amelia Opie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2010) 33; Patricia Howell Michaelson, Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 65.

<sup>476</sup> David J. Hall, "What Should Eighteenth Century Quakers Have Read?," The Journal of the Friends Historical Society 62.2 (2010) 103-110; Camilla Leach and Joyce Goodman, "Educating the Women of the Nation: Priscilla Wakefield and the Construction of National Identity, 1798", Quaker Studies 5.2 (2001) 165-182; Michele Lise Tarter, "Reading a Quakers' Book: Elizabeth Ashbridge's Testimony of Quaker Literary Theory," Quaker Studies 9.2 (2005) 176-190.

My project, through its extensive use of archival material, has shown that many more Opie archives should be explored in order to appreciate even more fully the contribution of Opie to the literary climate from 1790 to the 1840s, and its relationship to her faith. There are Opie archives which are as yet undiscovered, or the contents of which are undetermined, especially at the Norfolk Record Office. Now that we have a more nuanced view of Quaker attitudes to fiction, the letter collection in the Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, merits particular attention – with its Quaker focus – to see how Opie letters (and those of others) might deepen our understanding of the figure of Opie.

It certainly seems that Opie sat on the cusp of a change in terms of Quaker attitudes to fiction. In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe – not herself a Quaker – published Uncle Tom's Cabin, a fictional slavery narrative which dramatically altered the way in which Quakers viewed fiction, not only in its native America.<sup>477</sup> Anna Vaughan Kett's comments about the promotion of the work by Quakers in England indicate that some belonged to a 'literary society' and wrote 'poems and essays' (Kett "Without" 61). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Quaker periodicals concerning the Arts and non-Quaker literature started to appear, something that would have been unthinkable fifty years earlier.<sup>478</sup> Opie had her own reasons for her ongoing commitment to fiction and the novel, given her long and successful literary career, but when she republished her early works in the 1840s, Quaker attitudes were ready for a change. In her final years, however, Opie appeared to be thinking not so much of what the future might hold regarding Quaker attitudes to fiction and the novel, but more about how attitudes to these literary media, and towards writers more generally, had shaped her much earlier life.

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<sup>477</sup> Anna Vaughan Kett, "Amelia Opie: a smooth conversion to Quakerism?" by Isabelle Cosgrave, Quaker History Meeting, Quaker Centre, Friends House, London, 22 Feb. 2011. Kett has also touched on the impact of Uncle Tom's Cabin in print: "'Without the Consumers of Slave Produce There Would Be No Slaves": Quaker Women, Antislavery Activism, and Free-Labor Cotton Dress in the 1850s," Quakers and Abolition, eds Brycchan Carey and Geoffrey Plank (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2014) 63; see also Anna P. Vaughan Kett, "Quaker Woman, the Free Produce Movement and British Anti-Slavery Campaigns: The Free Labour Cotton Depot in Street 1853-1858," diss., U of Brighton, 2012.

<sup>478</sup> The Essayist and Friends' Review, ed. Wilfred Whitten (1893) is one such periodical: Jennifer Milligan, "British Quakerism 1837-1914 as Seen Through Ten Periodicals," Quaker History Meeting, Quaker Centre, Friends House, London, 24 Apr. 2012.

Opie reflected on the events of 1794. She wrote: 'from my loophole of retreat I am looking with pleasure, *not* on the world as it is, but on the world as it was'.<sup>479</sup>

Opie had not retired from society at this point: she 'jokingly proposed a chair race' to Mary Berry when both attended the Great Exhibition of 1851 in wheelchairs.<sup>480</sup> But she was increasingly infirm and unable to travel. She wrote at length:

The occurrences of the year 1794 have lately been pressing with such power on my remembrance, demanding from me a decided confession that it was the most interesting period of my long life, (or nearly such,) that I am inclined to give an account of what made it so, and acknowledge that it was the opportunity unexpectedly afforded me of attending the trials of Hardy, Horne Tooke, and Thelwall, at the Old Bailey, for High Treason. What a prospect of entertainment was opening before me when (while on a visit at Southgate, near London) I heard that at these approaching trials, to which I hoped to obtain admission, I should not only hear the first pleaders at the bar, but behold, and probably hear examined, the first magnates of the land; and on the event depended, not a *nisi prius* cause, or one of petty larceny, but interests of a public nature, and most nearly affecting the safety and prosperity of the nation; aye, and much personally interesting to myself; as I knew, in the secret of my heart, that my own prospects for life might probably be changed and darkened by the result. To such a height had party-spirit reached on both sides, in my native city and elsewhere, that even innocent men were accused of treasonable intentions and practices, who *talked*, when excited by contradiction, the fearful things they would never have thought of acting; and I had reason to believe that if the "felons" about to be tried should not be "acquitted felons," certain friends of mine would have emigrated to America, and my beloved father would have been induced to accompany them!

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<sup>479</sup> Brightwell, *Memorials*, 49. Quoted in Johnston, 98.

<sup>480</sup> Margaret Eliot MacGregor, *Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend* (Menasha (WI): The Collegiate Press, 1933) 126.

This was, indeed, an alarming idea to me, who was only beginning to taste the pleasures of London society, and who could still say in spite of the excitement of party feeling, and my unity of opinion with the liberals of that day, “England! with all thy faults I love thee still;” and when, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of the 10<sup>th</sup> mo., the trial of Thomas Hardy began at the Sessions-house in the Old Bailey, existence acquired, in my eyes, a new but painful interest; and, with the pleasing anticipations of the unexpected enjoyment awaiting me, were mingled some apparently well-founded fears of evil to come. How vividly do I often now, in my lone and lonely portion, live over the excitements of those far distant days, in the many, many evening hours, which I pass not unwillingly alone ... Yes! how often (as I said) do I recall with all these alternate emotions of pain and pleasure, of disappointment and fruition, the last days of October, and the first five days of November, 1794! (Brightwell Memorials 49-50)

Johnston writes that ‘it might not seem accurate to represent Amelia Alderson Opie as a member of a “lost generation,” her creative life the casualty of Pitt’s 1790s “Reign of Terror,” except for the fact that she tended to see it that way’ (97). He concludes that the above quotation is ‘powerful evidence of something that was endured, and something that was lost, by much of an entire generation’ (99), a passage that represents a ‘crack in the respectable façade’ (98) of Brightwell’s account. I examine a parallel loss for Opie, the loss of an opportunity to develop her writing career to the full owing to her joining the Quakers. In her final years, however, there was no sense expressed of any regret about that life-changing decision, but regret instead that a literary career that might have flourished without constraint had already been jeopardised by the draconian measures of Pitt in the 1790s.

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Critical work on Opie is expanding. King and Pierce recently edited The Collected Poems of Amelia Alderson Opie (2009); Ann Farrant published a popular biography in 2014, and Roxanne Eberle is currently publishing a cultural biography of Opie. To this research I add a valuable contribution through an

exploration more specifically of the connections between Opie's religious life and her prose writing during the whole of her long literary career. This project's focus on Opie's religious life from the beginning shows that, however difficult a choice it was regarding her writing career in particular, Opie's shift to Quakerism was not as abrupt as has been supposed. The first analysis of Much to Blame shows Opie's interest not only in the moral usefulness of fiction, but in the importance and value of entertainment through the novel form. Although she made a sacrifice in moving to the Quakers, her defence to Joseph John Gurney of her 1840s republications demonstrated further how important novel-writing was to her, and how much she enjoyed it.

My focus – with its greater concentration on Opie's later works and her republications – gives a sense of Opie's significance and her contribution to fiction well beyond the 1790s and Adeline Mowbray. But Opie's own demonstration of her commitment to a literary life – as Brightwell showed (inadvertently, it seems) in the long quotation above – reveals that this life was one fraught with dangers, as well as excitements. Beyond publishing in almost every genre possible over more than fifty years, and mixing with very different groups of people, her prominent reform commitment and later works suggest 'the ways in which women writers of the period negotiated ideological systems intent on restricting their access to publication and public recognition'.<sup>481</sup>

I think that Opie demonstrated, through her negotiation of the 1840s republications, the increased female autonomy and female agency that she had given the heroines in her last novels, The Only Child, Madeline and Much to Blame. Opie's move to the Quakers was not a move towards retirement, not even from her belief in the value of fiction, even though she could not use her talent for fiction-writing in the same way. Opie is a valuable example of a female Dissenting writer in the first half of the nineteenth century – a Quaker writer – who was not prepared for her reputation, her ideas, or her commitment to fiction to be quashed. She engaged even in the rapidly changing literary climate of the 1840s, and the way she resorted to 'white lies' to do so demonstrates the level of her deep and abiding belief in the moral and entertaining value of fiction and the novel form to the end.

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<sup>481</sup> Roxanne Eberle, Introduction, Women and Romanticism, ed. Roxanne Eberle, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2006) xxxviii.



## Appendix A: Amelia Opie's long literary career

Opie was, of course, not only a fiction writer: she had a very long and varied writing career, experimenting with almost every genre and publishing her works from 1790 to 1834, republishing early works between 1843 and 1847. After the anonymous 1790 novel Dangers of Coquetry, Opie published five more acknowledged novels (The Father and Daughter (1801), Adeline Mowbray (1805), Temper (1812), Valentine's Eve (1816) and Madeline (1822)) and two further anonymous ones (The Only Child; or, Portia Bellenden (1821), and Much to Blame (1824)).<sup>482</sup> She also abandoned a novel in progress – The Painter and his Wife – in 1823 as she prepared to join the Quakers officially.

In addition to prose fiction, Opie started with poetry (which she published anonymously for the radical Norwich periodical The Cabinet in the 1790s) and a few plays, one of which was privately staged (Adelaide (1791)). None of the plays were published, and none of the manuscripts remain. She published three collections of poems (Poems (1802); The Warrior's Return and Other Poems (1808) and Lays for the Dead (1834), her final new work), and published isolated poems over much of her career. She also wrote four tale collections: Simple Tales (1806); Tales of Real Life (1813); New Tales (1818) and Tales of the Heart (1820; two Quaker tracts in the 1820s: Illustrations of Lying in all its Branches (1825) and Detraction Displayed (1828), and a tale collection (Tales of the Pemberton Family (1825)) as well as a poem ("The Black Man's Lament" (1826)) for children. Having contributed a short anonymous tale – "The Nun" – to The Cabinet in 1795, Opie returned to the form in 1823, submitting 17 short fictional pieces to journals or periodicals between 1823 and 1839, but also contributing 13 non-fiction items to similar publications between 1815 and 1841. Opie republished some of her early works (partly novels, The Father

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<sup>482</sup> I do not include Self-Delusion; or, Adelaide d'Hauteroche (1823) as an Opie work here. Paula R. Feldman mentions the possibility that Opie wrote the novel ("Women Poets and Anonymity in the Romantic Era," New Literary History 33.2 (Spring 2002): 289), based on its attribution to 'the author of Domestic Scenes', which was the subtitle to Opie's 1812 novel Temper. But Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling note that an 1820 novel 'Domestic Scenes was written under the pseudonym of Lady Humdrum' and associate Self-Delusion with this one (eds, The English Novel 1770-1829: a bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles. Vol 2: 1800-1829 (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 550). I agree, regarding choice of styles and themes, that Lady Humdrum is much more likely to be the pseudonymous author of Self-Delusion.

and Daughter and Adeline Mowbray in particular) between 1843 and 1847, as part of a scheme apparently to republish all of her works with a new publisher, Grove and Son. This decision met with stern disapproval from her Quaker mentor (Joseph John Gurney), which inspired Opie in her turn to write an impassioned letter in defence of fiction.<sup>483</sup>

A comprehensive list of all Opie's writings – including songs – can be found in The Amelia Alderson Opie Archive.<sup>484</sup> Shelley King and John B. Pierce recognise that new Opie items are still coming to light, as various private collections come to be sold and Opie pieces are found therein.

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<sup>483</sup> Amelia Opie, letter to Joseph John Gurney, 23 February 1844, Gurney MSS, TEMP MSS 434/1/380, Library of the Society of Friends, London.

<sup>484</sup> Shelley King and John B. Pierce, eds, The Amelia Alderson Opie Archive, Queen's University, Kingston (Ont.), Web.

## Appendix B: The Amelia Opie Archives

(This list has been compiled using the National Record of Archives, ArchiveGrid - WorldCat Beta Services, and individual repositories' catalogues. I have relied on Margaret MacGregor's account for details of the missing Carr Collection.<sup>485</sup> There are dozens of repositories which house one or two Opie documents: I have not included these here, nor have I included collections of poems or artwork. I have included information about Opie's will and John Opie's estate upon death.)

### Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Abinger Collection. Letters (13) from Amelia Opie to William Godwin, 1795-1800.

Abinger Collection. Letters to Mary Wollstonecraft, 1796-1797.

Letters to CS Edgeworth, 1834-1859.

### British Library.

Correspondence (5 letters) between Amelia Opie and William Hayley, 1813-1816.

Letters (3) from Lady Caroline Lamb to Amelia Opie, 1820-1822.

Letters from Amelia Opie to George Thomson, 1803-1815.

### Carr Collection. (Missing.)

Opie's diary and journals; several manuscripts (Adelaide, three unnamed plays, and her incomplete novel The Painter and His Wife); many letters (Hudson Gurney to C. L. Brightwell; William Godwin to Amelia Alderson; Amelia Opie to C. L. Brightwell (12 letters); Pierre-Jean David d'Angers to Amelia Opie (26 letters)) and other documents (Godwin's criticism of a comedy of Amelia Alderson's, and Mrs Opie's reminiscences concerning the assizes). (MacGregor 129). The Huntington Library acquired the twenty-six letters from David to Opie, and Godwin's criticism of a comedy of Amelia Alderson's in the 1950s.

### Cornwall Record Office.

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<sup>485</sup> Margaret Eliot MacGregor, Amelia Alderson Opie: Worldling and Friend (Menasha (WI): The Collegiate Press, 1933) 129.

St Agnes Deeds, Family Papers. Account of Amelia Opie, administratrix of the estate of John Opie, with his next of kin, 1809.

Cambridge University: Fitzwilliam Museum.

Letters (34) from Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 1814-1816.

Cambridge University: Trinity College.

Letters (17) from Amelia Opie to Dawson Turner, 1815-1848.

Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Letters (354) from Amelia Opie, mainly to the Briggs family. Also includes letters to Susanna Taylor, Elizabeth Fry, Sarah Rose, Tom Alderson, a letter to Robert Southey, a letter from Godwin and letters (26) from Pierre-Jean David d'Angers. 1794-1854.

Knox College.

Amelia Opie papers.

Leeds University Library, Special Collections.

Letters (12) from Amelia Opie to Archibald Constable, and Longmans, 1816-1820.

Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Letters (c53) from Amelia Opie to Joseph John Gurney, 1814-1847.

London University: London School of Economics, the Women's Library.

Letters.

London University: University College London.

Letters (13) from Amelia Opie to Lord Brougham, 1830-1850.

National Archives – Prerogative Court of Canterbury.

Will of Amelia Opie, Widow of the City of Norwich, Norfolk. 22 February 1854.

New York Public Library.

Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, 1772-1925. Amelia Opie manuscripts include writings, correspondence, and artwork, mostly 1828-1845. Recipients of Amelia Opie's letters (about 30 people) include Josiah Fletcher (1), Caroline Fox (1), William Hayley (3), Elizabeth Inchbald (1), Robert Southey (4) and Simon Wilkin (1).

New York State Historical Documents: Albany.

50 items, primarily letters from Opie, but some poems also. Recipients include George Dyer, Josiah Fletcher, Robert Southey, William Christie, Archibald Constable, William Hayley, James Montgomery, Jane Porter, and others.

Norfolk Record Office.

Letters (36) from Amelia Opie to Sir John Boileau, 1841-1849.

Letters (85) from Amelia Opie to Lady Boileau, 1844-1853.

Letters from Amelia Opie to Josiah Fletcher and his wife, Sarah Fletcher, 1828-1851.

Letters (11) from Amelia Opie to Simon Wilkin, 1828-1853.

Letters (28), 1825-1851.

Miscellaneous Letters (Amelia Opie and Others), 1805-1890.

Miscellaneous Letters (Amelia Opie and Others), 1821-1890.

Scrapbook of letters of prominent persons, mostly from Norfolk, including Ivor Gurney, Harriet Martineau, Amelia Opie, I. Toynbee, C.M. Yonge and several bishops of Norwich. (Bolingbroke Collection.)

Swarthmore College: Friends Historical Library, Pennsylvania.

Papers of Amelia Opie in 15 folders, 1809-1853.

Wellcome Library.

Letters from Amelia Opie to the Hodgkin family, and poems.



Appendix C: Amelia Opie's Earnings from Longman's (in five-year segments)

1801 - 1805	£357 4 5
1806 - 1810	£745 6 0
1811 - 1815	£990 15 4
1816 - 1820	£1331 0 11
1821 - 1825	£504 4 5
1826 - 1830	£133 11 1
1831 - 1838	£119 7 4

There are no records of payments from Longman's to Opie (who died in 1853, and republished some works in the 1840s with different publishers) after 1838.

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This information is taken from Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus, "Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 17 (1987): 205. Compiled by Clive Jones, "The Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)," diss., OU, 2001, 339.



## Appendix D: Amelia Opie's Earnings (categorised by individual work)

<b>Publication Data of Opie's Works Published by Longman's</b>						
<i>Title</i>	<i>No. of editions</i>	<i>No. of copies (est.)</i>	<i>First Published</i>	<i>Last Published</i>	<i>Earnings</i>	
<i>Father &amp; Daughter</i>	Nine	6750	1801		£373. (approx.)	
<i>Poems</i>	Six	5750	1802		£401 (approx.)	
<i>Adeline Mowbray</i>	Three	2500	1805	1823	£335 12 2	
<i>The Warrior's Return</i>	Two	2000	1808	1815	£109 13 8	
<i>Temper</i>	Three	3000	1812	1838-Remaindered	£612 9 2	
<i>Tales of Real Life</i>	Three	2500	1813	1833	£413 5 5	
<i>Valentine's Eye</i>	One	2000	1816	1833 – Remaindered	£365 9 11	
<i>Madeline</i>	One	1500	1822	1833 – Remaindered	£203 8 11	
<i>Illustrations of Lying</i>	One	1500	1825	1833	£214 0 5	
<i>Detraction Displayed</i>	One	2000	1828	1833 – Remaindered	£ 19 15 2	
<i>Lays for the Dead</i>	One	1000	1834	1838 – Remaindered	Loss	

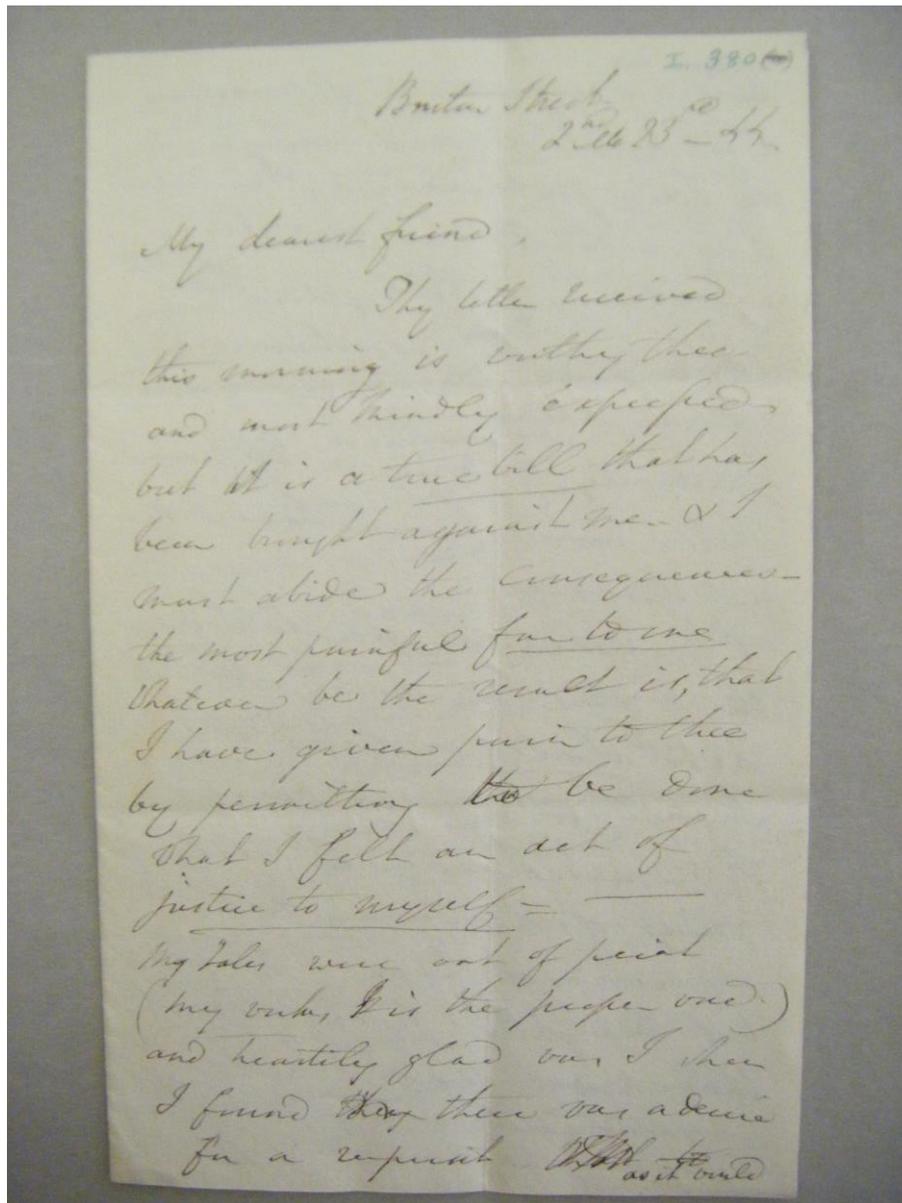
This information is taken from Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus, "Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 17 (1987): 205. Compiled by Clive Jones, "The Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)," diss., OU, 2001, 340. Jones notes that Simple Tales (1806), New Tales (1818), Tales of the Heart (1820) and Tales of the Pemberton Family (1825) are not included in Fergus and Thaddeus's analysis.



Appendix E: Images of Opie's 'defence of fiction' (1844 letter to Gurney)

Opie, Amelia. Letter to Joseph John Gurney. 23 February 1844. Gurney MSS. MS.  
TEMP MSS 434/1/380. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Side 1 of 8

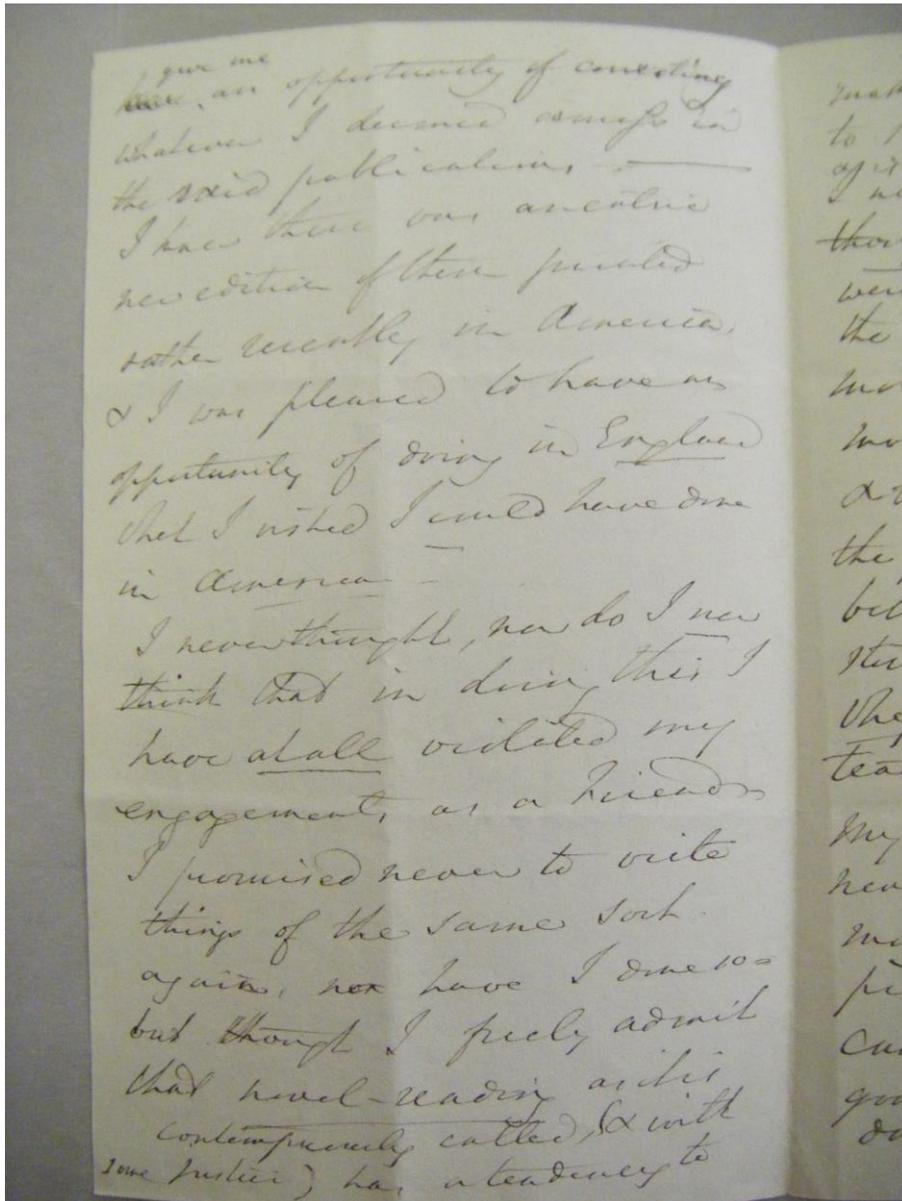


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Appendix E

Opie, Amelia. Letter to Joseph John Gurney. 23 February 1844. Gurney MSS. MS.  
TEMP MSS 434/1/380. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Side 2 of 8



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## Appendix E

Opie, Amelia. Letter to Joseph John Gurney. 23 February 1844. Gurney MSS. MS.  
TEMP MSS 434/1/380. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Side 3 of 8

make young persons disinclined  
 to receive, & instructive <sup>was</sup> reading  
 of it - therefore <sup>permissively</sup> I  
 never said, because I never  
 thought that works of fiction  
 were never to be read - on  
 the contrary, I believe, simple  
 moral tales the very best  
 mode of instructing the young  
 & the poor - else why do  
 the pious of all sects &  
 beliefs, spread tracts in  
 stores over the world & do  
 they did the blessed Saviour  
 teach in parables? -  
 My own books <sup>(which I read)</sup>  
 never read, are, in my books  
 moral tales - & many many  
 pious have the kind, &  
 could give me of the  
 good they have, occasionally  
 done - These books however

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## Appendix E

Opie, Amelia. Letter to Joseph John Gurney. 23 February 1844. Gurney MSS. MS.  
TEMP MSS 434/1/380. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Side 4 of 8

fully conversant with survive me  
and in many languages  
(some of them at least)  
and then a few weeks (now  
months) ago I thought my  
days were numbered I was  
remembered with careful  
that I had nearly executed the  
task I had undertaken - I  
felt no remorse of conscience  
for having assisted the painter  
has did I think myself  
responsible ~~to~~ to any human  
being for having undertaken  
that task - ~~that~~ <sup>considering myself responsible</sup> to my good  
my conscience ~~on~~ <sup>on the subject</sup> I had  
pleas'd much <sup>on the subject</sup> then. Near  
a year ago the application  
was made to me, & after  
some weeks consideration I  
agreed to the proposal - I got  
no money whatever - by the way  
the pleasure of having

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## Appendix E

Opie, Amelia. Letter to Joseph John Gurney. 23 February 1844. Gurney MSS. MS.  
TEMP MSS 434/1/380. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Side 5 of 8

I. 380(6)

that all mention of the great  
harm, & other blemishes, are  
to be expunged in the new edition  
I never thought, & therefore  
never said that I disapproved  
"the genus," because if I had  
I must have told an  
absolute falsehood - & after  
have I debated this opinion  
with several Pious cilla -  
On the contrary, I have often  
felt gratitude to the Most  
High for having given  
me a talent by which  
as I have reason to believe  
I have been permitted to  
do some good, & to those who  
seek for ~~and~~ amusement  
& probably, evil for instance  
in sales like mine -

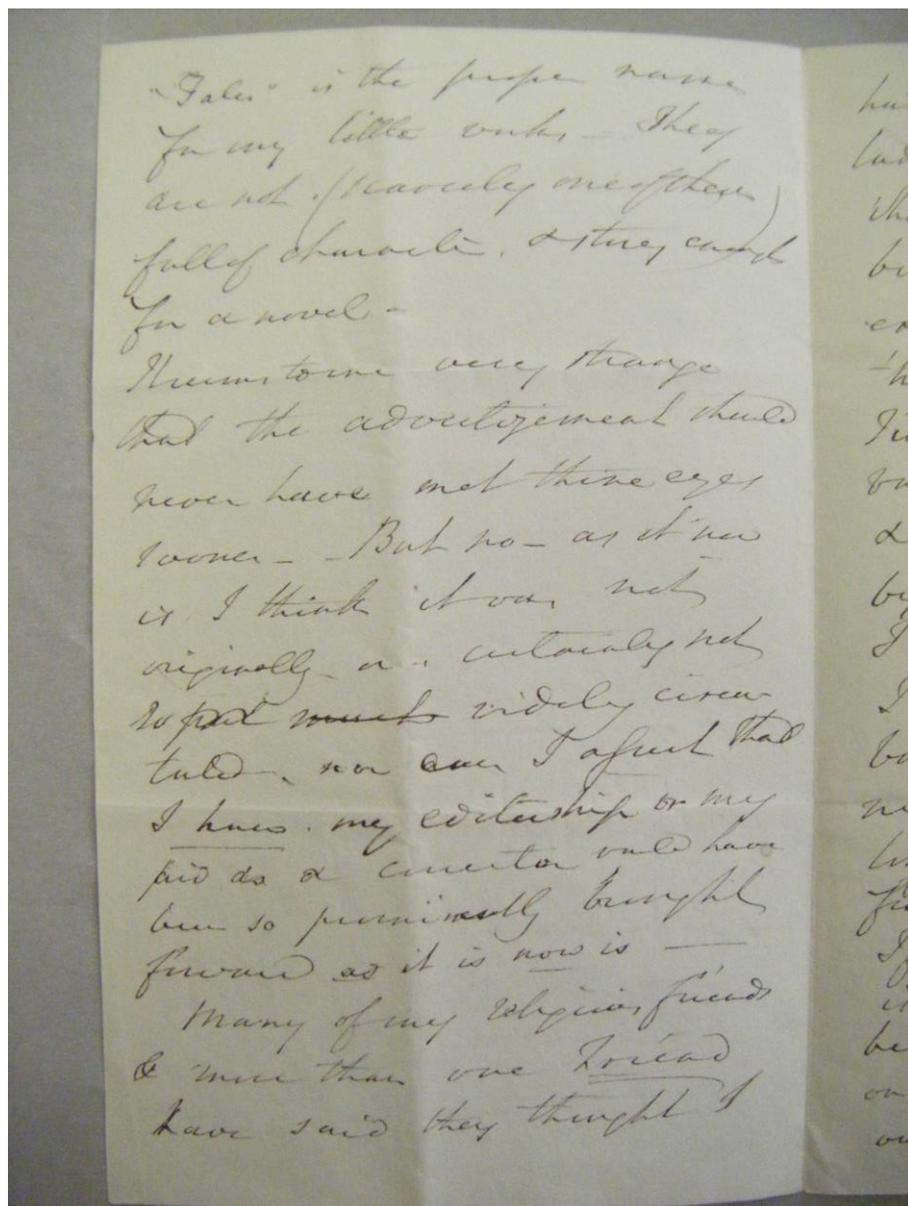
I hope to have some early plan written at length

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Appendix E

Opie, Amelia. Letter to Joseph John Gurney. 23 February 1844. Gurney MSS. MS.  
TEMP MSS 434/1/380. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Side 6 of 8

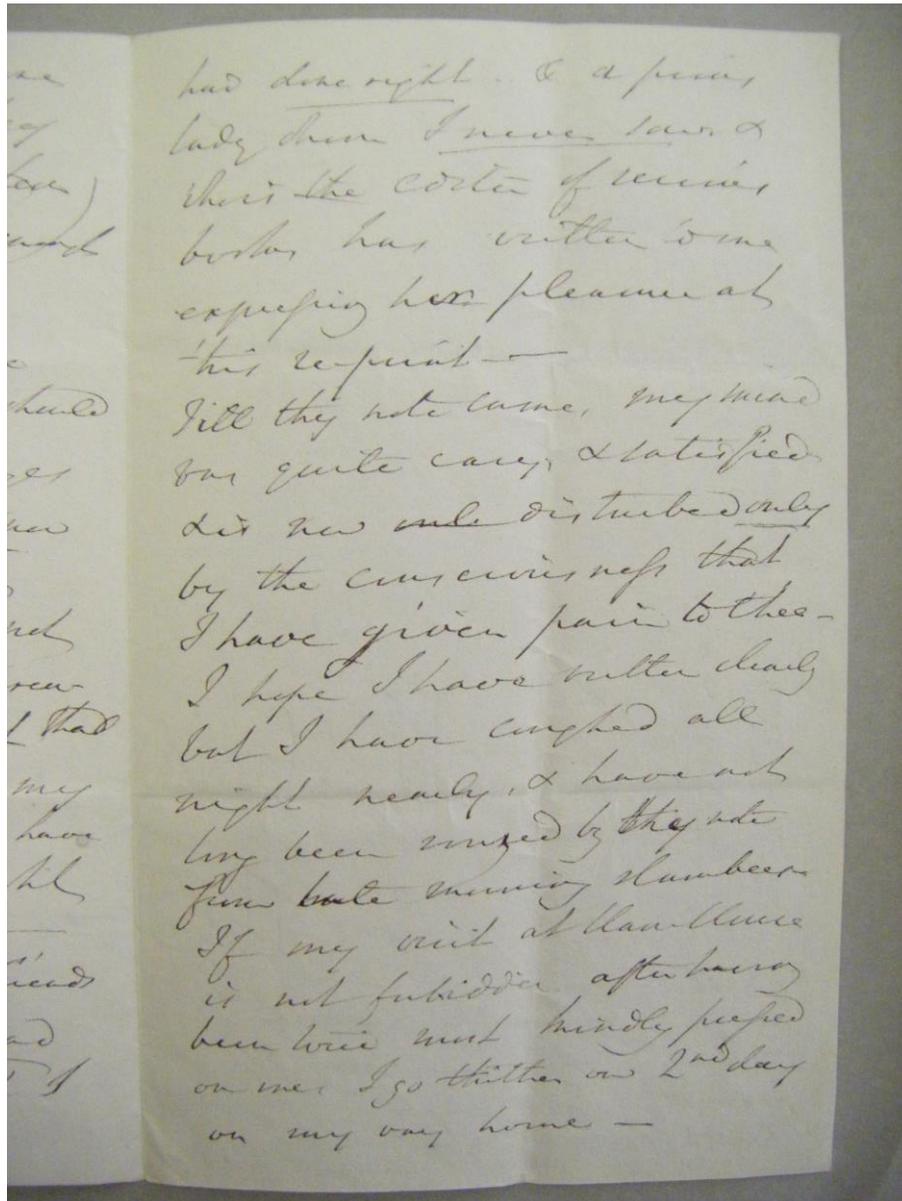


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## Appendix E

Opie, Amelia. Letter to Joseph John Gurney. 23 February 1844. Gurney MSS. MS.  
TEMP MSS 434/1/380. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

Side 7 of 8

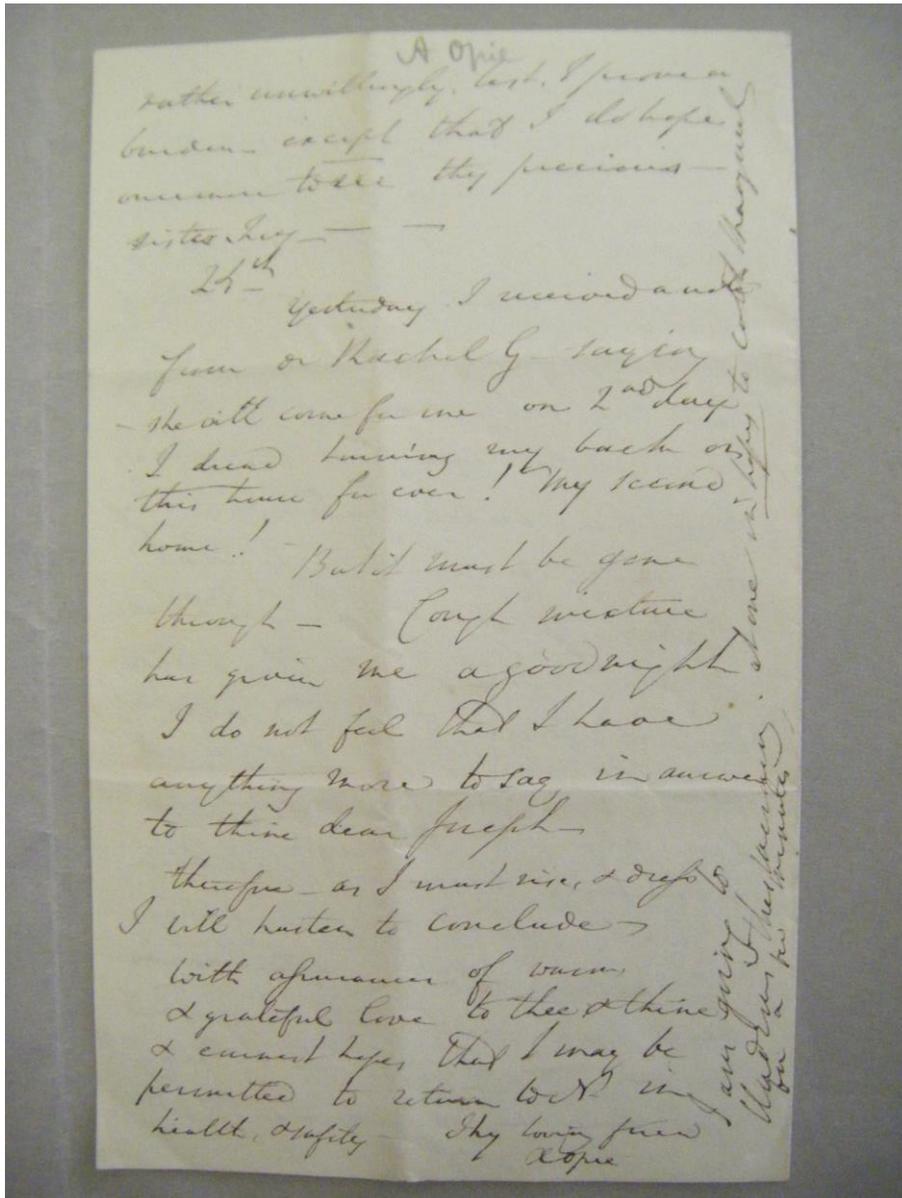


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Appendix E

Opie, Amelia. Letter to Joseph John Gurney. 23 February 1844. Gurney MSS. MS. TEMP MSS 434/1/380. Library of the Society of Friends, London.

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