Elizabeth Gaskell and the Coarse Authorship of Charlotte Brontë: religious perspectives on women's writing

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Abstract:

This article explores how the work of the Brontës could be situated in a context of religious writing about coarse subject matter, especially missionary memoir. It argues that Ellen Nussey, a friend of the Brontës, played an influential role in the editing of Elizabeth Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë, and that Nussey and Gaskell presented the family in a way that encouraged readers to associate the work of the Brontës with religious and moral genres of literature. It also argues that when Gaskell was writing her biography, even religious writing about coarse subjects was becoming less acceptable, and that the respectable woman writer Gaskell portrayed was, therefore, limited to a role of moral martyr.

Keywords: Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, temperance fiction, missionary memoir, biography, religion, Ellen Nussey

In October 1836, Charlotte Brontë wrote a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey, in which she castigated herself for her apparent coarseness: 'What am I compared to you I feel my own utter worthlessness when I make the comparison. I'm a very coarse common-place wretch!'.[1] What did Charlotte mean by this outburst, and which qualities did Charlotte think were 'coarse'?

At this point in the nineteenth century, 'coarse' had a religious, evangelical meaning, as did the term 'wretch'. Evangelical interpretations of the Bible defined 'wretched' as being unable to escape corrupt human nature and embrace God's spirit, with texts such as Daniel Defoe's *The Family Instructor* (1717-18) suggesting that a 'wretch' was one who did not live religiously: 'Wretch that I am! how have I liv'd as without God in the World'.[2] Charlotte condemned herself as 'coarse' because she could not bring herself to value the spiritual and thus reject human pleasures,

including her imagination. In a letter later that year, she bemoaned her 'corrupt heart, cold to the spirit, and warm to the flesh'.[3] However, at this point in the century, there were also social meanings of 'coarse'; specifically, for women, it could mean they were lacking in feminine delicacy. When comparing herself to the perfectly pious Ellen, Charlotte focuses on her friend's passive femininity, conflating this with spirituality: 'there you sit, upright and still in your black dress and white scarf – your pale, marble-like face – looking so serene and kind'.[4] Ellen's static serenity conjures an image of the Victorian 'Angel in the House', the essence of respectable womanhood.[5]

This essay explores how the reception of the Brontës' writings in the mid-nineteenth-century was influenced by the coexistence of social and religious conceptions of coarseness in women's writing. Different audiences would have received the Brontë sisters' novels in different ways. Particular subject matter – for example, drunkenness – was deemed 'coarse' by those keen to distinguish themselves socially through their refinement; however, religious audiences believed writing about such subjects was perfectly respectable for women – *if* it was prompted by the right reasons. How, why and by whom the Brontës were seen as 'coarse' is, therefore, important. Of particular significance was the ways in which the Unitarian Elizabeth Gaskell received the Brontës' writing, something that was also conditioned by the tensions between social and religious understandings of coarseness. Though Gaskell was able to secure some respectability for the Brontës' writings, I argue that the constraints imposed upon her by the social implications of coarseness affected how she could construct her biography of Charlotte. And, as the biography became a bestseller, how Gaskell portrayed Charlotte had implications for how women writers would be seen for the rest of the Victorian period.

As many scholars have established, Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) was highly significant for the perception of women artists in the Victorian period. It was foundational because it was the first major biography written about a woman novelist by a female peer.[6] Scholars have rightly focused on Gaskell's domestication of Charlotte to redeem her coarse reputation.[7] In this article, though, I want to look more closely at which particular elements of Charlotte's life and character were domesticated in the biography – and which of the coarser aspects of the Brontës' lives survived – as well as to propose new explanations for Gaskell's

editorial strategies. My explanations are based on the religious contexts of the Brontës, Gaskell, and their mid-nineteenth-century readers.

Historians have drawn attention to the centrality of religion – especially the dominant religion of evangelical Christianity - to nineteenth-century women's experience, and literary scholars such as Elisabeth Jay, Anne Hogan, and Andrew Bradstock have demonstrated how understanding the importance of Christianity in the lives of women writers can lead to new interpretations of nineteenth-century literature.[8] These scholars have shown that women were using Christianity to critique society; employing fictional depictions of life to test their personal theologies; or wrestling with the tension between religious and social prescriptions of appropriate behaviour for women. In Brontë studies, Marianne Thormählen notably explored the significance of religion to the lives and work of the Brontë family. In particular, Thormählen has shown how Anne Brontë's apparent religious motivations affected her reception and, in this special issue, how her novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* engages with religious temperance fiction.[9] has been Similarly, the impact of Elizabeth Gaskell's Unitarian religion on her work has been explored by scholars such as Jill Matus and John Chapple.[10] What has been less evident to scholars, however, is the influence of popular missionary writing on the Brontës, and on the construction of Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. This essay demonstrates the ways in which readers received the Brontës' 'coarse' novels within the context of missionary biography and temperance fiction, and how these generic traditions shaped Gaskell's biography and her presentation of what it meant to be a Victorian woman writer.

Writing religiously about coarseness

By the mid-nineteenth century, women's writing was flourishing, encouraged by religious movements and publishers. Evangelicalism placed great importance on spreading the word of God, and religious publishers produced vast amounts of print aimed at both the newly-literate working classes, converts in the mission field, Sunday schools, as well as the unconverted middle and upper classes. Correspondingly, there was a huge demand for writers, and women often filled this demand.[11] In evangelical circles, the domestic mission of women could include educating and converting their metaphorical family through Sunday school teaching,

working in the mission field, and writing religious tracts.[12] And women were explicitly encouraged to write within two particular genres: temperance writing and missionary biography, areas that required them to write about potentially coarse subjects, such as drunkenness, violence, idolatry, and general “sinfulness”.

Much has already been written about temperance fiction, especially that by Sarah Stickney Ellis.[13] Amanda Claybaugh has also noted how many women were involved in writing temperance tracts, and how literary magazines especially requested female-focused temperance stories.[14] Middle-class temperance writers dwelt on the degradation attendant upon alcoholism in the working-classes: how drinking led to poverty, violence against women and children, death and damnation. Rob Breton has remarked on the direct relationship between drink and untimely death in such writing, unless the character converts to Christianity.[15] Writing temperance literature was eminently respectable; not only did Stickney Ellis maintain her reputation, but clergymen such as William Gaskell also engaged in temperance writing. Gaskell herself likely contributed to William’s 1839 *Temperance Rhymes*, which, in addition to presenting the usual coarse depictions of alcoholism in the working-classes, contrasted these with ideal domestic scenes of religious self-sacrifice in working-class family life.[16]

The call that allowed women to write missionary biography came in one of the first biographies of a woman missionary – the American Ann Hasseltine Judson – published in both America and Britain in 1829.[17] The editor James D. Knowles encouraged all Christians to write about the sinful state of the unconverted and to encourage the public to support the missionary cause: ‘Christians, therefore, may serve the cause of the Redeemer, by circulating authentic accounts of the deplorable situation of the heathen nations’.[18] As this instruction features in a biography about a *woman* missionary, who circulated such ‘authentic accounts’, Knowles can be understood as instructing all Christians – including women – to write for the cause.[19]

To some extent, Knowles’s encouragement of women writers was part of his justification of Ann Judson’s actions in the mission field. Her active engagement with converts, her public missionary speeches in Britain and America, and her publishing of her letters had been criticised by some Americans as unfeminine, and even religious leaders in Britain were conservatively slow to recruit women to the mission field.[20] In her own account, Judson admits that her text includes ‘scenes of trial, the very recital of which is appalling to human nature’, which, of course, also

provided her account with a good amount of dramatic narrative.[21] However, she insists that she agreed to publish only on the encouragement of the Reverend Butterworth, believing that, if it could help the missionary cause, then it was her duty to write about such coarseness:

> From no-one was this request [to publish] more forcibly and repeatedly made than from that esteemed friend to whom these letters are addressed […] a full conviction that the providential circumstances therein detailed, will have a tendency to excite grateful emotions in the hearts of many of God's dear children, induces me to make an immediate and joyful offer of this little work.[22]

Women of the British missionary movement were quick to follow Knowles's advice and Judson's example. They published their experiences in newsletters, and Jemima Thompson began her collective biography of British missionary women with an entire essay making clear 'the deplorable degradation of women in Pagan and Mohammedan nations', insisting that this was solely 'for the purpose of furnishing correct views of the degraded condition of women in Heathen countries'.[23] And the anonymous 'Authoress' of *Memoirs of Female Labourers in the Missionary Cause* writes breathlessly of the 'awful accounts of prevailing darkness, idolatry and superstition […] among the degraded idolators' that she is compiling for the edification of her Christian audience.[24]

In addition to presenting the coarseness of the 'heathen', missionary biography also contained meditations on a missionary's own awareness of their sinfulness: their coarse human nature and inability to experience feelings of holiness. For example, in the *Memoir of Harriet Newell* (one of Ann Judson's fellow missionaries), Newell is quoted as bemoaning her 'cold, stupid heart!' and inability to 'fly away from this clod of earth and participate in the holiness and pleasures of the saints within the veil.'[25] The sentiment here is remarkably similar to that of Charlotte Brontë in her letter to Ellen Nussey. Charlotte described herself as coarse because she did not think she *felt* sufficiently religious: 'uncertain that I have ever felt true contrition, wandering in thought and deed, longing for holiness which I shall never, never obtain'.[26] Religious feeling was especially important in the evangelical movement, which coincided with the rise of late eighteenth-century ideas of sensibility, and many young Christians fretted, like Charlotte and Harriet Newell, that they were too earthly and coarse to truly feel God's spirit.[27]

The Brontës and Ellen Nussey would have been familiar with both the

genres of temperance writing and missionary biography, especially as Patrick Brontë started a temperance society in Haworth in 1834.[28] Ellen was a regular at missionary meetings, often asking Anne and Charlotte to contribute handicrafts for missionary fundraising, and had a brother who planned to become a missionary. Charlotte was at one point a member of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews.[29] Missionary stories and reviews of missionary biographies appeared in the *Methodist Magazine* and the *Christian Observer*, which were read at the Parsonage, and Charlotte explicitly recommended certain spiritual biographies to Ellen.[30]

There is some evidence that Anne Brontë in particular was writing in the tradition of moral literature. As Twycross-Martin has demonstrated, Anne introduces her controversial novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in the same manner as Sarah Stickney Ellis, using an explanatory preface to expound the necessity of portraying the realities of intemperance as a means to combat it.[31] In defending her novel against accusations of coarseness, Anne presented herself as duty-bound to write about this subject and explicitly invoked God as her inspiration: 'when I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God I *will* speak it'.[32] Juliet Barker and Margaret Smith join Twycross-Martin in taking Anne's preface at face value.[33] Certainly Charlotte encouraged readers to believe that Anne was motivated to write her coarse novel out of a painful feeling of religious duty to others: 'She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail […] as a warning to others. She hated her work, but would pursue it'.[34] Charlotte portrays Anne as a missionary-like martyr, sacrificing her comfort, happiness, and reputation to circulate an authentic account of societal sin. In her preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte implied that she also wrote to effect the moral reform of society. In defending her novel, she insisted that she was protesting against 'bigotry – that parent of crime' and directly addressed her readers in order to preach 'certain simple truths'.[35] Her language references the natural, simple form of religious influence, believed to be inherent to women, in order to deflect from her more radical attacks of society.

Whether or not Anne and Charlotte were sincere in claiming that their writing was motivated entirely by moral considerations, Ellen Nussey was, nonetheless, determined that they should be presented this way in Gaskell's biography. During the biography's production process, two of Ellen's actions show that she envisaged how the *Life* would take the form of a female missionary

biography. Firstly, Ellen made sure to send Gaskell the letters in which Charlotte, like missionary women before her, berated herself for coarseness and a lack of piety. These were intensely personal letters but, if they had been published in their entirety, an audience used to spiritual biographies would have recognised (as Ellen had) Charlotte's desire for true holiness. For example, in one letter that appears in the biography, Charlotte rejects the 'flippancy' of her life before she experienced religious epiphany:

> I do wish to be better than I am. I pray fervently sometimes to be made so. […] Do not mistake me - do not think I am good; I only wish to be so. I only hate my former flippancy and forwardness. Oh! I am no better than ever I was. [...] I am now as wretched and hopeless as ever.[36]

Such self-flagellation featured in the diaries of missionaries such as Ann Judson and David Brainerd, thus providing evidence of how these saints endured and overcame spiritual crises. If Ellen could establish Charlotte as experiencing such a spiritual crisis and conversion early in the biography, Charlotte's later actions could be interpreted as motivated by religion (as the potentially unfeminine actions of Ann Judson had been). Unfortunately for Ellen, Gaskell did not present the letters with this sort of explanation, perhaps because, as a Unitarian, the need for further conversion was alien to her. However, the majority of Christian readers would have recognised at least the glimmers of a possible conversion narrative in the extracts that were eventually included in the *Life*.

Secondly, Ellen wrote a description of Anne Brontë's death specifically for the biography, which Gaskell included in the biography almost unedited.[37] Ellen was with Charlotte when Anne died in Scarborough, and the description she wrote from memory of the event amounted to a Christian witnessing of a good evangelical death. Such witness descriptions were an essential element of spiritual biographies and always featured in missionary memoirs. They usually stressed the subject's passive resignation to God's will, as well as any suffering they endured. They detailed the subject's last words or any hymns or prayers they had requested to hear, and often suggested that the subject experienced some kind of vision of their assured salvation, which enabled them to expire happily.[38]

Ellen's description of Anne's death fulfilled all the requirements of the good evangelical death witness. Ellen writes that Anne 'evinced the pious courage and fortitude of a martyr', and was cheerful, grateful and happy to the end, with both

Charlotte and Ellen in awe of the obvious religious turn of Anne's mind: 'It was plain that her thoughts were driven by the imposing view before her to penetrate forwards to the regions of unfading glory'.[39] She also portrays Anne as being halfway between life and death – her vision supernaturally penetrating the veil of mortality and catching a glimpse of heaven. When the moment of Anne's death finally came, Ellen reports that, 'calmly and without a sigh [she] passed from the temporal to the eternal'. Ellen indicates that Anne's 'faith never failed', and that her last words were for Charlotte.[40]

In contrast, the description of Charlotte's death that Gaskell had obtained for the biography was troubling, in that did not meet the criteria of a good evangelical death. According to Patrick Brontë and Arthur Nicholls (Ellen had not been present), Charlotte was 'delirious', and her last words, although gratifying to Nicholls, could be interpreted as a protest against God's will: '"Oh!" she whispered forth, "I am not going to die am I? He will not separate us, we have been so happy"'.[41] Readers might be reminded of the heretical lesson the young Jane Eyre drew from Brocklehurst's stories of the deaths of sinful children: "I must keep in good health and not die".[42] However, in providing her account of Anne Brontë's death, Nussey was able to associate Charlotte with that perfect performance of Christian piety, thus neutralising the effect of Charlotte's last words.

Although Gaskell did not consciously construct her biography of Charlotte as a missionary memoir, Ellen's contributions to the text ensures that echoes of this genre can be detected and would have been familiar to a large number of readers. This, combined with Anne's and Charlotte's prefaces suggesting moral reasons for their writing, would have gone some way to redeeming the sisters in the eyes of many Victorians.

The rise of respectability

By the mid-nineteenth century, women writers – and even evangelicals – had become more cautious about their subject matter. Engaging in active work outside the domestic sphere – too close to coarseness and sin – had the potential to unsex and un-class a respectable woman. By associating with sinful subjects, women themselves could be seen as infected with coarseness. In his biography of Ann Judson, Knowles implicitly acknowledged this danger: '[The] scenes through which she passed, calling for decision, activity, energy, and fortitude, were less favourable

than […] domestic life, for the cultivation of the softer and the gentler qualities'.[43] Later female biographers sought to disclaim this danger, altering Knowles's description so that '[n]one but the scenes through which she passed could probably have developed sympathies so kind – love so constant – faith so fervent – piety so meek, gentle and submissive'.[44] This alteration combats any suggestion of unwomanliness, stressing Judson's feminine qualities to maintain the respectability of missionary work for women.

Both Anne and Charlotte Brontë were aware of the ideological move that sought to preserve women from associating with sin and saw how it limited women and doomed society. Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* dramatizes the immorality that occurs when society wilfully closes its eyes to sin, rather than recognising and combatting it. Her preface shows she knew she was risking her reputation, but it also stresses her belief that writing about sin in order to reform society was more moral – even if less respectable – than ignoring sin and maintaining a clear reputation.

Charlotte's preface to *Jane Eyre* went further than a moral defence of her actions: it was an attack on society's conflation of social status and morality that she saw enacted in Elizabeth Rigby's 1848 critique of *Jane Eyre* in the evangelical *Quarterly Review*. Initially Rigby criticises the text for its inclusion of coarse subject matter, such as the sins of Mr Rochester, and its portrayal of a woman who is aware of such sin:

> He talks to her […] recklessly as to a man. He pours into her ears disgraceful tales of his past life, connected with the birth of little Adele, which any man with common respect for a woman, and that a mere girl of eighteen, would have spared her; but which eighteen in this case listens to as if it were nothing new, and certainly nothing distasteful.[45]

Jane's calm reaction to Rochester's sin resembles that of a missionary encountering the heathen – and is thus still respectable. However, Rigby cannot believe that a young woman could confrontsin and not be infected by it: if she can listen to coarseness, she must be herself coarse. Rigby also redefines coarseness, her writing slipping between coarseness as sin and coarseness as a lack of status.[46] She characterises Jane's behaviour as 'this house maid beau ideal of the arts of coquetry', tying Jane to the coarse activity of coquetry but also implying that Jane is coarse because of her 'house maid' class.[47] Coarseness is also linked with a lack of feminine qualities: there is no simplicity to or humility in Jane. And when Rigby considers the authorship of this 'immoral' work, she insists that the novel's 'vulgarity' made the

idea of a woman writer impossible.[48] It is such slippage and hypocrisy that Charlotte attacks in her preface when she writes: 'Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. […] These things and deeds are diametrically opposed: they are as distinct as vice is from virtue.'[49] Reviewers, she argues, are guilty of bigotry when they use the social markers of class and femininity to signal piety. In her radical attack on social conventions, however, Charlotte doomed herself to a reputation as a vulgar writer and woman.

Elizabeth Gaskell was also aware of how moral work by women was not always deemed respectable by society. Although she was, in many ways, a radical writer, she lived a relatively conventional life, largely embracing society's views on women.[50] For Unitarians, life had been difficult in England up to the nineteenth century, and they could feel their newly-won respectability was insecure. Therefore, despite their somewhat advanced views on women's intellectual capability, Victorian Unitarians often conformed to social mores.[51] With this contextual awareness, Gaskell knew she would need more than assurances of morality and missionary characterisation to redeem the reputations of the Brontë family.

Gaskell's moral yet respectable woman writer

In the biography, Gaskell mobilised the religious meaning of 'coarse' while combatting the social implications the term had accrued by the 1850s. She also minimised aspects of the Brontës' writing identities that she found morally suspect, even though – or perhaps especially because – she secretly shared these.

Most significantly, Gaskell did not remove all the coarse subject matter from the Brontës' family history. Risking scandal, she included the lurid details of Branwell's affair with his employer's wife: how she, 'bold and hardened', seduced Branwell even in front of her children, and how Branwell drank to drown his feelings of guilt and remorse.[52] This was colourful material for a memoir, but Gaskell presents it almost explicitly as a temperance tale. She was an author already associated with the temperance writings of her husband, and an author who had maintained her respectability while writing about risky subjects. In her novel *Ruth*, published just four years earlier than the *Life*, she had depicted a fallen woman who became a heroine and died a martyr's death. Her nuanced treatment of the character, combined with her reputation as a properly religious and domestic woman writer, had ensured society understood her novel as concerned with effecting moral reform by writing

dutifully about coarse subjects. Indeed, in a letter to Gaskell, Charles Kingsley wrote: 'among all my large acquaintance I never hear of have heard but one unanimous opinion as to the beauty and righteousness of the book'.[51] Gaskell presents the scandal surrounding Branwell in exactly these terms:

> The story must be told. If I could, I would have avoided it […] but it is possible that, by revealing the misery, the gnawing lifelong misery, the degrading habits, the early death of her partner in guilt – the acute and long-enduring agony of his family – to the wretched woman […] there may be awakened in her some feelings of repentance.[53]

So that the reader cannot misconstrue her motives, she declares somewhat excessive regret (indeed, perhaps she protests too much) that she must reveal this titillating scandal in order to tell a cautionary temperance tale. As temperance stories associated drunkenness with the violence it could cause to the Victorian family, Gaskell's mobilisation of this genre within the biography connects Charlotte with victims of domestic violence and further encourages the reader to see her as a martyr.[54] Moreover, because the story of this novelist was being told by a woman writer who so clearly wrote for religious reasons, Charlotte's writing could be assimilated within the context of religious writing for social reconciliation.

Gaskell also domesticated Charlotte in the same way that female missionary biographers feminised their biographical subjects. Scholars have noted how Gaskell characterised Charlotte as a dutiful daughter, engaging in domestic tasks.[55] However, one of the most interesting ways in which Gaskell domesticated Charlotte was by minimising her identity as an author. As has been noted, Gaskell ignored Patrick's requests to write about Charlotte's novels; she also sidestepped any temptation to justify Charlotte's writing by recourse to the Romantic idea of genius.[55] Patrick's own accounts of his children frequently use this term and, as Lucasta Miller has demonstrated, it was the Romantic figure of the genius author, fêted in the public sphere, to which the young Charlotte and Branwell most aspired.[55] Yet, Gaskell does not use the word genius to describe Charlotte, referring instead to her 'powers of creation' and attributing these to the strong impressions made upon the imaginations of children in a secluded environment.[56] It appears that, in the mid-nineteenth century the idea of genius was becoming gendered and less respectable; the Romantic poet Byron was a genius, whereas women writers had God-given talent and it was their duty to use wisely. In his letter to Gaskell, Kingsley suggested his belief that 'a

simple, virtuous, practical home life is consistent with high imaginative genius' was no longer held by the majority of society.[57]

Gaskell was perhaps especially anxious about women writers being associated with the masculine and somewhat coarse conception of the author-genius because she herself was attracted by it. The Gaskells took an innocent pleasure in collecting signatures of celebrities, and when Elizabeth became a successful literary celebrity in her own right, she privately enjoyed the perks it provided her with: she engaged fully in the business side of her writing, and she used her position to write to other authors, set up visits and holidays, and collect more signatures.[58] Outwardly, however, she maintained her reputation as domestic and respectable, rather than mercenary and professional.

The tension Gaskell experienced around the idea of the public woman writer led to her minimising Charlotte's authorial genius and culminated in her killing off the 'authoress', substituting the short-lived domestic heroine, Mrs Nicholls, in her place:

> There is one other letter […] which develops the intellectual side of her character, before we lose all thought of the authoress in the timid and conscientious woman about to become a wife, and in the short almost perfect, happiness of her nine months of wedded life.[59]

In the same way Gaskell had neutralised the problematic character of the fallen Ruth, who could only be redeemed in death, she also erased the problematic character of the woman author, Charlotte Brontë. This first symbolic death of the author foreshadowed the death of the woman, who was already established as a victim and martyr, even in the absence of the perfect evangelical death.

The image of the woman writer that emerged from Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë, and which became the model for Victorian women writers, had been mediated in turn by the Brontë sisters' own religious context and references, Ellen Nussey's missionary-memoir-like accounts, and Gaskell's anxious editorship. The resultant woman writer was one who was not permitted to justify her activity by recourse to the Romantic idea of 'genius', but instead had to write as a painful duty, like female missionary martyrs, to save society. Though she could write dramatic tales replete with coarse subject matter, if she was to maintain a reputation as a respectable woman writer, she could not enjoy the public role of an author.

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Notes

[1] [?October 1836], in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume One: 1829 – 1847*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 152 – 3, p. 153.

[2] Charles Ellicott, *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers*, 1878, accessed via Bible Hub, http://biblehub.com/ [accessed 19 Nov 2017]; Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor*, quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* online <http://0-www.oed.com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/> [accessed 3 July 2018].

[3] 5 and 6 December 1836, in Smith, Vol I, 155-156, p. 156.

[4] October 1836, in Smith, Vol I, 152–53, p. 153.

[5] Catherine Hall has written about the development of domestic feminine ideology and its links with evangelicalism in *White Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp. 84–89.

[6] Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), p. 57; Pamela Corpron Parker, 'Elizabeth Gaskell and Literary Tourism', in *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth Century Culture*, ed. by Nicola J. Watson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 128–38, p. 129; Elisabeth Jay, 'Introduction', in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin, 1997), ix–xxxii, p. ix.

[7] Miller, pp. 56–62; Jay, 'Introduction', in *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. xiii.

[8] See, for example, Sue Morgan and Jacqueline DeVries (eds), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); Julie Melnyk (ed.), *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of their Fathers* (London: Garland, 1998); Elisabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (eds), *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998). On the

significance of evangelicalism to middle-class culture, see Ian Bradley: *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London: Cape, 1976), pp. 14, 145.

[9] See Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); 'Standing Alone: Anne Brontë out of the Shadow', *Brontë Studies* 39 (2014), 330 –40, pp. 335, 338; and 'Horror and disgust': Reading *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, this issue, pp. XX. On temperance fiction and *Tenant,* see also Henrietta Twycross-Martin, 'The Drunkard, the Brute and the Paterfamilias: the Temperance Fiction of the Early Victorian Writer Sarah Stickney Ellis', in *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture*, ed. Hogan and Bradstock, 6–30, pp. 23–24; and Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (London: Cornell UP, 2007), pp. 87–88.

[10] Jill Matus, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. by Jill Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–9, p. 2; and John Chapple, 'Unitarian Dissent', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Matus, 164–77.

[11] See Dennis Butts and Pat Garrett (eds), *From the Dairyman's Daughter to Worrals of the WAAF: The Religious Tract Society, Lutterworth Press and Children's Literature* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2006); Penny Brown, *The Captured World: The Child and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in England* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); and Nancy Cutt, *Ministering Angels: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Writing for Children* (Wormley: Five Owls Press, 1980).

[12] See Alison Twells, 'Missionary Domesticity, Global Reform and "Woman's Sphere" in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Gender and History* 18 (2006), 266–84, pp. 267–68; and Twycross-Martin, 'The Drunkard', in *Women of Faith*, pp. 9–10.

[13] For example, see P. J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971); Rob Breton, 'Diverting the Drunkard's Path: Chartist Temperance Narratives', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 41 (2013): 139-152; and Twycross-Martin, 'The Drunkard', in *Women of Faith.*

[14] Claybaugh, pp. 87–88.

[15] Breton, p. 143; see also Keating, p. 27.

[16] For a discussion of the Gaskells' shared understanding of how poetry could be used to morally improve the working classes, see Barbara Brill, *William Gaskell 1805-1884: A Portrait* (Manchester: Manchester Literary and Philosophical Publications, 1984), pp. 45–51.

[17] Both Alison Booth and Linda Peterson have noted this biography's significance. See Booth, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 166–67; Peterson, 'Women Writers and Self Writing', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 209–30.

[18] James D. Knowles, *Memoirs of Mrs. Ann H. Judson*, 3rd edn (London: Wightman and Co., 1830), p. v.

[19] See Ann Judson, *An Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire in a Series of Letters, Addressed to a Gentleman in London* (London: Butterworth and Son, 1823).

[20] Knowles, p. 36; For British views on women missionaries see Peter Williams, '"The Missing Link": The Recruitment of Women Missionaries in some English Evangelical Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century', in *Women and Missions: Past and Present, Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. by Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 43-69 (pp. 44-5); and Valentine Cunningham, '"God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife"' in *Women and Missions Past and Present, Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. by Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 85–105, p. 91.

[21] Judson, *An Account of the American Baptist Mission*, p. 1.

[22] Judson, pp. ix–x.

[23] Jemima Thompson, *Memoirs of British Female Missionaries* (London: William Smith, 1841), pp. i–ix.

[24] Anon, *Memoirs of Female Labourers in the Missionary Cause* (London: Simkin, Marshall and Co, 1839), pp. 2–5.

[25] Leonard Woods, *Memoirs of Mrs. Harriet Newell*, 2nd edn (London: Booth and Co., 1816), p. 70.

[26] 5 and 6 December 1836, in Smith, Vol. I, pp. 155–56.

[27] See Angharad Eyre, 'Love, Passion, Conversion: Constance Maynard and Evangelical Missionary writing', *Women's History Review* 25 (2016), 35–52.

[28] Twycross Martin, 'The Drunkard', in *Women of Faith*, p. 23.

[29] Ellen Nussey, pocket diary, 1844, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin, Ellen Nussey Collection 1.6; letter, 17 March 1840, in Smith, Vol. I, pp. 211–13; letter, late June 1843[?], in Smith, Vol. I, pp. 324–26; letter, 21 Dec 1839, in Smith, Vol I, p. 206.

[30] Jay, 'Introduction', in, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. xiv. Valentine Cunningham has argued that Brontë had access to the biography of Henry Martyn, on whom he believes she based the character of St John Rivers. See Cunningham, '"God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife"' , pp. 97–98.

[31] Twycross-Martin, p. 24.

[32] Anne Brontë, 'Preface to the Second Edition', *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. by Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 4; on the reception of this novel, see Thormählen's article in this special issue.

[33] Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 531–32; Margaret Smith, 'Introduction', *Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, Vol. I, pp. xviii.

[34] Charlotte Brontë, quoted in Gaskell, pp. 267–68.

[35] Charlotte Brontë, 'Preface' , *Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 3-5.

[36] Gaskell, p. 108.

[37] Gaskell refers to the account being provided by a friend of the Brontës in the same way she refers to Nussey throughout the biography. Nussey went on to include her version of the account in her own biography of Charlotte Brontë (this was withdrawn from publication, though a volume exists in the British Library): *The Story of the Brontës: their homes, haunts, friends and works* (Bradford: Horsfall Turner, 1885-9). Comparison of the two texts shows that, in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Gaskell made very few cuts and no substantive edits. On this episode see also

Juliet Barker, *The Brontës*, pp. 588–90; and 'Saintliness, Treason and Plot: The Writing of Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 21 (1994), 101–15, p. 106.

[38] On the 'good Christian death', see Jay, *The Religion of the Heart*, pp. 154–60; and Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 27–32.

[39] Gaskell, pp. 293-95.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Gaskell, p. 427

[42] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 33..

[43] Knowles, pp. 277–78.

[44] Grierson, *American Biography: Or, Memoirs of Mrs. A. Judson and Mrs. M. L. Ramsay* (Edinburgh: Leith, 1831), pp. 282–83.

[45] *Quarterly Review*, 17 March 1849, p. 501.

[46] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The ideological work of gender in mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 134–35.

[47] *Quarterly*, p. 504

[48]Ibid., p. 507.

[49] Brontë, Preface, in *Jane Eyre*, p. 3.

[50] Matus, p. 3.

[51] Chapple, in Matus, p. 164; Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement 1831-51* (New York: St Martins, 1995), pp. 5–7; Ruth Watts, 'Mary Carpenter: Educator of the Children of the Perishing and Dangerous Classes', in *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education and Social Progress 1790–1930*, ed. Mary Hilton and Pam Hirsch, pp. 40–41.

[52] Gaskell, pp. 204–14.

[51] Charles Kingsley, letter 25 July 1853, University of Manchester Library, Elizabeth Gaskell Manuscript Collection, English MS 730/57; see also Matus, pp. 1–9.

[52] Gaskell, p. 204.

[53] Twycross-Martin, pp. 12–13.

[54] See especially Miller, pp. 72–73.

[55] Jay, 'Introduction', in *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. xiii.

[56] Miller, pp. 2–3.

[57] Gaskell, pp. 69–71.

[58] Kingsley, letter 25 July 1853. Miller has also noted the connection between Brontë's genius and Gaskell's fear that Brontë was consequently lacking in feminine qualities, p. 31.

[59] Letters to Elizabeth and William Gaskell and miscellaneous letters, Elizabeth Gaskell Manuscript Collection, University of Manchester Library, English MSS 730–734.

[60] Gaskell, pp. 415–16.