3-2016

Hannah More's Moral Imagination: Fiction that Reformed a Nation

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Senior Seminar - Summer 2015

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She has been described as the most influential woman of her era and Britain's greatest propagandist.[1] Her works were far more popular than Jane Austen's and were personally requested by royalty. She ran in the highest circles, dear friends with both literary giant Samuel Johnson and abolitionist hero William Wilberforce. In her day, Hannah More was a household name, widely recognized for the massive influence she had on society. Today, it is rare to meet someone who has heard of her.

When Hannah More began writing in the late eighteenth century, her works became extremely popular very quickly. By the time of her death in 1833, she was known almost world-wide as a best-selling author. Yet More's goals were far more than literary. She was a reformer, seeking improvement among the Christian sects of British society and the advancement of the gospel throughout the rest of the nation. With this end in mind, she became an important figure in several reformative campaigns, including abolition and the Sunday School movement. Her endeavor to live with Christ-like intentionality motivated her to write a wide variety of works, including tracts, novels, plays, poems, and didactic essays. She became an expert at using fiction to teach morals, a format that can be dubbed "moral imagination."

Hannah More's use of imaginative literature to reform the moral tenor of the nation was remarkably successful. To understand More's use of moral imagination, one must ask what makes her unique as a moral imaginist. By exploring the life of More herself, her literary

[1] As cited in Anne Kostelanetz Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830, (*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 15.

context, and comparable contemporary works, it becomes clear that there were two key factors that make More stand out. First, as an Evangelical, her works took a decidedly Christian tone that many comparable works lack. Moreover, her ability to adapt her message into varying formats, including novels and chapbooks, in an attempt to reach otherwise unreached people groups was unprecedented. Ultimately, this uniqueness resulted in an extremely effective writing career, measured both by her popularity and the change she brought about. Armed with moral imagination, Hannah More embarked on a battle to reform British society.

Positioned for Greatness: A Brief Biography

Hannah More was born February 2, 1745 in a rural hamlet four miles from Bristol.[2] The fourth of five daughters born to Jacob and Mary More, her father was employed as a schoolmaster of a poor charity school in Stapleton.[3] His position and his own noteworthy intelligence evidently had a great influence on his parenting as Jacob More raised his daughters with an unusually high attention to their education. In 1862, More's biographer wrote that "With more enlarged views than were common a hundred years ago, good Mr. More…determined to strengthen the minds of his daughters."[4] Hannah proved to be a remarkable pupil. Extremely intelligent, she taught herself to read and then began writing short bits of poetry by the time she was four years old.[5]

When Hannah was nearly thirteen, her older sisters established a boarding school in Bristol. Before long, Hannah was teaching alongside her sisters, and their school was gaining great popularity. The school's adherence to Scriptural morality and serious education, rather than

[2] Helen C. Knight, *Hannah More; or, Life in Hall and Cottage*, (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1851).
[3] M.G. Jones, *Hannah More,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 3.
[4] Knight, *Hannah More,* 10.
[5] Thompson, *The Life of Hannah More, with Notices of Her Sisters*, 6.

simply churning out girls who were "accomplished" enough to find a husband, "rendered this school the most celebrated of its kind in the kingdom."[6]

It was in this context that More found her first opportunity to become a published author. In 1762, 17-year-old Hannah became appalled at the lack of appropriate plays for her students to perform. She was not comfortable with the morally questionable content, so she decided to write her own script. *The Search After Happiness* was "a substitute for the improper custom…of allowing plays, and those not always of the purest kind, to be acted by young ladies in boarding schools."[7]

In 1773, a repeatedly broken engagement led to a generous annuity from the would-be fiancé.[8] This freed Hannah from the need to teach at the school and allowed her to pursue writing. In the winter of 1773-4, More spent the season in London. With a letter of introduction from a subscriber of their school, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Elizabeth Montagu, and other recognizable names became familiar with the young teacher-turned-author. [9] Witty and sharp, More found fast friends among London's greatest. Dr. Johnson in particular was a special mentor Hannah cherished dearly, and their friendship helped to thrust her into the spotlight.[10]

One connection that Dr. Johnson helped More to gain was with David Garrick, arguably the most important of these early literary friendships. The very well established actor was also a theater manager, and Garrick latched onto More's plays.[11] Offering extensive assistance in the revision and stage managing process, he debuted her first public drama, *The Inflexible Captive*, in 1775. More met with great success, and it was followed by two other dramas, *Percy* in 1777

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[6] Thompson, *The Life of Hannah More, with Notices of Her Sisters,* 13.
[7] As cited in Ford, *Hannah More: A Critical Biography*, 19.
[8] Mona Scheuermann, *In Praise of Poverty: Hannah More Counters Thomas Paine and the Radical Threat*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 5-7.
[9] Ford, *Hannah More: A Critical Biography,* 33.
[10] Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More,* 56-65.
[11] Ibid., 67.

and *The Fatal Falsehood* in 1779. Between these debuts, More also gained recognition as a poet. and published a series of didactic essays intended for use by girls' boarding schools.[12]

By this point, Hannah More was considered a true member of the *literati.* She was an important participant of the "Bluestockings," a literary circle made up of local geniuses, particularly women.[13] Respect for More was so great that she was included in Samuel Richard's famous 1779 painting, *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain.*[14]

In 1779, at the age of thirty-four, More experienced an Evangelical conversion.[15] While she had assuredly been a Christian before this time, the reading of Scripture, Rev. John Newton's *Cardiphonia,* and solitude and prayer brought More to understand that "not all that… glisters [is] gold" – a lesson Hannah took seriously as she scorned her previous way of life as a high society *literati*. [16] Turning away from theater, she doggedly pursued nobler purposes and eventually publically admitted that she wished she had never dabbled in playwriting.

More's life took a distinctive turn at this point. Her biography no longer centers on London and the likes of Dr. Johnson, but shifts to a ministerial focus. Hannah continued to write and, under the mentorship of John Newton, learned to reconcile her faith with her talents.[17] In this way, her story closely parallels that of her very good friend, William Wilberforce. The two intelligent, witty, passionate Evangelicals bonded over their similarities and worked closely together for the remainder of their lives. [18] Together, they fought for their two greatest passions:

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[12] Ford, *Hannah More: A Critical Biography,* 38-75.
[13] Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz, *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings, (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)
[14] Ibid., 60.
[15] Ibid., 78-83.
[16] Hannah More, "Ode to Dragon, Mr. Garrick's House Dog, at Hampton," in *Hannah More's Complete Works*, 2 vols., 42-43, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), 43.
[17] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 361.
[18] Demers, *The World of Hannah More*, 58.

the abolition of slavery and "the reformation of manners."[19]Through More's moral imagination, she changed the hearts of the people while Wilberforce changed the laws of the land. In addition to writing, More also dedicated her life to several poor communities, with her Sunday Schools ultimately responsible for the education of thousands.[20]

Hannah accomplished an incredible amount in widely varying circles, with her fingers dipped into several different types of reform. It is hard to wrap our arms around a figure as complex and multi-faceted as Hannah, but it is clear that this can be best done by recognizing her success as an author. While she wrote many types of works over her fifty-two year writing career, her best-selling publications were the most imaginative. In keeping with More's life aspirations, these were also tightly linked with her goals for moral reform. By turning to these works, we can better understand how More's moral imagination sets her apart as unique.

Literature and Society: The Context of Hannah More's Moral Imagination

Hannah More's imaginative works were introduced into a society well prepared for moral literature. The types of publications More produced fit smoothly into the broader literary context. Moral imagination had been rising in popularity for several decades, long before the publication of More's best-sellers.

Several factors play into this surge of moral imagination, beginning with the simple fact that literacy rates had increased dramatically. For the vast majority of history, publications had a very limited audience of only the most highly educated, and thus only the most affluent and almost exclusively male. By the time Hannah More was writing at the end of the eighteenth

[19] Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More*, 119.
[20] Jones, *Hannah More*, 151-156.

century, however, literacy had become an expectation for virtually all British citizens.[21] This greatly increased the need for written work, as well as drastically altering the content and format of the works in order to adapt to new audiences. Reading became an activity that the vast majority could enjoy, an accessible and entertaining option for the transfer of information.[22]

The entertainment value of reading led to the affluent Georgian era society adopting it as a favorite pastime. The indulgence that demarcates the Georgian era expanded to the novel, as women with significant amounts of time and money turned their attention toward favorite characters and fascinating plotlines, reminiscent of the passion for imported jewels and fabrics. Books become a commodity, and reading was bought and sold among the affluent at a shockingly increased pace.[23]

As the market expanded, so did the goods that were offered. Imaginative reading materials appeared in several varieties, and although the novel ultimately won out as the preferred form among the affluent, other options were abundant. Criminal narratives, or exaggerated "biographies" of those who were arrested for various crimes, were extremely popular.[24] Plays and poetry continued to increase in popularity. Within families, reading aloud together became commonplace, much as families today may gather around a favorite television show. Additionally, imaginative literature began to be used in formal education.[25]

With such broad readership and extensive use, many began to recognize the potential value and harm of imaginative literature. As young people rapidly consumed this literature, the

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[21]Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth Century English Fiction*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 7.
[22] Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, introduction to *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics, and History*, edited by Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005).
[23] Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth Century English Fiction*, 9.
[24] Hal Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth Century England,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
[25]Colby, *Fiction with a Purpose: Major and Minor Nineteenth-Century Novels*, 16-17.

(often self-appointed) guardians of society worried about the influence such material would have. At the same time, it was recognized that reading held great potential for imparting moral instruction. In 1789, a book was published entitled *The Female Guardian, Designed to Correct Some of the Foibles Incident to Girls and Supply them with Innocent Amusement for their Hours of Leisure.*[26] Not atypical for the era, the title alone demonstrates the level of power many perceived books to have, resulting in a book that was such a good "guardian" that it "corrected foibles." The particular use of the phrase "innocent amusement" emphasizes the concern that there were alternative ways to spend leisure that were less innocent. In line with its mission, the book quotes Elizabeth Montagu, the dear mentor of Hannah More, who is practically begging for more positive, realistic female role models in literature, saying that "examples of domestic virtue would be more particularly useful to women than those of great heroines."[27]

Mrs. Montagu was not the only of More's mentors who felt strongly about the need for moral literature. In 1750, when his future protégé was only five years old, Dr. Samuel Johnson voiced these concerns in his *Rambler #4*. He calls out the power of literature, whether used for ill or for betterment, and says that "the most important concern" of authors ought to be that "books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions."[28] The young, ignorant, and idle became the primary target audiences of Hannah's works half a generation later, and her moral imagination was most assuredly written with the intention of serving as "lectures of conduct." Clearly, even in these decades before her popularity, the idea of moral imagination was alive and well.

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[26] Ellenor Fenn (as Mrs. Lovechild), *The Female Guardian, Designed to Correct some of the Foibles Incident to Girls, and Supply them with Innocent Amusement for their Hours of Leisure,* (London: John Marshall and Co, 1784).
[27] Ibid., 34.
[28] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, no. 4 (March 31, 1750), accessed July 31, 2015, http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/johnson.rambler.html.

Moral imagination had been popularized with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* of 1678.[29] Building on this context, literary master Samuel Richardson produced his two major works -- the multi-volume epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748). While these scandal-filled pages may not always be recognized as moral lessons, Richardson's intention was to educate his readers and encourage them to reform. Even the subtitle of *Pamela* – "*Virtue Rewarded"*—reveals this desire to teach young people to continue along the straight and narrow to enjoy betterment in the long run.[30] He tells the story of the 15-year-old maid Pamela who refuses to allow her master to seduce her. When her master sees that her "person" and "mind" are upright, he switches gears and decides to instead marry Pamela, thus resulting in a happily-ever-after scenario for the young maid. Clearly, the lesson to work hard and stay pure was rewarded, and Richardson attempted to use this as a model for young women to emulate purity. The extreme selling success of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* is all but legendary, as the number of contemporary remakes, parodies, and even merchandise testify.[31] While Richardson sought to entertain and was obviously successful to that end, he also purposefully intertwined his narratives with moral lessons.

Aside from these somewhat subtle morality lessons, other narratives began to circulate that were more blatantly instructive in nature. These became increasingly popular in the decades leading up to the nineteenth century, as embodied by stories like the anonymously authored *May Day; Or, Anecdotes of Miss Lydia Lively: Intended to Amuse and Improve the Rising Generation* (1789). In this children's tale formatted as a dialogue between a child and her mother but which reads like a sermon, little Miss Lydia learns how to be a well-behaved child. With chapter titles

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[29] J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction,* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1990), 132.
[30] Mary Patricia Martin, "Reading Reform in Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 37, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 595-614, accessed August 1, 2015, doi:10.2307/451051.
[31] Spacks, *Novel Beginnings,* 61, 86-87, 95.

such as "Benevolence Encouraged," "The Generous Confession," and "The Relapse," the "moral" aspect of moral imagination is obviously favored.[32]

More was not alone in her quest to write morally imaginative literature. Others were also utilizing creative thinking and calling for increased usage of fiction to teach valuable lessons. While the final products varied in audience, length, message, and countless other factors, there was nothing revolutionary about moral imagination. Yet More is a distinct voice amidst a rapidly crowding market. She may not have been breaking new ground, but she was taking the concept of moral imagination and running in a different direction, farther, faster, and with greater success, than anyone else ever had.

More's Uniqueness: An Evangelical Spin on Moral Imagination

While the hindsight of history shows us that Hannah was unique, even her contemporaries recognized a special gift in this best-selling author. In 1790, following the publication of her didactic essay *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World,* the Bishop of London wrote to his "dear friend" Hannah. Sounding somewhat amused, he explains to More that it was really quite silly for her to attempt to publish that "little book" anonymously, as it was immediately obvious that she must be the author. Comparing her to an ostrich with its head stuck in the sand so it thinks no one can see it, he says that the book is clearly hers because "There are but few persons… that could write such a book — that could convey so much sound, evangelical morality, and so much genuine Christianity, in such neat and elegant language." [33] Two points can be taken from the Bishop's comments – she was flooded with "evangelical morality" and "genuine Christianity," as well as that she was writing in "neat and elegant

[32] *May Day; Or, Anecdotes of Miss Lydia Lively: Intended to Amuse and Improve the Rising Generation,* (London: John Marshall and Company, 1789).
[33] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 352-3.

language" that perfectly appealed to her target audience of the upper classes. More was decidedly unique, and the Bishop beautifully captured several reasons why.

First, Hannah More's profoundly Evangelical beliefs make her stand out from other authors. While morality was the fruit of More's work, this was not her end in and of itself. Rather, More sought a specifically Christian agenda. As she wrote, "I know of no way of teaching morals but by infusing principles of Christianity, nor of teaching Christianity without a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures." [34] This is a defining characteristic of More's imaginative writing. It contrasts profoundly with the examples of moral tales mentioned previously, such as the Richardson style heroine who finds herself battling anti-heroes in questionable circumstances. Scandalous seduction scenes will not be found in More's work, even if they may have been useful for teaching morals. More took a different route, keeping her work Scripture-focused.

This focus was founded on her aim for not only the societal improvement of manners, but something deeper – she sought religious revival. Like the other members of the Clapham Sect, her Evangelical beliefs led to an intense desire to live out her faith by incorporating it into her work.[35] In a similar style as Wilberforce, Hannah More boldly remained in the world, writing in secular circles while fully engaging her faith. As she wrote to a friend in 1795, "I have no doubt it is a part of Christianity to convert every natural talent to a religious use."[36] As her Scripture saturated fiction demonstrates, More took this very seriously.

It is also worth noting that while many British citizens identified as Christians at this point in history, specifically as members of the Anglican church, More took her faith in a

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[34] Martha More, *Mendip Annals: Or, a Narrative of the Charitable Labours of Hannah and Martha More in Their Neighbourhood, Being the Journal of Martha More,* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859), 6.
[35] Stephen Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect: How Wilberforce's Circle Transformed Britain, (*Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010).
[36] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 468.

different direction by identifying as an Evangelical. She explained in her diary in 1803 that "Bible Christianity is what I love…a Christianity practical and pure, which teaches holiness, humility, repentance and faith in Christ; and which after summing up all the Evangelical graces declares that the greatest of these is charity [love]."[37] These personal beliefs differed from the broader Anglican views at the time, building on the First Great Awakening that had sent many Christians searching for a more personal, revived faith. With a greater emphasis on individual growth and a personal relationship with God, individual responsibility for morality generally increased. More's works demonstrates her Evangelical belief that each person is responsible for their own personal growth and sanctification. This Evangelical view of morality set her apart from other moral imaginists, particularly as it inspired her to write about characters who lived even more intentionally and more Biblically than other fictitious role models. For More, it was not about living morally as much as it was about living Biblically for the glory of God.

More's Uniqueness: Adapting to the Audience

More's motivation for morality had a major impact on what she wrote about and how she approached the art of writing. This was not, however, the only thing that the Bishop of London mentioned as a distinctive mark of More. His comment that few others "could write such a book…in such neat and elegant language" points to a second crucial difference. More was, undeniably, the best of the moral imaginists. Her work was well-written and thereby well-received. At its surface, this may appear to be a fairly simple explanation, but the reality is far more complex. More was incredibly intentional in her use of imaginative works, and it was her ability to adapt her writing to different audiences that made her work effective. This is hinted at by the Bishop's comment. By saying that *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*

[37] As cited in Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More,* 155.

is "neat and elegant," the Bishop demonstrates that particular book's ability to present a tidy, easily accepted format to a "fashionable" audience. These two adjectives are not, however, what would have been used to describe all of Hannah's works. Within five years, More's best-selling *Cheap Repository Tracts* would be published, using language that was far from "neat and elegant," but was as coarsely commonplace as was acceptable for publication.[38] This was intentional; in fact, this was the key to Hannah More's success. By adapting her morally imaginative works to appeal to multiple, varied audiences, Hannah More delved from the common trajectory of imaginative authors, making her very distinctive and ultimately very effective.

More's decision to vary her format for her audiences was rooted in her earliest decision to write morally imaginative works. As previously mentioned, it was at the age of eighteen that More wrote her first play, published within three years. The play, *The Search After Happiness*, was written specifically with the audience in mind. Working as a teacher in the girls' school, More realized that the plays available for young girls were not morally sensitive, and given the all-consuming nature of memorizing and rehearsing, it was critical to give impressionable young girls a positive play to produce. More recognized a particular need, a gap in the curricula, and then wrote to fill that gap.[39]

As More became increasingly confident in her Evangelical convictions, her desire to spread her message farther and wider led her to examine the possibility of other "gaps" in available literature. More's lifelong examination of the society around her helped her to recognize the great needs of both the rich and the poor. Yet More also realized the need for very different types of literature in order to effectively minister to both classes. More decided to

[38] Jones, *Hannah More,* 134-136.
[39] Ford, *Hannah More: A Critical Biography*, 22-24.

accept that challenge, publishing her novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* as a device to reach out to the upper classes, and her best-seller, *The Cheap Repository Tracts,* as a drastically different device for educating the lower classes. Moral imagination took many forms with Hannah, and an examination of these two very different works and More's method of adaptation allows us to see just how unique More was from other authors.

Adapting to the Audience: The Novel-Hungry Upper Class

More had begun her career writing for the upper classes and, to a large degree, becoming part of it. While her upbringing had been modest, her position as a member of the *literati* thrust her into high society for her young adult years. While More eventually eschewed this way of living, she had intimate knowledge of it and numbered many close friends among the upper classes. This insight enabled Hannah to critically evaluate and then rather harshly critique the upper classes in her writing, with the pointed non-fiction essays *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great* (1788) and *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* as two of the most popular of these criticisms.

Of particular interest when discussing More's unique ability to adapt to different audiences, More's genuine understanding of the lifestyle of the great included an understanding of how they read books. While literacy, time spent reading, and number of published works sold generally increased throughout the country, as discussed previously, it was the rise of the novel that became particularly pandemic. Novels, which had made their earliest and most noteworthy appearances in the works of Defoe, Swift, Richardson, and Fielding, were still a new art, developing "a new kind of relationship with new combinations of readers."[40] Unlike the vast majority of written work which had preceded novels, novels were written primarily for

[40] Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction,* 39.

individuals rather than communal readings. The increased popularity of "closets," or tiny spaces built into houses that allowed a few moments of solitude, reflect a desire to encounter ideas and explore their meanings in solitude.[41]

This "new kind of relationship" was embodied among a readership that was significantly younger and more female than many previous demographics. Not much different than today, a huge proportion of novels centered around young people transitioning into adult life. Ripe for interesting storylines, the transition years of early adulthood made for an entertaining setting. Young ladies were the primary consumers of the never-satiable novel market.[42]

This led to a stream of books that were as popular as they were questionable, both in terms of literary quality and moral soundness. The speed at which books were consumed led to a market that had room for shoddily edited or poorly written books. The primarily young female audience was also less educated than the male scholars of previous eras had been, again making it easier for less-than-quality novels to slip into bookshelves. Of greater concern to More and many of her contemporaries was the questionable morals of the storylines. If the books were targeted at young girls, they were reaching a highly impressionable audience – the same audience Mrs. Montagu and Dr. Johnson had specifically warned about taking pains with. As solitary reading also increased in popularity, it became easier to publish works that were less family friendly, as young people could slip into their closets and read nearly anything without detection.

Hannah More was painfully aware of these dangers. In her extremely popular *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education,* More spoke strongly about the potential evils of

[41] Ibid.,41-42.
[42] Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth Century English Fiction,* 7.

shoddy novels.[43] In 1797, More wrote a letter to the Duchess of Gloucester that railed against "the greedy and depraved appetite for novels — that shameful fashion." [44] Within nine years of that letter, More took a major step in responding to her concerns. In 1808, More herself published her only novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*. As More wrote to Sir William Weller Pepys in December 1809, "I wrote *Coelebs* because I thought there were already good books enough in the world for good people, but that there was a larger class of readers whose wants had not been attended to…. A little to raise the tone of that mart of mischief and to counteract its corruption I thought was an object worth attempting."[45] Aware of the context into which it was published, it is clear that she did her best to fit the book tidily into the expectations society had for a novel while the content itself remained above reproach. The story contained in *Coelebs* is a far cry from the "shameful," "dangerous," and "embellished" depictions of "grossest crimes" and "irresistible passion" that More hated. Rather, the content of *Coelebs* was more akin to a sermon.

The story focuses on a twenty-three year old man, Charles, ("Coelebs" is Latin for bachelor) who is on a mission to find a wife. Throughout the novel, he is dismayed by his inability to find a woman who is truly both godly and intelligent, expressing his disappointment in the self-indulgent, hypocritical, or petty behavior of the young gentlewomen. Finally, he meets Lucilla Stanley, a woman of outstanding Christian virtue, extraordinary intellect, and admirable prudence. Charles is smitten by "da"[46] As modern readers may agree, Charles thought Lucilla nearly too good to be true.

While the gently growing relationship fills the plotline of the story, *Coelebs* can hardly be described as a romance. Rather, each chapter brings with it a small sermon, utilizing a person

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[43] Jones, *Hannah More,* 191.
[44] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 481.
[45] Ibid., 331.
[46] Hannah More, "Coelebs in Search of a Wife," in *Hannah More's Complete Works in Seven Volumes*, vol. II, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), 97.

Charles encounters, a story someone relates, or a debate between characters to teach a Christian lesson or grapple with Christian ideas. For example, the early chapters of the book relate Charles's stay with two families, one that over-emphasizes the doctrine of grace and one that overemphasizes the doctrine of works. Through witty, often amusing, and occasionally biting commentary, Charles notes that neither extreme is acceptable for Christ-like living. Between snapshots of plot, one receives a full course in Christian doctrine, living, and philosophy.

The content of *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* therefore both emulates and diverges from contemporary novels. First, it follows many of the dictates of the novel. More wisely bought into the ever-popular motif of young people transitioning into adulthood as the backdrop for her venture into novel-writing. A search for love is the epitome of sensational books for young readers, and through even the title More plays to that sentiment. Additionally, More plays to the trend of "closet time" and personal reading hours by creating a novel that asks readers to stop and consider how this may relate to them as individuals. It explores deep, complex ideas, made possible by a society that was increasingly giving itself time to look at big ideas in solitude.

Clearly, though, *Coelebs* also deviates from the normal pattern of novels by what is absent from its pages. The excitement and sensation of other novels are entirely absent. In fact, the plot itself is arguably absent. While this was a different era of novel-writing, More carried the didactic style far further than other novelists.

Despite this difference, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* had a truly marvelous reception. Within three days of its publication, the first edition was entirely sold out. After nine months, the twelfth edition was already underway in England.[47] Considered one of England's earliest best-sellers, the money made off of the book reflect its popularity.[48] After only the first year, More

[47] Jones, *Hannah More,* 193.
[48] Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More,* 23.

had received about €2,000—almost six times as much money as Jane Austen ever made off of *Mansfield Park*, her most comparable novel.[49] People around the world were clamoring for the novel. It was translated into German in 1816, and the next year into French.[50] In America, the book underwent thirty editions by 1834.[51]As stated by Colby, "From all indications, *Coelebs* was the most widely read [novel] of the first quarter of the nineteenth century."[52]

While the popularity of the novel speaks volumes, the reviews on it tell a slightly different story. Many literary critics were less than complimentary, suggesting that Charles was utterly dull and "priggish," Lucilla was obnoxiously too good to be true, and the plot itself was non-existent.[53] The popularity of the novel and the extremity of its moral prescriptions lent the book to be duplicated and parodied, with *Celia in Search of a Husband* and *Coelebs in Search of a Mistress* as just two examples. The most popular of the parodies was Robert Torren's *Coelebia Choosing a Husband*, which included all of the sensational bits that Hannah More had left out of the original. Described as the precursor to the Harlequin romance, Toerren's *Coelebia* was not complimentary to its parent novel.[54]

Among the Evangelical circle, reviews were surprisingly mixed. Some Evangelicals, such as fellow Clapham Sect member John Venn, were extremely positive, telling Hannah in a personal letter that, "I look upon Coelebs as one of the most useful works which has ever been written for the purpose which it was intended to answer."[55] In general, though, the Evangelical circle took a rather disappointed view of their favorite author's new venture. The genre of the novel was seen as so terribly corrupt that More's attempt to bridge Christianity and novel-

[49] Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian,* 278.
[50] Ibid., 281.
[51] Jones, *Hannah More,* 193.
[52] Colby, *Fiction with a Purpose: Major and Minor Nineteenth-Century Novels,* 80.
[53] Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian,* 279.
[54] Demers, *The World of Hannah More*, 98.
[55] As cited in Jones, *Hannah More,* 196.

reading was difficult to accept. It was a sting to More when the Christian Observer, a favorite of the Clapham Sect, published in February 1809 that "We would caution others not to enter rashly on the same project…Divinity is an odd ingredient in a work of imagination."[56] More's moral imagination for the upper and middle classes was a step too radical for the Christian Observer.

Even this criticism demonstrates More's ability to create something totally dissimilar from any other work of moral imagination. Writing explicitly Christian works in an explicitly secular format, More set herself apart as both effective and unique.

Adapting to the Audience: Chapbook-style Lessons for the Poor

While *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* found great success among upper and middle class citizens, Hannah More knew there was still a vast number of unreached peoples, particularly those who would not have the time, interest, or education to benefit from a culturally distant novel. The poor, whom she became so acquainted with during her years of establishing the Cheddar Schools, became a passion of More's. The need was undoubtedly very great. According to most estimates, "the poor" accounted for about seventy-five percent of England during the eighteenth century.[57] As Hannah wrote in October 1789, "Having with great concern discovered a very large village, at many miles' distance from me, containing incredible multitudes of poor, plunged in an excess of vice, poverty, and ignorance beyond what one would suppose possible in a civilized and Christian country, [my sister and I] have undertaken the task of seeing if we

[56] As cited in ibid., 279.
[57] Judith Frank, *Common Ground: Eighteenth-Century English Satiric Fiction and the Poor, (*Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 9.

cannot become humble instruments of usefulness." [58] Hannah continued by remarking that this seemed overwhelming -- "the difficulties are great, and my hopes not sanguine." [59]

More was accurate in recognizing the sheer magnitude of her dream. She was facing a society that, much like the questionable novels circulating the upper classes, had become immersed in literature that many deemed unfruitful -- or, as Hannah eloquently put it, "pernicious trash." [60] The increase in literacy across England, including among the poor, led to new ways of allowing people of even tiny incomes to enjoy the amusement of literature. Chapbooks, or small, soft-cover books four to twenty-four pages in length, and broadsides, one-sided sheets typically used for a short story or song, became extremely popular. Both contained illustrations, which enabled even the less literate to appreciate the tales. Another common feature was lyrics to a ballad, which could then be chanted by the seller until it caught on, and soon even the most illiterate among the people would know the story.[61] In this way, information was distributed rapidly and thoroughly among poor communities.

This, of course, was not Hannah's concern – in fact, it became her tool. Rather, her concern was the content of the chapbooks. Take, for example, the collection of chapbooks published together in 1882, several generations after their popularity. One most assume that the bawdiest or otherwise most embarrassing chapbooks have been left out of this decent publication, and yet even the stories contained give pause for thought. "The Whole Life, Character, and Conversation of that Foolish Creature Called Granny," for instance, tells of "an Eminent Lawyer of the Temple" who has two children by "that simple creature" – that is, Granny—who he "decoyed" and then attempts to keep this information secret. There is even an

[58] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 335.
[59] Ibid., 335.
[60] Ibid., 457.
[61] Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian,* 171.

illustration of a couple tucked soundly into bed while a crowd of others discover them. [62] It is little wonder that Hannah More was concerned about the influence of this "dirty and indecent stuff."[63] Not all chapbooks and broadsides were bawdy, however. Many were superstitious, focusing on witches, devils, ghosts, and visions. [64] Others were seemingly harmless, telling stories such as Aesop's Fables and Robinson Crusoe.[65] Still, More felt the potential for moral damage was high and in desperate need of countering.

Fear increased as the tenor of the nation changed. The onslaught of the French Revolution disturbed the tentative peace that had covered the English countryside, and concerns of revolution were justifiable. This became a matter of grave distress for anti-revolutionaries -- including Hannah More -- when Thomas Paine published *Rights of Man* in 1791. While Paine's pamphlet was obviously lengthier than a typical chapbook, the ability of the pamphlet to rouse the lower classes was immense, holding potential to bring about political and social upheaval.[66]

The conservative circle asked Hannah to write a response to *Rights of Man*. This came to fruition in More's 1792 *Village Politics, by Will Chip, a Country Carpenter.* The "earthy dialogue" is written in a relatively crude fashion, using common diction and common people to make a strongly anti-revolution argument that would be highly accessible for the people who the government was most concerned about revolting.[67]

Undoubtedly, the immense power of the pamphlet to advance views among the poor, as well as the increasing concern about the ideas that were circulating among her villager friends, gave More ample cause for distress and a subsequent desire to bring about change. As she

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[62] John Ashton, *Chap-books of the Eighteenth Century, with Facsimiles, Notes, and Introduction*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1882), 477.
[63] Jones, *Hannah More,* 140.
[64] Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian,* 173.
[65] Ashton, *Chap-books of the Eighteenth Century*.
[66] Scheuermann, *In Praise of Poverty: Hannah More Counters Thomas Paine and the Radical Threat,* 39.
[67] Ford, *Hannah More: A Critical Biography,* 184-186.

worked to educate the villages through her Sunday Schools, she became particularly concerned about the lack of worthwhile literature available for her newly literate pupils to enjoy.[68] She stated her mission in a 1794 letter to her dear friend and mentor John Newton: "It is the profligate multitude that want to be drawn off from that pernicious trash, the corruption of which is incalculable. I have therefore thought it lawful to write a few moral stories…carefully observing to found all goodness in religious principles." [69] It was this passion that led to her best-selling publication, *The Cheap Repository Tracts*.

From 1795-1798, More was the editor of *The Cheap Repository.* Each month saw the publication of a story, a song, and a Sunday story. They somewhat resembled More's *Village Politics*, although the content was far more religious and moral than political. More personally wrote at least fifty, likely many more, of the eventual 114 tracts, while friends and relatives contributed the other portions.[70] More kept a close eye on what was allowed, including rejecting even her closest friend's contributions if they were too overtly political or otherwise not keeping with the tenor of the tracts.[71] More hoped to spur on the lower classes toward Christian moral standards that would eventually enable personal betterment.

Take, for example, *The Two Shoemakers,* one of More's tales that was published as a serial in six parts. The story stars two young boys, Jack Brown and James Stock. Jack is a lazy, insolent boy, who chose not to apply himself to his studies. Since his father is sure he is far too lazy to be successful as a farmer, Jack is sent off to be an apprentice shoemaker. James, on the other hand, is a dutiful young man who works and studies hard. Too poor to get into any other profession, James also apprentices under the same shoemaker. The story that follows is fairly

[68] Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More*, 160.
[69] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 457.
[70] Jones, *Hannah More,* 139-40.
[71] Ibid., 140

predictable. The master shoemaker quickly realizes that James is more reliable. When the shoemaker (also a bad influence) dies from apparent alcohol poisoning at the local tavern, the shop is left in James's hands, who is able to apply himself, remain humble, and ultimately rise to great success. In contrast, Jack finds himself in debtors' prison. In the final installment of the story, James explains to his new apprentice the dangers of drink, the importance of work ethic, and the value of Christianity. [72]

The Two Shoemakers is an exemplar of More-esque tales. It is simple but engaging. Interesting things – death at a bar, being uninvited to a funeral – engage readers, but they are woven into a tapestry of morality. She is encouraging the lower classes to, as Christians, apply themselves, be honest, be humble, and avoid dissipation and drunkenness, which will ultimately make their way in this world easier as well.

It is important to note that the tales were not tracts by today's definition. They did not contain any sort of explicit "ABCs of Salvation" message, but rather provided role models to be followed. In fact, while they were supportive of her work, the world renowned Religious Tract Society did not officially recognize More's work as tracts, as they were "doctrinally inadequate." More herself would undoubtedly have agreed that this was not the intention.[73]

Rather, More published the *Tracts* in a format identical to the chapbooks she was emulating, ultimately distinguishing herself among other moral imaginists. Keeping the stories short, pointed, and with sensational titles (i.e. *Sinful Sally* or *The Gin Shop; or, a Peep into Prison*), they were attractive and affordable for lower class workers. [74] In appearance, they were nearly identical to the chapbooks, using small pages and woodcuts amidst simple, clear

[72] Hannah More, "The Two Shoemakers" in *Hannah More's Complete Works,* 2 vols., 201-223*,* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835).
[73] Jones, *Hannah More,* 150.
[74] Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More,* 223.

language.[75] Images and ballads enhanced their appeal.[76] For many, the most appealing part was the price. At ½ *d.,* 1 *d.,* or 1 ½ *d.,* nearly anyone could afford the tracts.[77]

More stands in contrast to other attempts at moral imagination for the lower classes by choosing to imitate the format of the chapbooks. Others, the best known of whom was Sarah Trimmer, wrote moral tales for the poor, but even the cheapest of these were unaffordable for the impoverished people they were directed toward. Particularly dull sounding titles, such as Trimmer's *The Servants' Friend: An Exemplary Tale Designed to Enforce the Religious Instruction Given at Sunday and Other Charity Schools*, make it clear that few but the servants' masters were going to be interested in purchasing the works.[78] More clearly deviated from Trimmer and her peers by seeking to create literature that was financially feasible and also contained content that was of genuine interest to the lower classes. She kept the people in mind, writing for them rather than simply at them.

More's new style of writing necessitated a new style of distribution. In this way as well, More chose to imitate the already existing forms of distributing literature among the lower classes. It seemed logical that the best way to get new literature into the hands of old readers was to use the same method. In 1794, Hannah discussed this with one of the project's greatest supporters, Bishop Porteus. He noted that "if we gain…to our side" the booksellers, hawkers, peddlers, and match-women who "vend the vilest penny pamphlets to the poor people," they would be able to distribute their pamphlets without serious difficulties. Bishop Porteus then remarks that "it would be a most edifying spectacle to see this ragged regiment all drawn up

[75] Jones, *Hannah More,* 141.
[76] Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian,* 175.
[77] Jones, *Hannah More,* 141.
[78] Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian,* 170-1.

there together, and chanting forth our admirable compositions to the astonished villagers."[79] Recalling that the sellers of the chapbooks chanted the ballads to draw customers, Porteus was tickled to think of the shock that would occur when Scripturally sound moral tales came spewing out of the hawkers' mouths. Likewise, the images would make the *Cheap Repository Tracts* accessible to many. Hannah More was therefore situated to have her tracts travel far by using the traditional chapbooks methods of pamphlet sellers and word-of-mouth-friendly ballads and images. Once more, Hannah had broken from traditional usage of moral imagination.

More had a final tactic in mind for distributing the tracts. Enlisting the assistance of her upper-class friends, tracts were given away *en masse*. Some of these went to individuals (personal charity cases or servants in particular), but many were offered free of charge to hawkers and book peddlers, with the intention of keeping prices low. [80]

The heart of the *Cheap Repository Tracts* was to make a version of moral imagination that was accessible to lower class citizens. This meant low prices, which was a lofty goal given the price of printing. The tracts became very expensive for Hannah More, and she ultimately instituted a subscription service. Here as well she demonstrates her deviance from the traditional moral imaginist. As one of her earliest biographers recounts (although perhaps rather idealistically), the subscription service was "warmly taken up by the wisest and best characters of the country."[81] These subscribers helped to cover the costs and distribute the pamphlets that were published each month. As there were new editions of three new stories, songs, and Sunday readings once a month, the subscribers were essential to the success of the tracts.

That success was hit almost instantly. Within the first year alone, two million copies of the publication were sold. According to some estimates, this broke all of the best-seller records

[79] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 456.
[80] Jones, *Hannah More,* 141.
[81] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 456.

in existence.[82] *Cheap Repository Tracts* were sent across the ocean to America, the West Indies, and Sierra Leone. Some were even translated into Russian.[83] The great popularity of the tracts brought More to the realization that it was not just the poor who were reading them. As middle and upper class readers began to enjoy the tales, More capitalized on their interest and had the tales published in three bound volumes. [84] While these obviously were not intended for the poorest classes, they brought in significant revenue that helped to fund the project. Eventually, by 1798, new material for the *Cheap Repository Tracts* petered out, for reasons that are not entirely clear.[85] The run of success that the tracts had enjoyed from 1795-1798 was unprecedented and remained unsurpassed, either by More's other works or other morally imaginative works, for decades.

Ultimately, it was More's ability to adapt her message to fit a different format that allowed her such success. When More had originally proposed the plan in 1794, Bishop Porteus had promised bold support: "Your plan entirely coincides with my idea of the danger to be apprehended from the dispersion of small tracts of infidelity and immorality among us, and the necessity of counteracting them in the same way." [86] Porteus appears to have been right. It was by using the same techniques that were distorting morality among the lower classes that More was successful in reintroducing moral ideals.

While the concept of moral imagination was not new in Hannah More's age, More is set apart among other moral imaginists because of her ability and decision to adapt her works for several audiences. Ranging from *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* for middle and upper class readers to *The Cheap Repository Tracts* for those of the lower classes, she mastered the novel and the

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[82] Ibid., 456.
[83] Demers, *The World of Hannah More*, 109-110.
[84] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 456.
[85] Jones, *Hannah More,* 142-144.
[86] Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More,* 456.

chapbook. This type of range is virtually unheard of. Using long stories and short, appealing to the prim and the common, stories set in high society and low, with language both eloquent and simple, Hannah did it all.

Enormously Effective

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Hannah More's career is not simply that she did it all, but that she did it all well. More is worth studying as a unique moral imaginist if for no other reason than her sheer effectiveness. More so than other author at her time, More stands as the most accomplished. Alexander Johnstone, chief justice of Ceylon, expressed it well when writing to More in 1819 that, "What a pleasure it must afford you to have the power of producing such moral improvement by your writings, not only throughout Europe, but throughout Asia also! For I am convinced that your writings have had a greater effect, and have been more generally read, than any other works which have been written for the last hundred years." [87] As Johnstone would have agreed, her effectiveness can be weighed in two ways: the popularity of her works and the changes that were instituted as a result.

Much has already been said about the popularity of More's two best-sellers, *Coelebs* and *Cheap Repository Tracts*. Yet these diverse pieces are far from the only works More was known for. Even as a young playwright, her most popular play, *Percy,* was "almost universally acclaimed," viewed by Lord North, translated into French, and brought back to the stage in the next century.[88] After her commitment to Evangelicalism, More's work remained extraordinarily popular. *Hints toward Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, written in 1801 as an educational guide expressly for 8-year-old Princess Charlotte, was applauded greatly by the

[87] As cited in Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More,* 133.
[88] Ford, *Hannah More: A Critical Biography,* 62-3.

Queen and the Bishop of Exeter.[89] Such high-ranking praise speaks not only to why More continued to grow in popularity, but also how well society received her. After *Coelebs*' shocking success, More's popularity only increased. *Practical Piety* (1811), a straight-forward didactic essay, sold more editions than *Coelebs*,[90] Even More's least popular work, *The Character and Practical Writings of St. Paul* (1815) sold out on the first day of publication.[91] Hannah More was clearly one of England's best-selling authors.

It is useful to consider how Hannah More ranked in comparison to that British female author modern readers are so familiar with – Jane Austen. While Austen's works may have survived longer, the use of a statistical n-gram allows us to see that More was clearly the more talked about author among her contemporaries. At the height of More's popularity (or at least the point at which she was most likely to be mentioned in published works), she was 135 times more popular than Jane Austen. Austen did not even begin gaining ground until 1866, and it was not until fifty-six years after More's death that Austen finally slightly surpassed More in number of mentions. Even at Austen's peak popularity in 1964, she still lagged behind where More had been.[92] For the modern Austen-enraptured society, it may be startling to realize that there was a far higher ranking queen of literature among Austen's contemporaries.

Enormously Effective: Catalyst of Change

Popularity alone, while important, does not truly speak of effectiveness. More had little interest in her personal success, but had her eyes on much higher things. Rather than over-emphasizing the numbers, profits, and editions, More considered herself effective when she saw

[89] Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian,* 255-6.
[90] Jones, *Hannah More,* 200.
[91] Ibid., 200.
[92] This data was collected using Google's n-gram feature under the search terms "Hannah More" and "Jane Austen." The chart can be recreated at https://books.google.com/ngrams.

change lived out in society because of what she had written. While there are countless possibilities of how to tease this out and see whether More was truly effective, only four changes that More helped usher in shall be mentioned.

England was experiencing major changes during More's adult life. She played a role in several of these movements, not the least of which was abolition. Her best-selling poem "Slavery" (1787), followed years later by "A Feast of Freedom" (1819) and a few pointed tracts among the *Cheap Repository,* helped to win over the nation's heart against slavery. She is said to have been "the single most influential woman in the British abolitionist movement," providing the pen that stirred up the people.[93] Answering More's prayers and in response to her valiant action, the British slave trade was abolished in 1807 and, two months before More's death in 1833, slavery was entirely abolished throughout the nation. While of course More was far from the only voice in the battle, her influence is impossible to ignore.

More controversial is Hannah More's impact on the quelling of revolution. In 1838, one of her earliest biographers, Henry Thompson, recounted how a group of rioting revolutionaries "were convinced of their folly and abandoned their design" after "the timely distribution of the ballad 'The Riot' [written by More] among them."[94] More's tracts and political pieces were written with a strongly anti-revolutionary agenda. While the riot serves as a tangible example, it is believed that her ideas percolated throughout the lower classes, following right behind Paine's views and neutralizing radical threats.[95] As one biographer suggests, More "did far too much to stop a liberating French-style political revolution from occurring." [96] As her works crossed the globe, Hannah's goal was ultimately met, as revolution did not occur in England.

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[93] Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More,* 136.
[94] Thompson, *The Life of Hannah More with Notices of her Sisters*, 158.
[95] Scheuermann, *In Praise of Poverty: Hannah More Counters Thomas Paine and the Radical Threat,* 2-12.
[96]Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830,* 15.

Perhaps most directly attributed to More was the increase in charitable work among the fashionable. While this may not have been precisely the goal More set out for – she sought moral reform and Christian revival, of which charity was only a portion – it was assuredly a measurable result of More's writings. In 1841, Lucy Aikin wrote that it was specifically due to Hannah More that visiting the poor had become "a fashion and a rage."[97] More's books had made it normal for women of the upper and upper-middle classes to have an attitude of charity toward the lower classes – an attitude that More revised to center around Evangelical and domestic values.[98] After the publication of *Coelebs,* in which Lucilla's charity plays a major role in Charles's attraction to her, charitable giving became "the standardized picture," and benevolence was "permanently attached to English womanhood."[99]

Finally, Hannah More's timing in the grand narrative of English history places her directly on the brink of the Victorian era. Some argue that this is not coincidental, but that More's works were influential in forming the atmosphere of the era that is now hard to separate from the private, refined, and somewhat puritanical view that is conjured by the phrase "Victorian." More was successful in her reformation of many aspects of the upper classes, some say even revolutionizing the manners of the upper class females.[100]Anne Stott's groundbreaking biography of Hannah More is even given the tantalizing subtitle "The First Victorian," and she argues throughout that More was critical in bringing about broader cultural changes in Europe. Again, More is one of many factors, but the sheer number of people who read and reread her

[97] Dorice Williams Elliott, "The Care of the Poor is Her Profession: Hannah More and Women's Philanthropic Work," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 19 (2): 59. 1995.
[98] Ibid., 55-60.
[99] Jones, *Hannah More,* 195.
[100] Mitzi Myers, "Reform or Ruin: A Revolution in Female Manners," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 11 (1982): 199-216.

extremely “Victorian” works cannot be overlooked when examining the transition out of the Georgian and Regency eras and into Victorian England.

While it is difficult to precisely measure the impact a single person has, it is easy to see that Hannah More and her works left fingerprints across the globe. The impact of her life and her works was enormous, making her a more effective moral imaginist than any comparable authors.

Conclusion

Hannah More has been largely forgotten by history. Her overtly Evangelical works with their characterization of the poor are now considered, at best, a darling but antiquated little trifle, and at worst, offensive and oppressive. While she is no longer the best-seller adorning every girl’s bookshelf, Hannah More’s legacy is clear. As a moral imaginist, she stood apart from other authors in her distinctively Evangelical views and her ability to adapt her works with such range. Her effectiveness can be measured by her popularity and the societal changes she initiated. By using fiction to teach lessons, Hannah More allowed imagination to run wild while stealthily reforming the British Empire. More’s morality, faith-based and humble, was transformed into the stuff of fairy tales while becoming the backbone of Britain.

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