

The Dissenting Academies and the Literary Politics of the 1790s

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine the far-reaching influence of the Dissenting academies on the political, religious, and literary debates of the 1790s. Following the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, the English Parliament passed a series of laws that denied a variety of civil and political rights, including holding civil office and attending Oxford and Cambridge, to anyone who was not a member of the Church of England. These Nonconformists included a doctrinally diverse group of Protestants known as Dissenters. In response to these laws, the Dissenters created their own institutions of higher learning, which became known as the Dissenting academies. Previous scholarship has regarded Dissenters as either a uniform group or as too denominationally distinct to consider collectively. I argue that a “Dissenting disposition” existed across the different kinds of Dissenters—from severe Calvinists to tolerant Unitarians—that not only represents a commonality among them, but also explains their doctrinal differences. The Dissenting academies were the sites at which the Dissenting disposition was formalized and disseminated.

My conception of the Dissenting disposition is drawn from Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) broader notion of *habitus*, described in *The Logic of Practice* as a system of “durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (53). As a “structured structure,” a disposition can be formalized, taught, and reproduced. As a “structuring structure,” the same disposition can be a generative process. In the case of the Dissenting disposition, I find that a shared way of knowing was institutionalized through the Dissenting academies, one which argued that a process of free inquiry and debate would determine the truth. By examining multiple sides of an issue in debate, one is forced to confront the possibility of error and, having overcome that possibility through reason, one is left with the

conviction that their position is either correct or not. Codified through tutors and works disseminated across the academies, this disposition was intended to equip Dissenters with the means to question—initially their own religious dogma and later the political and literary traditions prevailing in England.

I consider the significance of the Dissenting disposition at the levels of both institutions and individual writers. At the institutional level, I trace the formalization of this disposition in the mid-eighteenth-century Dissenting academies—specifically through the circulation of Philip Doddridge’s writings and the teachings of his students who themselves became tutors at other academies. I show how, by the closing decades of the eighteenth century, the Dissenting disposition manifested in Dissenters’ attempts to repeal the repressive Test and Corporation Acts. This doctrinally diverse committee of Dissenters, many of whom had attended Dissenting academies, shared a faith in the power of debate that shaped their ultimately failed campaigns. At the individual level, I examine William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both of whom considered themselves Dissenters, at least for a period of time, and provide powerful case studies for exploring different experiences of the Dissenting disposition. Each underwent multiple religious and political conversions that can be traced through their writings, in particular Godwin’s multiple editions of *Political Justice* and *The Enquirer* and Coleridge’s “The Eolian Harp” and early sonnets.

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Introduction

A Disposition to Dissent

As a Dissenter, I think... that religion is properly a personal concern, to which every man ought to attend for himself; that every man has an equal right, and is equally obliged, to judge for himself, with regard to worship and obedience which he owes to his Maker, and to follow the deliberate judgment of his own mind, unbiased by any considerations whatsoever; and that no man, or body of men, can have a right to impose articles of faith or modes of worship upon others, and to subject those who differ from them to any kind of hardship or suffering. These are the maxims, in which, I suppose, every Dissenter, who is such from enquiry and conviction, and not merely from education and custom, must be agreed...

– William Enfield, *Remarks on Several Late Publications Relative to the Dissenters; in a Letter to Dr. Priestley* (1770)

William Enfield's outline of the values that define Dissenters will sound familiar to any scholar of Dissent. His values align with the first two of John Evans's three principles of Dissenters in *A Sketch of the Several Denominations into which the Christian World is Divided* (1795), which are the most commonly presented definition of Dissent in contemporary scholarship: "I. The right of private judgment. 2. Liberty of Conscience, and 3. The perfection of scripture as a Christian's *only* rule of faith and practice."¹ The alignment of Enfield and Evans is not itself significant; indeed, there is broad agreement among scholars that on these points Dissenters found common ground. What is significant in Enfield's *Remarks* is his emphasis on how these values came to be inculcated in Dissenters—"not merely from education and custom," but instead "from enquiry and conviction." In this dissertation, I examine the special relationship that Dissenters saw between free inquiry and conviction and propose this relationship as a

¹ John Evans, *A Sketch of the Several Denominations into which the Christian World is Divided* (London: Printed by J. Sammells, 1795), 73.

uniquely Dissenting way of knowing that their academies codified, even as it yielded significant doctrinal differences.

These doctrinal differences have been the focus of most scholarship on Dissent in the last twenty-five years to the point that it is no longer seen as useful to refer to Dissenters as a unified group. As Kevin Gilmartin writes, scholars should not “flatten out the complex social and cultural history of religion in the period.”² However, focusing on how doctrinal differences originated instead of on the doctrinal differences themselves allows us to find greater commonality among Dissenters than we may see in Enfield and Evans’s broad definitions. Specifically, this focus raises the importance of Dissenting academies as sites of “enquiry and conviction” rather than of education per se. Like Dissenters themselves, the Dissenting academies have not been examined as a group due to scholars’ prevailing assumptions of predominant differences and individual significance. Daniel White’s *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2007) is representative of an overwhelming trend in Romantic studies to focus almost exclusively on Warrington Academy, which White describes as “one of the more prestigious nonconformist educational institutions of the eighteenth century.”³

It is in the Dissenting academies that we find the codification of a “Dissenting disposition”—a process of free inquiry through debate that allows one to develop conviction. Formalized and reproducible yet also generative and undogmatic, this disposition, which I will examine further below, allows us to recognize both Dissenters’ doctrinal differences and the common process through which they might arrive at these differences. Thus, this dissertation

² Kevin Gilmartin, “Romanticism and Religious Modernity: From Natural Supernaturalism to Literary Sectarianism,” *The Cambridge History of Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 627.

³ Daniel White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

opens up three important and interconnected insights into the scholarship on Dissent. First, it demonstrates that a greater commonality existed among Dissenters than recent scholarship has perceived possible or useful. These Dissenting academies lead us to the second point that education should be included with religion, politics, and literature as an important lens through which to consider Dissent as a whole. Most scholars have examined a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition in the context of only religion, politics, or literature. However, the Uniformity Act and the Test and Corporation Acts, all of which were Restoration reactions to the English Civil Wars and their outcomes, created a need for institutions of higher education outside of Oxford and Cambridge. The consequences of these acts, coupled with a ready workforce of ejected ministers, led to the establishment of Dissenting academies, their pedagogical formalization of free inquiry leading to conviction through debate, and their increasing acceptance of common textbooks, such as Philip Doddridge's *A Course of Lectures on Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity* and Isaac Watts's *Improvement of the Mind*. In this sense, the Dissenting disposition is a product of seventeenth-century laws of exclusion and writings on education, especially those by Locke and Milton.

Third, this Dissenting disposition shared across academies allows us to better understand the conflicts that Dissenters encountered in their interactions with dominant institutions and in their intellectual pursuits as individuals. I examine conflicts at both levels. For example, the Dissenters' attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts necessarily brought them into debate with the Anglican majority in the press and in Parliament, in which the Dissenting disposition led to an unwarranted faith in the power of reasoned debate. As examples at the individual level, William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, leading intellectuals of the Romantic age, both grappled with the Dissenting disposition, though in very different ways. For

Godwin, the Dissenting disposition was a family inheritance that was further reinforced during his time at Hoxton Academy. The Dissenting disposition provided a framework for Godwin on how to rethink important aspects of the political and philosophical writings, but these shifts in stance have manifested as charges of inconsistent political and moral views by scholars for more than one hundred years. What has sometimes appeared as “apostasy” to scholars is better understood as Godwin’s deeper Dissenting disposition, which allows and even encourages one to change views in light of new evidence. Coleridge is a more special case, since he was not educated within the Dissenting academies, yet he engaged with Dissent for about a decade and struggled to see taking multiple positions through free inquiry and debate as moral and ultimately returned to the Anglicanism in which he had been raised. To further build on our understanding of what Dissenters had in common and how this shared way of knowing was formalized, in the next section I provide a theoretical grounding for the concept of a Dissenting disposition in relation to existing scholarship.

Review of Scholarship and Theory

Scholars have previously described Dissenters sharing and passing down beliefs as part of a “tradition,” whether this was a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition writ large or a tradition with a specific political, religious, or literary scope. I trace the possibility of such a tradition in the scholarship on the role of Dissent in the Romantic era—beginning with M. H. Abrams’s *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971)—and then highlight the theoretical problems with this term and conclude by explaining the greater value of a Dissenting disposition.

For many scholars in literary and cultural studies, the idea of such a tradition functioning in the Romantic era immediately brings to mind the work of M. H. Abrams and his idea of a

purely literary tradition in *Natural Supernaturalism*. Abrams saw the Romantics, specifically the Romantic poets, as nonconformists who were looking back to the seventeenth century as a source for their own version of radicalism. In *Natural Supernaturalism*, Abrams saw the English Revolution of the seventeenth century as an attempt to “translate Scriptural prophecy into revolutionary action” and that “the later eighteenth century was another age of apocalyptic expectation, when the glory and promise of the American Revolution and, much more, of the early years of the French Revolution, revived among a number of English Nonconformists the millenarian excitement of Milton and other seventeenth-century predecessors.”⁴ Furthermore, according to Abrams, this millenarian tradition was recovered, but fully transformed, into secularized forms like poetry, and this recovery and transformation was the defining feature of Romanticism.

Abrams’s thesis was authoritative for a generation of Romanticists, but became an authoritative foil for the groundbreaking works of Romantic New Historicism in the mid-1980s. Indeed, one of the problems with the term “tradition” in late eighteenth-century studies can be traced back to *Natural Supernaturalism* and its focus solely on a literary tradition. A central tenet of important works like Marilyn Butler’s *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981) and Jerome McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) was the questioning of Abrams’ thesis. The New Historical emphasis on social forces brought with it a focus on the political landscape that, in effect, pushed religion into the background as the Romantic period increasingly became seen in light of the birth of the modern and the secular. Under these conditions, the idea of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition functioning in the late eighteenth century was considered essentially impossible for three reasons. First, in terms of politics, there was not a

⁴ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973), 64.

strong enough republican movement during the eighteenth century to see a clear political seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition. Second, in terms of religion, Dissent was seen as too doctrinally diverse for there to be continuity between seventeenth-century Puritanism and Presbyterianism on the one hand and eighteenth-century Dissent on the other. Finally, the literary tradition as outlined by Abrams was considered highly untenable. However, I argue that this division between literature, politics, and religion is created by our contemporary disciplinary fields of scholarly inquiry and reinforced by New Historicism's influence in English departments for the last three decades. In the context of Dissent's manifestation in the Romantic era, this discipline-specific blind spot has obscured the Dissenting disposition.

Two excellent examples of this division can be found in the work of recent scholars. Both Kevin Gilmartin, in his essay "Romanticism and Religious Modernity: From Natural Supernaturalism to Literary Sectarianism" (2009), and Glenn Burgess, co-editor of *English Radicalism, 1550-1850* (2007), embrace these disciplinary divisions and conclude that no Dissenting tradition exists, whether political, religious, or literary. In Gilmartin's response to the lingering possibility of a tradition as outlined by Abrams, he focuses on the possibility of a "generalized radical Protestant tradition," which essentially rephrases a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition, yet with a telling difference.⁵ For Gilmartin, the tradition coming out of the English Revolution and Civil Wars was a religious tradition, a religious tradition that would need to be reflected in Romantic literature in order for there to be a "generalized radical Protestant tradition." Gilmartin writes:

Even allowing for the omissions that are required to produce a literary canon knit together by natural supernaturalism, there is a doubtful lack of historical

⁵ Gilmartin, "Romanticism and Religious Modernity," 626.

specificity about the religious traditions said to have been at work in a shared Romantic displacement of apocalyptic vision into human consciousness and literary imagination.⁶

The doubtful lack of historical specificity about religious traditions that Gilmartin suspects is due to the fact that the “Protestant tradition was essentially a sectarian tradition.”⁷ For Gilmartin, this means that the Protestant tradition was too fragmented to be considered a tradition. This position is part of a move toward a better understanding of the religious diversity of the time, a much-needed corrective to older scholarship, like Abrams’, that saw English Protestantism as a uniform and united entity. However, Romantic scholarship has gone too far in the opposite direction. Where once we saw unity because of Abrams, we now only see disparity and fragmentation.⁸ Not only are the differences between the Church of England, the denominations evolved from Old Dissent, and the new evangelical branches of Dissent much clearer, but also the disagreements within each of these groupings are also much clearer. The strict doctrinal differences between Dissenting denominations were very important in certain contexts—contexts that were not static, but continually changing. While these differences need to be respected, those differences do not preclude the possibility of unity in certain contexts. Burgess also argues that religion should be separated from the politics of the time because eighteenth-century religious belief was “often unpolitical or even apolitical, relying not on human agency but on God to transform the world” and concludes that there was no real tradition passed down from the seventeenth century.⁹ In defining radicalism as a purely secular ideology, Burgess ignores that

⁶ Ibid., 644-45.

⁷ Ibid., 646.

⁸ Daniel White’s *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* is a notable exception.

⁹ Glenn Burgess, “Introduction,” *English Radicalism, 1550-1850*, ed. Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

for many radicals the link between their nonconformity and their radicalism was key. Whether literary or political, neither scholar sees the potential for a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition.

In contrast, Daniel White is neither opposed to the idea of a tradition, nor does he embrace disciplinary divisions in theory. His book *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2007) works to overturn the New Historical trend of separating religion from literary production in Romantic studies. He argues, “Literary creation and political expression in late-eighteenth-century England were inextricable from religious discourse and practice, yet the interpenetration of religious, political, and artistic life during the period nonetheless remains insufficiently understood.”¹⁰ That said, White primarily tackles the interpenetration of religious and artistic life, specifically literary production; politics hover faintly in the background. White’s distinction between sectarianism and denominationalism does open up the possibility of seeing nuanced similarities and differences among Dissenters. The vital difference between sectarianism and denominationalism is that sectarianism is defined by exclusive membership and hostility or indifference to secular society, while denominationalism is more inclusive within a general set of beliefs.¹¹ In other words, Presbyterians, Unitarians, and Rational Dissenters, among others, were denominations within a more generalized form of Protestant Dissent. These groups may have differed greatly in matters of ecclesiastical polity and forms of worship, but White’s emphasis on their denominationalism lays the groundwork for identifying and describing a shared Dissenting disposition.

In this dissertation, I consider not only the politics, religion, and literature of Dissent, but also education in the form of the Dissenting academies. In this sense, I build on and

¹⁰ White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

further extend White's more interdisciplinary approach. Unlike contemporary scholars, such as Gilmartin and Burgess, I argue that Dissenters are not fragmented so entirely that no commonality can be found. Thus, in making claims of a Dissenting disposition, I argue for a shared foundational way of knowing among Dissenters that co-exists with doctrinal and other differences. For example, though many of the individuals in this dissertation have commonly been associated with the sub-group of Dissent known as Rational Dissenters, including Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, and Andrew Kippis, there are reasons why I am using the term "Dissenters" and not "Rational Dissenters." As Knud Haakonssen points out in his collection on Rational Dissent, where he also expresses a preference to not use the term, that for many the term Rational Dissent is used synonymously with intellectual Unitarianism.¹² While the Unitarians may have been the most outspoken proponents of the Dissenting disposition in the late eighteenth century, it was not limited only to Unitarians. For example, the "committee appointed to conduct the application to Parliament for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts" discussed at length in Chapter Two was comprised primarily of middle-class, moderate Dissenters and purposely seemed to avoid the largely radical Rational Dissenters.¹³ Second, the Dissenting disposition predates Rational Dissent. The formation of Rational Dissent is commonly dated to the 1770s, but, in Chapter One, I trace the origins of the Dissenting disposition to the first half of the eighteenth century, and some aspects of it originated in the seventeenth century. Finally, and related to the second point, the Dissenting disposition did not define Rational Dissent or intellectual Unitarianism, but the already established Dissenting

¹² Knud Haakonssen, "Enlightened Dissent: An Introduction." *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4-5. Haakonssen prefers the term "Enlightened Dissent."

¹³ Also, see Chapter One for an examination of the Dissenting disposition outside of the more liberal Dissenting academies.

disposition in many ways contributed, perhaps even led, to the creation of both English Unitarianism and Rational Dissent in the late 18th century. It was the commitment to undogmatic free inquiry that laid the foundation for a slow but continual movement up the anti-trinitarian ladder, from Arianism to Socinianism to Unitarianism.¹⁴ Rational Dissenters were different from many of their fellow Dissenters in the degree to which they placed the Dissenting disposition at the core of their beliefs, but the difference was in degree, not in kind. In the remainder of this section, I explain how the concept of a Dissenting disposition addresses the problems raised by previous scholarship engaged with the idea of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition, in whatever form.

Beyond the particular disciplinary forms that a tradition might take, the term “tradition” itself allows for so many disciplinary forms that it can become unwieldy. In other words, a tradition ironically invites scholars to focus on its dissolution because only one exception or different disciplinary form is needed to refute another scholar’s conception of a tradition. Greater specificity in what a tradition means and how it functions is also required, so that we can account for similarities and differences in a more nuanced way—in the present case, so that we can recognize the contributions of the last twenty years of scholarship on doctrinal diversity among Dissenters while also perceiving their points of commonality.

Thus the term I have chosen is a “Dissenting disposition”. This conception of disposition is drawn from Pierre Bourdieu’s broader notion of *habitus*:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured

¹⁴ Arianism is the belief that Son was not co-eternal to the Father, but was truly begotten and was also subordinate. Socinianism is the belief that Christ did not exist until he was born on earth, but he was still divine in nature. Unitarianism is the belief Christ, though the Son of God, was not a divine being and not part of the godhead, but was strictly a man.

structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.¹⁵

As a “structured structure,” a disposition can be formalized, taught, and reproduced. As a “structuring structure,” the same disposition can be a generative process—a way of seeing, being, or understanding. In the case of a Dissenting disposition, we find a shared way of knowing—the formalization of using free inquiry in debate in order to achieve conviction. No dogma demands a specific truth from Dissenters, but rather a generative process of how to arrive at truth. Codified in the Dissenting academies, this disposition was taught and reproduced through tutors and their disseminated works. This disposition was intended to equip Dissenters with the lasting means to achieve conviction and even to revise their views, as necessary. Specifically, by examining both or multiple sides of an issue in debate, one is forced to confront the possibility of error and, having overcome that possibility through reason, one is left with the conviction that their position is correct. This pedagogic work of the Dissenting academies is a powerful way to produce a lasting disposition:

[P]edagogic work (whether performed by the School, a Church or a Party) has the effect of producing individuals durably and systematically modified by a prolonged and systematic transformative action tending to endow them with the

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

same durable, transposable training... i.e. with common schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action...¹⁶

As Priestley wrote in his memoirs of his time as a student at Daventry under former students of Doddridge who had become tutors themselves, we can see the prolonged and systematic transformative action that formalized the Dissenting disposition through generations of Dissenting tutors: “The general plan of our studies, which may be seen in Dr. Doddridge’s published lectures, was exceedingly favourable to free inquiry, as we were referred to authors on both sides of every question, and were even required to give an account of them.”¹⁷ Priestley was introduced to this pedagogic approach through tutors who themselves had learned it directly from Philip Doddridge, and Priestley would later promote this exact method of teaching to his students at Warrington Academy. This approach yielded a unique faith among Dissenters in the power of debate and reason to root out possible incorrect options such that only true knowledge remains.

I want to emphasize that the particular disposition that I am examining was not the only disposition to influence a Dissenter, but a particularly powerful one within a constellation of dispositions that formed an individual’s overall habitus. Any individual would also bring with them dispositions generated by their class, specific denomination, and their family—not just their education. As Bourdieu defined disposition in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*,

The word *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977), 196.

¹⁷ Joseph Priestley, *Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley, to the Year 1795, written by himself* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1806), 18.

structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition*, *tendency*, *propensity*, or *inclination*.¹⁸

It is important to acknowledge that a disposition is one amongst a system of dispositions. For example, arguably, only the Rational Dissenters felt completely unrestrained in the realm of religion, as their religious disposition and the Dissenting disposition were mutually reinforcing—two sides of the same coin. But for a more moderate, or even a conservative, Dissenter, the Dissenting disposition could still be an inculcated, durable disposition used to support the group's emphasis on liberty of judgment/conscience—reinforced by a Dissenting education—while at the same time be constrained to some extent by other dispositions including religious, familial, and class dispositions. For example, as I show in Chapter One, there is evidence of the Dissenting disposition at work in the teaching at Bristol Baptist Academy, a conservative Particular Baptist school. Though the Dissenting disposition was part of the pedagogic work at this institution, the students would also bring with them strong religious and familial dispositions that could, and often did, constrain the pedagogic disposition; for most students at a Particular Baptist academy, the possibility of an anti-trinitarian position would have, perhaps unconsciously, been essentially out of the realm of possibility. And for any student raised in a Trinitarian family and denomination, the move to Socinianism or Unitarianism—anti-trinitarian stances that questioned the role of Christ as a part of the trinity—would have meant explicitly facing those familial and religious dispositions through the disposition of pedagogic free inquiry and consciously choosing to go against those previous inculcated inclinations. This, of course, did happen. Sometimes the new consciously chosen belief would stick, like with Joseph Priestley's conversion to Unitarianism from a more Calvinist family; sometimes it

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 214. Italics in original.

wouldn't, such as Coleridge's conversion to Unitarianism from Anglicanism. The power of the Dissenting disposition as a concept is highlighted by these two examples as Priestley would have been raised Calvinist, but also educated within a Dissenting academy meaning that the groundwork for how a change in conviction was already laid. Coleridge, with his Anglican upbringing, would have had a more difficult time displacing his previous dispositions.

Significantly, this Dissenting disposition may be one of the few common dispositions held among Dissenters. It is one of many dispositions that any Dissenter denomination or individual might have—only one part of their larger habitus—and therefore allows for Dissenters' doctrinal differences as well as this pedagogic commonality. White has also turned to Bourdieu, specifically to describe a Dissenting habitus: "Like so many aspects of mid-eighteenth century Dissent, the Warrington Academy involves the story of a familial network within which an inherited Dissenting habitus incorporated and was transformed by contemporary religious and economic dispositions."¹⁹ Here, White uses habitus in a way that is so capacious—in that habitus is inherited via familial, educational, religious, and economic dispositions—that it begins to resemble Raymond Williams's definition of "culture," which is to mean "a whole way of life."²⁰ Consequently, habitus, like tradition and culture, is too broad to provide the specificity that I am aiming for. It is precisely by describing a Dissenting disposition that I can claim, for example, that a Unitarian and a Presbyterian shared a disposition but not a larger set of doctrinal or other similarities that might suggest that all Dissenters shared "a whole way of life."

¹⁹ White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, 24.

²⁰ Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary," *The Raymond Williams Reader*, ed. John Higgins (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 11.

Overview of Chapters

[Dissenting academies] varied considerably in quality, but it can be fairly claimed that in the best of them, in the eighteenth century, a new definition of the content of a general education was worked out and put into practice. Here, for the first time, the curriculum begins to take its modern shape, with the addition of mathematics, geography, modern languages, and crucially the physical sciences.

– Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1961)

When contemporary Romantic scholars consider the Dissenting academies, in the same way that Williams did in *The Long Revolution*, they see the latter's primary value as contributing to the birth of a modern curriculum for higher education. In Chapter One, I trace the foundation of eighteenth-century Dissenting educational theory and progressive curricular change to the seventeenth-century writings of Milton and Locke. In particular, I examine the impact of Milton's emphasis on free inquiry in education and Locke's emphasis on the need to test truth in the writings written and used by tutors at Dissenting academies. Through their shared texts and a close network of tutors and students, the Dissenting academies codified what had been a loose set of beliefs into a formal and reproducible disposition. In this chapter, I examine the influence of several texts, tutors, and students. I focus especially on Philip Doddridge's prominent role in this codification, as both an influential teacher at Northampton and the author of *A Course of Lectures on Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity*. His teachings spread throughout the Dissenting academies through his writings as well as through his former students who became tutors themselves. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity* (1778) by Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, both of whom were products of a Dissenting education. In this work, Priestley and Price enact the Dissenting disposition in print by structuring the text itself as a debate.

In Chapter Two, I examine how Dissenters enacted the Dissenting disposition beyond the academies in their attempts in 1787, 1789, and 1790 to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts—the very laws that had led to the creation of the academies. Dissenters and their Anglican opponents debated each other in print, producing more than one hundred pamphlets and books on the subject. The Dissenting disposition can be seen throughout the Dissenters’ publications on repeal, including the pamphlet that launched the debate itself. In this pamphlet, written by a committee of Dissenters and titled *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with Reference to the Test and Corporation Acts* (1787), the authors declare that repeal cannot be denied when such a cogent argument is presented. My rhetorical analysis of select pamphlets from the debates demonstrates how the Dissenters framed their own religious identity as fellow Protestants, as well as how they eventually lost control of how their religious identity was framed to their opponents. The Dissenters’ adherence to the Dissenting disposition ultimately led to the failure of their attempts to repeal—manifesting initially in their writing of *The Case* and subsequently in continuing to re-publish it, rather than respond to counter-arguments, due to their faith that their opponents’ error would yield to their truth.

Turning from Dissenters’ enactment of the Dissenting disposition in their interactions at an institutional level to its manifestation in individuals, I focus on William Godwin in Chapter Three. Godwin came from a family deeply rooted in Dissent. Indeed, his grandfather had been a close friend of Doddridge. In this chapter, I argue that the importance and process of free inquiry that Godwin learned at Hoxton—essentially, the Dissenting disposition—demonstrates his constancy to a way of knowing rather than to a particular dogma. This disposition informed his shifting perspectives on a number of issues over the course of his career, which I trace from amongst his earliest writings such as *Sketches on History* (1784) through to his latest writings

including the *History of the Commonwealth of England* (1824), with a special focus on *The Enquirer* (1797). These writings show not only how Godwin drew on the Dissenting disposition in formulating and reformulating his views, but also how much he valued the education that he had received at Hoxton and the connections that he had formed there. In his *Autobiographical Fragments* (1800), Godwin described Andrew Kippis as both his mentor at Hoxton and a sincere friend. This analysis also addresses the renewed reading of Godwin as an apostate who lacked philosophical and moral constancy, by showing constancy behind those shifts in his dedication to the Dissenting disposition as a guide to rethinking his former stances based on new evidence.

In Chapter Four, I turn to a more centrally Romantic writer, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who, unlike Godwin, was neither raised in a Dissenting family, nor educated at a Dissenting academy. Coleridge's education at Christ's Hospital, and later at Cambridge, was necessarily Anglican. From the time that he began exploring Unitarianism in his early twenties—and until his return to Anglicanism in his early thirties—Coleridge struggled to adopt a religious position that viewed the relationship between error and truth less dogmatically than his Anglican upbringing. He expressed this struggle with the Dissenting disposition in his poetry during the 1790s, in which he invoked arch-literary Dissenter Milton through both theme and form. I begin my analysis with Coleridge's early sonnets and conclude with "The Eolian Harp." These works show Coleridge engaging the conflict between the Dissenting disposition and his earlier education—for example, writing metaphorically in "The Eolian Harp" of his felt sense of guilt in considering the pantheism of his meditative flight. Although he initially valued the Dissenting disposition for allowing him to consider pantheism and even materialism, he ultimately concluded that such thoughts threatened his Christian faith and he re-identified himself as an Anglican in 1805.

Chapter 1

A Way of Knowing:

Dissenting Academies and the Disposition of Dissent

Education is one of the most important subjects that can present itself to human enquiry... It is not surprising, therefore, that it should have engaged the attention of men in all ages, and that persons of the first ability in genius, knowledge, and learning, should have made it the matter of their discussion... To write upon it was eminently worthy of the poet who could produce the “Paradise Lost;” and of the philosopher to whom these nations are so unspeakably indebted for his researches into the powers of the human mind, his defences of civil and religious liberty, and his critical illustrations of the Holy Scriptures.

– Andrew Kippis, *A Sermon Preached at the Old Jewry...
On Occasion of a New Academical Institution,
Among Protestant Dissenters* [1786]

After the Civil Wars of the seventeenth century, access to higher education through Oxford and Cambridge was cut off to all who refused loyalty to the Church of England. Nonetheless, the numerous branches of Protestant nonconformists, Dissenters, required a well-educated ministry. Former Anglican ministers who deserted the Church of England after the Act of Uniformity in 1662 began establishing their own institutions of higher learning, which became known as Dissenting academies. As of 1690, twenty-three academies existed in England, most very small and lacking proper resources.¹ However, by the mid-to-late eighteenth century, Dissenting academies ranged from very small academies like the original academies up to much larger, more ambitious academies whose education level rivaled and perhaps surpassed that of

¹ Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 367. For a very brief, but informative, overview of Dissenting academies, see pages 366-71.

Oxford and Cambridge, including Warrington Academy, New College at Hackney, and Manchester College at York.² Very few Dissenting academies survived the turbulence of the 1780s and 1790s, and those that did often eventually merged into the developing university system of the nineteenth century. This chapter argues that a particular way of knowing developed in these Dissenting academies in the eighteenth century, a certain way of thinking about truth: a Dissenting disposition.

With three of the leading Dissenting academies having recently shut their doors—Warrington, Hoxton, and Exeter—a group of prominent Dissenters from the greater London area resolved on January 13, 1786, to open a new academy in or near the metropolis. At a sermon given to the supporters of this “new academical institution” on April 26, 1786, Andrew Kippis outlined the importance of this new institution for Dissent and the ideas of education on which it would be founded. This soon-to-open institution, which would become New College at Hackney, was intended to provide education for those entering the ministry as well as lay students who could not attend Oxford or Cambridge because they would not submit to the Church of England’s Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, thus following in the footsteps of its predecessors such as the better-known Warrington academy.³

² David L. Wykes, “The Dissenting Academy and Rational Dissent,” *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 109-10. This essay is possibly the best introduction to Dissenting academies.

³ When Romantic studies have focused on Dissenting academies, it is almost always the Warrington academy that receives attention. Though Warrington was an exceptional academy with exceptional tutors and students—Priestley, Price, John Aikin, Gilbert Wakefield, and others as tutors; John Simpson, Samuel Heywood, John Aikin (the younger), unofficially Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and others as students—Warrington was different in degree, not kind, from many other Dissenting academies that also played a major intellectual role in Dissenting thought in the mid-late eighteenth century. This chapter, then, will examine Dissenting academies and their impact

Kippis opened his sermon by linking the Dissenters' contemporary educational project with a seventeenth century Dissenting tradition of writing about education. He first invoked the author of *Paradise Lost*, which is not at all surprising. Milton was a towering figure in eighteenth century Dissent for both his heterodox Christian poetry and his prose; *Areopagitica* was well known and *Of Education* had been published at least 36 times by 1800.⁴ However, the second figure invoked may not be so obvious to Romantic scholars today. The "philosopher" in question is described by three defining features: first, as a researcher "into the powers of the human mind"; second, as a defender of "civil and religious liberty"; and third, as a critical illustrator of "the Holy Scriptures." Kippis was confident that the Dissenting audience of his sermon would instantly understand whom he was referring to, but in the print edition of his sermon he added a footnote on the identity of the philosopher to ensure the reader made the correct inference. This philosopher who provided critical illustrations of the Holy Scriptures was John Locke.

This description of Locke as a scholar of scripture and his key place in Dissent may come as a surprise to many in eighteenth-century and Romantic studies where there is a tendency to associate him with Deism. However, recent scholarship on Locke has shown conclusively that he was not a Deist. Locke was certainly a heterodox Christian, despite the fact that he remained a member of the Church of England from its re-establishment in 1662 through the end of his life. And though he was friends with some famous Deists later in life, namely Anthony Collins and Matthew Tindal, current Locke scholarship aligns his views on Christ with Arianism or

on the later eighteenth century more deeply and broadly than Romantic studies have previously considered them.

⁴ Warner G. Rice, "A Note on 'Areopagitica,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 40.4 (1941): 474.

Socinianism.⁵ This view is due in large part to an increasing body of scholarship on Locke's religious beliefs and more attention paid to Locke's later works including *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and *The Paraphrase Upon the Epistles of St. Paul* (published posthumously in 1707).⁶ Based on these works, it is not surprising that the Dissenters would claim Locke as one of their own, especially Rational Dissenters like Kippis.

The view of Locke that was taught at the Dissenting academies differed greatly from what was taught at Cambridge. (The teaching of Locke was banned at Oxford.) Cambridge eventually put Locke's empiricist epistemology at the core of its curriculum. Cambridge's teaching emphasized the first two books of *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which laid the foundation of Locke's experiential sensationalist epistemology. However, though this is only the *foundation* of Locke's epistemological project, it was these aspects of Locke's writings that were picked up by the Cambridge Latitudinarians and it was this partial version of Locke's epistemology that became widely accepted. In fact, it was so widely accepted that even a writer we may associate to some extent with Dissent like William Blake would attack Locke for his empiricist sensationalism in his 1788 poem "There is No Natural Religion [A]," as well as in numerous other later poems. This Cambridge-popularized version of Locke's epistemology ignored the aspects of Locke's writings that would more directly impinge upon the teachings of

⁵ Arianism and Socinianism were both forms of anti-trinitarianism that differed in the divinity or humanity of Christ. Arians believed that Christ was literally the Son, meaning that he was not co-existent with God but necessarily was created by God. Socinians believed in the humanity of Christ, that he had not existed before he was born on earth. Both positions were heresy in the eyes of the Church of England and traditional Calvinism.

⁶ See especially Richard Ashcroft's *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (1986), John Dunn's *The Political Thought of John Locke* (1969), W.M. Spellman's *Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (1988), John Marshall's *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (1994), Nicholas Wolterstorff's *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (1996), and Jeremy Waldron's *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* (2002).

the Church of England, like Book IV of the *Essay*, which deals directly with moral philosophy and faith, or his aforementioned later writings on Christianity and the epistles of St. Paul that challenge trinitarianism, original sin, and other core doctrines of the Church of England. The empiricist epistemology of the early books of the *Essay* was more fully incorporated with his other writings concerning his Christian beliefs about revelation and the nature of Christ at the Dissenting academies, and it was done so in a way that paralleled Milton's writings on the nature of truth and knowledge.

In this chapter, I argue that a Dissenting disposition emerged as a way of discovering truth, and also that this Dissenting disposition was formalized and reproduced through the Dissenting academies. This Dissenting disposition was a pedagogical framework that coalesced within the Dissenting academies as a process of free inquiry where considering all sides of a topic, debate, and personal reason both combated dogma and led to truth. This chapter examines how the curricular expansion that occurred in the eighteenth-century Dissenting academies helped produce this disposition. This curricular expansion was driven by a belief that knowledge gained through the emerging "sciences"—knowledge about the Bible, history, nature, and the human condition— could shed light on religious truth, or any sort of truth for that matter. Knowledge gained through these sciences coalesced with reason, and often revelation, in the Dissenting academies as a path to truth. Though the truths that were arrived at could vary greatly across Dissenting denominations, the pedagogical procedure that this chapter examines was widely acknowledged across Dissent as the proper route to true knowledge. This emergent disposition came out of a unique combination of Locke's writings on epistemology and radical Protestant thought on education, in which Milton's *Areopagitica* and *Of Education* play an important role. Over the next half century, this Dissenting disposition became institutionally

established in the Dissenting academies by way of the tutor Philip Doddridge at Northampton, his many students who themselves became tutors at other institutions, and the widespread use of Doddridge's published lectures at academies of all Dissenting stripes.

The key to understanding the theory within this eighteenth-century Dissenting disposition is a careful examination of its practice in the institutions of Dissenting education. Certain tutors at Dissenting academies developed an enlightenment emphasis on free inquiry into a highly specialized framework that promoted a rational and radical Protestant concern with error in conjuncture Locke's theories of how knowledge was gained through the five senses, which made it palatable to many forms of Dissent. It was the Dissenting academies and the publications surrounding Dissenting education that formalized this disposition with a goal of promoting an undogmatic freedom of personal judgment that became a disposition that impacted how these Dissenters saw the world and considered truth. This is not to say that the free inquiry of the Dissenting disposition was completely free of constraints. A disposition is always one within a system of dispositions and the dispositions within this system impact each other. For example, most of the tutors and students within the Dissenting academies were middle class Dissenters and as such came with certain class assumptions that could and did impact their conception of free inquiry. Nonetheless, Dissenting academies did expand the curriculum massively to include the new sciences, including history, which was regarded as an emerging science and a key to determining truth, including religious truth. And finally, Dissenting academies transmitted and reproduced this disposition to new generations of Dissenters. This chapter embeds Dissenting disposition into the praxis of the Dissenting academies.

The Dissenting Disposition

The Dissenting disposition, as I defined it in my Introduction, is a pedagogic framework where, by examining both or multiple sides of an issue in debate, one is forced to confront the possibility of error and, having overcome that possibility through reason, arrive at the correct or true answer. Before I get too deeply into the creation and formalization of the Dissenting disposition, there are two issues that I want to examine briefly because it is important to identify how these issues were distinct from the Dissenting disposition. These two issues are Dissent's several epistemologies, on the one hand, and the rhetorical exercise, *in utramque partem* on the other.

As the Dissenting disposition was a pedagogical framework for how to arrive at truth that emerges, in part, from readings of Locke, its formation can seem tightly bound to questions of epistemology—theories of how knowledge is gained—even if that framework eventually became separated from epistemology and became a pedagogic matter that created a lasting way of thinking about truth. Locke's empiricist epistemology held great power in eighteenth-century England. One of the ways it gained this power was through a version popularized by Cambridge that promoted a sensationalist and experiential epistemology, which best coexisted with Latitudinarian Anglican theology and the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists, as they were two sides of the same coin.⁷

⁷ Locke's epistemology was seen by a certain vein of Latitudinarians/Cambridge Platonists (not the more orthodox vein) to provide a detailed epistemology that supported Newton's natural philosophy, specifically in the early books of the *Essay*. Or, as Steffen Ducheyne recently wrote, "In Book 1 of his *Essay*, Locke argued that there are no innate principles originally imprinted in the human mind. Locke's epistemology provided Newton with a philosophical terminology with which he could attack Cartesian philosophy" (*The Main Business of Natural Philosophy* (2011), 257). And, as John Gascoigne writes, "The 'holy alliance' between Newtonian natural philosophy and Anglican latitudinarianism had, by the end of the eighteenth century, proved a fruitful marriage" (*Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment* (1989), 300). Locke's epistemology

However, the real story of epistemology and Latitudinarianism is much more complicated. The Latitudinarians' goal was to make the Anglican Church acceptable to as broad a swath of the nation as possible, and they felt the way to achieve this was to reduce the focus put on arguments about the specifics of doctrine and liturgical practice in favor of inclusion. There seem to have been three branches within Latitudinarianism and, while all shared the same goal, each had a very different epistemological underpinning: (1) Orthodox Latitudinarians who were rationalists that are largely aligned with the Cambridge Platonists, (2) Heterodox Latitudinarians who were empiricists and aligned themselves with Locke and Newton, and (3) a group in the middle that didn't see Locke's empiricism and the rationalism of the Cambridge Platonists as mutually exclusive.⁸ This last group may seem odd to us from our current perspective, but it was a widely available stance in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Even the leading Cambridge Platonist and rationalist Henry More saw no significant conflict between his rationalist theories and Locke's empiricist *Essay on Human Understanding*.⁹ This example of epistemological flexibility is important early in the creation of the Dissenting disposition because it highlights the way in which the seemingly strict divide that we now see between Rationalist and Empiricist thought was in fact a more fluid process that

played an important role in the marriage of Newton's natural philosophy and Anglican Latitudinarian theology, and all three were inextricably bound throughout the eighteenth century.

⁸ For the language of orthodox/heterodox Latitudinarians, I draw from Thomas C. Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729): Context, Sources, and Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 46-60. However, Pfizenmaier is not the only scholar to see Latitudinarianism as divided in such a way. For example, Charles Taliaferro also sees a number of the Cambridge Platonists as providing a middle way between Empiricism and Rationalism in *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and Religion Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 55-6.

⁹ See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Since Locke was railing against innate "ideas" and More was arguing for innate "tendencies" or "dispositions," he saw no conflict for the Cambridge Platonist school of thought (167).

occurred in the eighteenth century. This means that during the creation and formalization of the Dissenting disposition, the use of Locke's experiential epistemology could be mobilized by a range of thinkers and this mobility allowed for the Dissenting disposition to grow into a pedagogical framework that could accommodate and support *varying* epistemological positions later in the eighteenth century. As I explore later in this chapter, both Neoplatonic rationalist Richard Price and the empiricist Joseph Priestley could fundamentally disagree on an epistemological level, yet agree on the Dissenting disposition as the proper way to uncover truth. The same can be said for Dissenting academies as a whole; though academies had differing intellectual and doctrinal foundations, those foundations were not seen as incompatible with the Dissenting disposition. This epistemological flexibility also helps to explain how, in the eighteenth century, Dissenters arrived at an pedagogical framework comprised of a coalescence of a unique reading of Locke's empiricism with the two radical Dissenting traditions of liberty of conscience and the necessity of testing faith and truth, all of which is bound up in the central practice of free inquiry in Dissenting education.

The second issue I want to examine is the relationship between the Dissenting disposition's unique form of free inquiry and the rhetorical exercise, *in utramque partem*. Free inquiry as taught in the Dissenting academies goes beyond a repetitive practice or a simple exercise meant to expose an opposing view's weakness. The key difference is in the expected outcome and its relationship to truth. To highlight this difference, I will compare free inquiry as taught in the Dissenting academies with its emphasis on teaching both sides of a debate to the rhetorical exercise of *in utramque partem*.

In utramque partem was a form of disputation described first by Aristotle, and then picked up by Cicero, that involved arguing both sides of a question. This style of disputation was

revived and became a staple of early modern humanist education. By the eighteenth century it was no longer a significant part of university education, but was still a major part of a grammar school education. The idea behind *in utramque partem* was that being able to argue both sides of a question would help a student learn to anticipate, and therefore better argue against, an opponent's argument. However, in practice, this meant that a student would have to learn to defend a position he knew was false. In other words, this rhetorical and pedagogical practice implied a sense of epistemological relativism. Being able to argue both sides of an argument makes no claims to the truth and can in fact lead one to the conclusion that anything can be re-described.¹⁰ It is a rhetorical technique that does not, and does not try to, lead to truth, but a way of using language to organize things however best benefits a specific argument.

Though *in utramque partem* was once seen as a way to truth, this view was no longer sustainable by the eighteenth century for several reasons. For both Aristotle and Cicero, *in utramque partem* was part of a *process* of getting to the truth already known, and by the late middle ages it had begun to be considered an essential way of *measuring* truth.¹¹ However, that relationship to truth began to erode in the sixteenth century as Machiavelli's instrumentalist view of rhetoric and emphasis on casuistry exposed the relativism inherent in humanist rhetorical methods. As Victoria Kahn states,

¹⁰ For more on *in utramque partem*, rhetorical re-description, and moral ambiguity, see Quentin Skinner, "Moral Ambiguity and the Renaissance Art of Eloquence," *Essays in Criticism* 44.4 (1994): 267-92.

¹¹ Marta Spranzi, *The Art of Dialectic Between Dialogue and Rhetoric* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011). Spranzi writes, "A text by Henry of Brussels (c.1300) quoted by Grabmann sheds light on three uses of the 'quaestio disputata' as far as the knowledge of truth ('cognitio veritatis') is concerned... The third is explicitly identified with the virtues of arguing *in utramque partem*, namely with the fact that when the disputation is over we can weigh both sides and see where the truth lies" (56).

[I]n taking the generative possibilities of a practical conception of rhetoric more seriously than did the humanists themselves, Machiavelli paradoxically appeared to realize the humanists' worst fears about a technical or instrumental conception of rhetoric: its ethical indeterminacy, its concern with success, its use for the purpose of force and fraud, violence and misrepresentation.¹²

Shortly after Machiavelli, Montaigne's *Essays* more explicitly distanced the practice of *in utramque partem* from a result with a relationship to truth:

For while Montaigne borrows the *in utramque partem* method of arguing from the Academic skeptic and the classical orator, he does not share their conviction that this form of argument will allow one to arrive at some approximation of the truth.¹³

By the end of the sixteenth century, *in utramque partem* had lost its relationship to arriving at truth; by the eighteenth century it was primarily a grammar school exercise.

On the other hand, the eighteenth-century Dissenting academy version of arguing both—or many—sides of a question is a pedagogical technique aimed specifically at finding the truth in

¹² Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 9. This is also a view supported by Virginia Cox, who makes a more specific link between Machiavelli, *in utramque partem*, and the relativizing of truth in "Rhetoric and Ethics in Machiavelli." *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 173-189. This relativism is brought to the forefront by Machiavelli in chapter 18 of *The Prince* where an allusion to *in utramque partem* becomes an exercise in understanding how a prince should not actually be virtuous at all times, but should instead seem outwardly virtuous but "set up in your mind in such a way that, when it is necessary for you not to be so, you are capable of shifting to the contrary" (Cox 182). This ability to sustain contraries is *in utramque partem* in political practice, not being guided by a sense of truth, but by what is needed most at that moment. This view of Machiavelli's understanding of *in utramque partem* has most recently been echoed by Michelle Zerba in *Doubt and Skepticism in Antiquity and the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Specifically, see chapter 8: "A Ciceronian Machiavelli."

¹³ Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 115-16.

the matter under dispute. Knowledge must be tested in order to be determined true knowledge; faith must be examined and tried in order to be true faith. Following in the footsteps of his mentor John Jennings, who was part of a radical tradition of Dissenting thought on the relationship between truth and the exposure to error that can be traced back at least as far back as Milton, Doddridge took the traditional reading of Locke's empirical epistemology and put such an emphasis on the role of reason in gaining or testing that knowledge that his pedagogical framework was essentially a unique coalescence of empiricism and rationalism, the production of "rationally qualifiable facts," to borrow a phrase from Jack Fruchtman, Jr. This unique coalescence, as I am describing the Dissenting disposition, also had the advantage of providing a strong protection against skepticism as Lockean sensationalism provides a foundation, but empirical claims are then always assessed through reason—a conception of reason available to both empiricists and rationalists. For example, the existence of God, or the actions of God, cannot be directly and empirically experienced. However, what can be experienced and known are the material effects of God's existence and his providential plan, the effects of which are accessible via the proper application of reason to empirical or scientific knowledge. This theory of how knowledge is gained is what I am arguing constitutes a Dissenting disposition as it was developed in the Dissenting academies. And since Dissenting academies play the central role in the development of a Dissenting disposition, it is worth taking a step back to examine the origins of these academies and how specific historical forces influenced the creation of the Dissenting disposition.

The Origins of the Dissenting Academies

The creation of the Dissenting academies was a direct consequence of the English Civil Wars and Interregnum. Early Restoration laws worked to curtail those who did not conform to the Church of England from wielding any form of civic or political power, as it was broadly this group that led to the Rump Parliament, the New Model Army's capture of Charles I, and his eventual beheading. The most potent form of exclusion was that nonconformists could not hold any civil or military position. In Chapter Two I examine in detail the late eighteenth-century impact of these laws, but the most salient point for the present chapter is that these laws prevented nonconformists from attending either Oxford or Cambridge. More specifically, Dissenters were fully denied admission only to Oxford. Dissenters could technically attend Cambridge, but, since they were not allowed to earn a degree there, Cambridge was not a viable choice for most Dissenters. And it is worth noting that either school would be hostile to the beliefs of most Dissenters. This led to the creation of Dissenting academies as educational alternatives, and these academies served three important functions.

First, Dissenting academies offered employment alternatives for nonconforming ministers suddenly out of a job. The Test and Corporation Acts, also known as the Clarendon Code, included a number of Parliamentary acts passed between 1661 and 1678 that restricted the civil liberties of nonconformists. One act in particular was key to the formation of the Dissenting academies: the 1662 Act of Uniformity. This act effectively formed the basis of the Restoration religious settlement by requiring the use of all the rites and ceremonies in the Book of Common Prayer in Church of England services. It also required episcopal ordination for all ministers, a requirement that had been removed by Parliament during the Civil Wars. The result of the Act of Uniformity was that nearly 2,000 clergy left the Church of England in what became known as

the Great Ejection. The practical result was that there were then nearly 2,000 educated men who were equally devoted to following their consciences by not conforming and in need of earning a living. First private tutoring and then the creation of Dissenting academies provided an income for these former Church of England clergy. As Herbert McLachlan writes, “Some of their number had been tutors at Oxford or Cambridge. All were men of learning and principle. Hence, though contrary to law, schools, or academies as they were called, gradually sprung up in every part of the country.”¹⁴ Though it was illegal at first for nonconformists to be tutors, the ban loosened with the passing of the Toleration Act of 1689 and was altogether removed by 1734.

Second, these early academies were instrumental in maintaining a supply of educated young men trained to be nonconformist ministers and therefore ensure the continuity of the nonconformist ministries. If the Dissenting movement were to survive past a generation or two, an educated ministry would be absolutely necessary. For example, of the original 2000 ejected men, under “400 (about a fifth) of the ministers silenced in 1662 were still living in 1690... and not all were still active in the ministry.”¹⁵ The ability to educate young Dissenting men specifically for entry into ministry was an incredibly important role played by the academies throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth and, according to some Dissenters, the only role that truly mattered.

And third, they provided a higher education option for nonconformist lay students. Though many of the Dissenting academies were concerned solely with ministerial training to prepare young men for the pulpit, a number of the largest academies also accepted lay students.

¹⁴ Herbert McLachlan, *English Education Under the Test Acts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), 2.

¹⁵ David Wykes, “The Dissenting Academy and Rational Dissent,” in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 106.

These academies, usually academies related in some way to Rational Dissent, aimed to provide a liberal education fit for a gentleman and to prepare these young men for an active civil life.

Though Rational Dissent was the portion of Dissent that tended to take the Dissenting disposition to its most extreme application, there is good reason—as I explain in greater detail later in this chapter—to see the Dissenting disposition as a part of Dissent as a whole, not just a radical aspect of Rational Dissent. Nonetheless, it was a major concern to open education to the children of all Dissenters, particularly well-off Dissenters who could play a major financial role in the stability of the academies. As David Jennings, head of Kibworth academy, wrote to his friend Philip Doddridge in 1732, “the support of our interest comes from the laity and . . . they will not be constrained to bring up all their sons either as ministers or dunces.”¹⁶

As nearly all of the early academy tutors were themselves taught at Oxford and Cambridge, having been members of the established church and then left during the Great Ejection,¹⁷ the early Dissenting academies of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries were primarily nonconformist reflections of Oxford and Cambridge. Oxford largely focused on Aristotle and still basically organized around the medieval trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and Cambridge already showed a strong focus on mathematics. Though initially quite similar, the curriculum in the Dissenting academies was to diverge radically from the primary English institutions of higher education in the eighteenth century as a Dissenting disposition emerged. Philip Doddridge was the primary individual behind this divergence. I will later explain how Doddridge helped formalize and spread a Dissenting disposition, but first I will describe the traditions of higher education that Doddridge was reacting to by briefly exploring

¹⁶ J. D. Humphreys, *Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge*, 5 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829-31), 3: 115-16. David Jennings was the younger brother of John Jennings. The letter is dated Nov. 9, 1732.

¹⁷ McLachlan, 19.

the undergraduate curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge in the eighteenth century. This examination will highlight not just the novelty of the Dissenting disposition, but the fundamental differences between the predominant educational practices of Oxford and Cambridge, and the disposition that propelled Dissenting education.

The Eighteenth-Century Curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge

In working to show that Dissenting academies were the leading educational institutions of their day, early studies of Dissenting academies would lead one to believe that the education provided by Oxford and Cambridge was quite poor in the eighteenth century.¹⁸ While education at Oxford and Cambridge was by no means impoverished in the eighteenth century, as in the older view, the universities were quite set in their ways, with change coming slowly, if it came at all. Oxford's curriculum only slightly diverged from that of the medieval university system, maintaining a focus on the classics, while Cambridge largely focused on mathematics. This section gives a brief overview of education at Oxford and Cambridge in the eighteenth-century using more current research in order to update the comparison to the Dissenting academies.

The curriculum at Oxford in the eighteenth century was still directly governed by the Laudian code of 1636, which grounded most education at Oxford firmly in the medieval scholastic tradition; the medieval system of scholastic disputations remained a core pedagogical

¹⁸ As Matthew Mercer has previously pointed out in his important essay, "Dissenting academies and the education of the laity, 1750-1850." The early studies referenced are Irene Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England: Their Rise and Progress, and their Place among the Educational Systems of this Country*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914) and H. McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts: Being the History of Nonconformist Academies, 1660-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931).

method.¹⁹ At the BA level, this meant that the curriculum was centered on grammar, rhetoric, and logic and moral philosophy.²⁰ A BA student would also take a little geometry and Greek during the second year, while divinity was taught by individual colleges and not part of the university's overall curriculum.²¹ Throughout the eighteenth century, Aristotle and the classics were the center of the curriculum at Oxford, and emerging modern sciences were widely neglected.²² The subject of history was an option at Oxford, as they did employ a professor of history, but it was not a standard part of the BA education. Only those working on an MA received any formal education concerning history in the form of some lectures on chronology, and those who wanted to go further could, in theory, earn a doctorate in history/chronology. However, most men who stayed on for their MA were those intending to take on holy orders.²³ Overall then, education at Oxford closely followed scholastic traditions and, for the most part, the education one received at Oxford in the 1780s would be quite similar to the education one would have received in the 1680s.

Cambridge, on the other hand, had moved farther away from earlier scholastic traditions. Though Cambridge was also still under the direction of medieval and early modern statutes, the university worked around the system by substituting mathematics in place of classical logic and then massively expanding the centrality of mathematics, with Locke's *Essay Concerning Human*

¹⁹ For more on the curriculum at Oxford during the eighteenth century, see L. S. Sutherland's "The Curriculum." *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. V: The Eighteenth Century*, eds. L.S. Sutherland and L.G. Mitchell. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 469-91.

²⁰ Sutherland, 472.

²¹ On the teaching of divinity by tutors, see *Oxford University Statutes, Volume 1. Containing the Caroline Code, or Laudian Statutes*. III.ii, Trans. by G.R.M. Ward (Oxford: Oxford University, 1845), page 15ff, in Sutherland, 472.

²² Sutherland, 480.

²³ Sutherland, 484.

Understanding also becoming a staple of the Cambridge curriculum.²⁴ Speaking to the extent of the role that mathematics played in a Cambridge education, as well as the reason why, William Bennett, a tutor at Emmanuel College, Cambridge wrote, “Mathematics have been, in general, substituted for Practical Logic, because it furnishes more clear and certain Proofs...”²⁵ Mathematics were emphasized to such a degree that even John Jebb, a well-known mathematician at Cambridge, feared that their students were missing out on a well-rounded education. In 1777, Jebb wrote, “Yet surely the study of mathematics, and of nature’s operations, should not entirely engross the youthful mind. Inquiry into metaphysical and moral truth, is accompanied with numerous advantages.”²⁶ However, Jebb’s calls for the widening of Cambridge’s curriculum fell on deaf ears because mathematics served an ideological end at Cambridge. As John Gascoigne has argued, mathematics was thought to be an uncontroversial subject because it did not stray into religion; mathematics was a self-contained system with “clear and certain Proofs” and Locke’s empiricist epistemology worked to bolster this way of thinking at Cambridge, usually in accordance with latitudinarian theology.²⁷

Unlike Oxford, Cambridge offered considerably more opportunities to learn experimental sciences, but it was still not a major focus at Cambridge, especially when compared to the emphasis it received at many of the Dissenting academies, since the experimental sciences were considered potentially dangerous as they were grounded in observation and reason. In the

²⁴ John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment: Science, Religion and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 7, 128.

²⁵ Emmanuel College, Cambridge, MS 3.1.29: 197, in Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment*, 273. Bennett was a tutor at Emmanuel in the 1770s and 1780s.

²⁶ John Jebb, *The Works Theological, Medical, Political, and Miscellaneous, of John Jebb, M.D. F.R.S. With memoirs of the life of the author; by John Disney, D.D. F.S.A. In three volumes*, ed. John Disney (London: T. Cadell, 1787), 2: 270.

²⁷ Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment*, 297.

eighteenth century, it was virtually impossible to completely separate the study of science, or natural philosophy, from religion. New scientific discoveries were impacting how the Bible was read and how the existence and operation of God was understood; they cast doubt on things like the possibility of miracles and even the divinity of Christ. In other words, experimental science was a threat to established religion. Oxford largely ignored these issues by banning the teaching of Locke and offering very little in the emerging sciences. At Cambridge, the decision to teach the clear and authoritative laws of mathematics and Lockean empiricism was a conscious one because the institution did not want to encourage a full sense of free inquiry and potentially a spirit of dissent.

Philip Doddridge and an Emergent Dissenting Disposition

As the eighteenth century progressed, the Dissenting academies moved farther and farther away from their origins of imitating Oxford and Cambridge. Ministerial education was the foundation, but instead of scholastic dispositions, the Dissenting academies increasingly pursued free inquiry—instead of uncontroversial mathematics, modern sciences like chemistry, mechanics, pneumatics, anatomy, geography, and history. The man most responsible for this turn was Philip Doddridge (1702-1751).²⁸ Doddridge is a complicated figure in the history of English

²⁸ Doddridge was responsible for the refinement and dissemination of an approach to education, however it is important to note the two men that played the role of mentor in Doddridge's life: Samuel Clarke and John Jennings. Samuel Clarke was the minister at St. Albans, a Dissenting congregation that Doddridge joined in 1719. It was Clarke who encouraged Doddridge to enter the ministry and then helped him prepare for admission to the Dissenting academy at Kibworth. Doddridge began attending the dissenting academy under John Jennings at Kibworth Harcourt in 1719 and then moved to Hinckley with Jennings's academy in 1722. Doddridge completed his four-year course of study in June 1723, just a month before Jennings died of smallpox. Following in Jennings's footsteps, Doddridge first accepted the minister position made vacant by Jennings's departure at Kibworth and then moved into education. It was Jennings's approach to education that Doddridge refined and transmitted to his many students.

nonconformity. He has long been seen as an heir to Richard Baxter and the “middle way” theology of reason within moderation—which is not entirely dissimilar to the Latitudinarian middle way. Because of this moderate stance, Doddridge has, like Richard Baxter,²⁹ been seen as a key figure in the history of the evangelical revival that results in New Dissent and the rise of Methodism.³⁰ This might make Doddridge seem like an odd figure to emphasize in a project with a focus on the lasting importance of a seventeenth-century intellectual tradition that comes out of Old Dissent, not the more evangelical New Dissent. However, recent scholarship by Isabel Rivers and others has begun to re-consider Doddridge’s relationship with Old Dissent, emphasizing the influence of Doddridge on education.³¹ A major part of my argument is based on the idea that though contemporary scholarship on Dissenting academies recognizes

For more on the relationship between Doddridge, Clarke, and especially Jennings, see the following, all of which are also excellent sources on Doddridge in general: G.F. Nuttall, *New College, London and its Library: Two Lectures* (London: Friends of Dr. Williams’s Library Lectures, 1977); Isabel Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge’s Academy Lectures* (London: Dr. Williams’s Trust, 2003); Roger Thomas, “Philip Doddridge and Liberalism in Religion,” in *Philip Doddridge, 1702-51: His Contribution to English Religion* (London: Independent Press, 1951), 122-53; David L. Wykes, “The Dissenting Academy and Rational Dissent,” in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 99-139.

²⁹ For more on Doddridge and Baxter, see: Alexander Gordon, *Heads of English Unitarian History* (London: Philip Green, 1895), 56-101; Gordon, “Philip Doddridge and the Catholicity of the Old Dissent” in *Addresses, Biographical and Historical*, (London: Lindsey Press, 1922), 185-237; and Geoffrey Nuttall, *Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge: A Study in a Tradition* (London: Friends of Dr. Williams’s Library, 1951).

³⁰ For more on Doddridge’s links to Methodism, see A.T.S. James, “Philip Doddridge: His Influence on Personal Religion” in *Philip Doddridge (1702-51): His Contributions to English Religion*, ed. Geoffrey Nuttall. (London: Independent Press, 1951), 32-45. See also, Alan Everitt, “Springs of Sensibility: Philip Doddridge of Northampton and the Evangelical Tradition,” in *Landscape and Community in England*. (London: Hambledon Press, 1985). 209-45.

³¹ Isabel Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge’s Academy Lectures* (London: Dr. Williams’s Trust, 2003); R. K. Webb, “The Emergence of Rational Dissent,” in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12-41. This is perhaps more of a re-emergence of thought linking Doddridge and Rational Dissent, as Alexander Gordon pointed to this in *Heads of English Unitarian History*.

Doddridge as a central figure in Dissenting education, I do not believe that his full importance has yet been acknowledged, nor has his part in a larger formation of a Dissenting disposition been realized.

Doddridge's curricular reforms and contributions highlight the central role that free inquiry played in Dissenting education. As the leading Doddridge scholar Isabel Rivers writes, "Doddridge himself always found that his own views were confirmed and strengthened by reading those of his opponents... When he became a tutor, Doddridge thought it important that his students should have the same opportunity to judge these arguments for themselves."³² I believe that this central tenet of Doddridge's educational practices became more than just a successful pedagogical tool, but was part of an emergent Dissenting disposition. This disposition was founded in a unique reading of Locke combined with an anti-authoritarian Protestant belief in the centrality of a liberty of conscience, as well as the role that error plays in determining truth that can most potently be traced to Milton's *Areopagitica* and *Of Education*.

I want to emphasize the links between Doddridge's commitment to free inquiry, and his unique reading of Locke and Milton's writings on education and knowledge—all of which play integral roles in the formation of the Dissenting disposition. A crucial aspect of this was the massive expansion of the subjects taught in Dissenting academies and the prominent place of modern sciences in the Dissenting curriculum. Though the Dissenting academies were not the only ones to teach the emerging sciences in the eighteenth century, the emphasis that was laid on them was far greater at the academies than at Oxford or Cambridge.

Philip Doddridge was the youngest of twenty children, born to a salesman of oils and pickles. Doddridge did not follow in his father's footsteps, but did follow his grandfather who

³² Isabel Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge's Academy Lectures* (London: Dr. Williams's Trust, 2003), 12.

had resigned his living with the Church of England during the Great Ejection and became a nonconformist minister.³³ Doddridge's contributions to Dissenting education include popularizing teaching in English instead of Latin. He also found some renown through the circulation of a manuscript titled "Account of Mr. Jennings's method of academical education with some reflections upon it in a letter to a friend" (1728) and won a major victory that confirmed the legality of Dissenting academies by direct order of King George II in 1734. Most important for this exploration of Doddridge's educational influence, Doddridge inherited from his mentor, John Jennings, a theory of education highly influenced by the epistemology of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Jennings and Doddridge took from Locke the importance of experience for gaining knowledge and the understanding that any religious revelation must be judged by reason.³⁴ The idea that free inquiry was essential in the search for truth became a central tenet of education under Doddridge and the foundation of Dissenting disposition.³⁵

³³ The Great Ejection was a consequence of Act of Uniformity of 1662. The Act of Uniformity required all ministers in the Church of England to conform to the Book of Common Prayer. Over 2000 ministers refused to do so and were ejected from the Anglican Church.

³⁴ One important area where Doddridge differed from Jennings in relation to Locke, however, was that Jennings taught in Latin and Doddridge taught in English, as Locke promotes in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London: A. and F. Churchill, 1693). After Doddridge chose to teach in English, however, most other tutors soon followed suit, which speaks to the influence that Doddridge's educational practices had over other academies (Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 1, 369).

³⁵ Doddridge, nor Jennings, was not the first to incorporate Locke and free inquiry into Dissenting education. Thomas Rowe was already doing this at the end of the seventeenth century, which his most famous student Isaac Watts remembers clearly (Watts, *The Dissenters* Vol. 1, 370). Samuel Taylor at Tewkesbury was also teaching Locke, apparently both under the aegis of theology and logic. However, Doddridge, with Jennings's system, was the first to be published and spread throughout the Dissenting education network. For more on the philosophical impact of liberty on Dissenting thought, see chapter three of Alan P.F. Sell, "The Eighteenth-Century Dissenters' Contribution to Moral Philosophy" in *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2004), 55-103.

It is in this search for truth through teaching both or several sides of a debate where Doddridge and the Dissenting academies diverged to form a unique interpretation of Locke, especially when compared to Cambridge. The traditional reading of Locke's epistemology is surely familiar: against rationalist notions of innate ideas, Locke argues that the mind is a blank slate at birth and that it is filled via sensory experience; this is how knowledge is gained. The key text here is Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), a staple reading at Cambridge and nearly every Dissenting academy. However, there are a couple of major divergences in how Locke was taught between Cambridge and the Dissenting academies. In the late seventeenth century at Cambridge, the Latitudinarian shift in theological thought had been so successful that it essentially put an end to theological debate. As Gascoigne observes,

Within Cambridge what teaching there was in divinity – and there was less and less formal instruction as the university's curriculum became ever more dominated by the mathematical sciences – largely consisted of variations on the themes which had been enunciated by Clarke (and before him, by latitudinarian preachers like Wilkins and Tillotson). Given the basic propositions of latitudinarian theology... there was little room for theological development or originality.³⁶

While divinity became increasingly less important at Cambridge, the teaching of divinity in a variety of forms was central to the educational project at Dissenting academies, the training of nonconformist ministers being the original purpose of the academies. Whereas Cambridge had what can be seen as an official, authoritative religious stance, Latitudinarian theology, the Dissenting academies by their very nature were not only theologically diverse, but theological

³⁶ Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment*, 126.

development was at the core of a Dissenting academy education as can be seen by the educational practices that were emphasized by Doddridge and his many followers.

The writings of Locke informed every aspect of Doddridge's teaching, primarily through an approach centered on always teaching both sides of a debate. Where the standard focus on Locke's *Essay* is on the first two books that lay out his empiricist epistemology, the Dissenters were also particularly interested in Book IV on knowledge with its interest in faith. Behind Doddridge's approach to teaching stands Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* on the role that reason plays in determining religious truth:

He that believes, without having any Reason for believing, may be in love with his own Fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning Faculties he has given him, to keep him out of Mistake and Error.³⁷

Book IV of Locke's *Essay* concerns knowledge. This passage provides the transition between the chapters "Of Reason" and "Of Faith and Reason" and provides a condemnation of enthusiasm. Instead of naked revelation, the key to finding religious truth is in testing that truth or faith by reason. Doddridge, like Jennings before him, reads Locke on the search for religious truth as an educational approach that requires students to learn both sides of a debate, apply their reason, and decide for themselves on which side truth lies. As Doddridge wrote in a letter to John Wesley in 1746, "...I think that, in order to defend the truth, it is very proper that a young minister should know the chief strength of error."³⁸ This style of teaching, and the theory behind

³⁷ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 347.

³⁸ J. D. Humphreys, *Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge*, 5 vols (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829-31), 4: 492-3.

it, originated in Locke, was picked up by Jennings, refined by Doddridge, and later spread throughout the Dissenting academies by Doddridge's students.

Only through the experience of learning what both—or all—positions had to offer could a student come to an understanding of the debate and judge by reason which position was the correct position. Doddridge went so far as to teach texts that he completely disagreed with.³⁹ That a Dissenting minister with a fairly firm Calvinist bent would have his students reading pantheist tracts like John Toland's *Letters to Serena* (1704) or Dutch philosopher and political economist Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), or discussing the philosophy of Spinoza, was nearly unthinkable to Doddridge's more orthodox peers.⁴⁰ What if the opposing argument was the one that the students preferred? This did happen on occasion, and Doddridge wept over the student's decision.⁴¹ Nonetheless, it was important to Doddridge to let the student come to his own conclusion.⁴²

This idea that debate had a special power to uncover truth was a fairly common concept among Dissenters. It can also be found in the writings of Isaac Watts, a good friend of Doddridge whom Doddridge dedicated his oft reprinted and influential *The Rise and Progress of the Religion in the Soul* (1745). For Watts, this concept appeared in the form of a trope that he and

³⁹ For more on this topic, see Isabel Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge's Academy Lectures* (London: Dr. Williams's Trust, 2003).

⁴⁰ Meanwhile at Cambridge, latitudinarian theology was still the absolute standard. Gascogne writes, "Hence the broad measure of religious harmony which characterized mid-eighteenth-century Cambridge also brought with it an atmosphere of complacency... Without the stimulus of debate – which in eighteenth-century Cambridge largely meant theological argument – this new intellectual order hardened into a new orthodoxy which was almost as settled and complacent as the scholastic curriculum it had replaced" (140-1).

⁴¹ See Doddridge's account of his student Charles Bulkley in a letter of April 23, 1740 to Watts, in T. Milner, *The Life and Times, and Correspondence of the Rev. Isaac Watts* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1834), 657-8, in Rivers, *Defence of Truth*, page 18.

⁴² This has a distinct ring of Kant's enlightenment maxim of having the courage to think for one's self, however Doddridge died 34 years before Kant's 1784 essay *What is Enlightenment?*.

other Dissenters used to describe the power of conversation through an analogy to how fire is made:

Often has it happened in free Discourse that new Thoughts are strangely struck out, and the Seeds of Truth sparkle and blaze through the Company, which in calm and silent Reading would have never been excited, by Conversation you will both give and receive the Benefit; as Flints when put into Motion and striking against each other produce living Fire on both Sides, which would never have risen from the same hard Materials in a State of Rest.⁴³

This passage from Watts highlights the importance that conversation played in many Dissenting circles.⁴⁴ *The Improvement of the Mind* was, along side Doddridge's *Course of Lectures*, a common textbook throughout the Dissenting academies and the two obviously shared a similar conception of the importance of conversation and debate. I am focusing on Doddridge more than Watts, however, because it was Doddridge who transformed this common Dissenting concept into a pedagogic framework that also emphasized the role of reason and judging for one's self and transmitted it through his students who later themselves became tutors. For example, the Nonconformist minister, Doddridge student, and editor of the 1794 edition of Doddridge's *Course of Lectures*, Andrew Kippis wrote that, though in the divinity lectures Doddridge "stated and maintained that his own opinions, which in a considerable degree were Calvinistical, he never assumed the character of a dogmatist... The students were left to judge for themselves; and

⁴³ Isaac Watts, *The Improvement of the Mind* (London: Printed for James Brackstone, 1741), 43. Quote originally found in Jon Mee and Jennifer Wilkes, "Transpennine Enlightenment: The Literary and Philosophical Societies and Knowledge Networks in the North, 1781-1830," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (2015): 603.

⁴⁴ For more on Isaac Watts and the concept of conversation as collision, see Mee and Wilkes's "Transpennine Enlightenment" and Jon Mee's excellent *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially chapter one, "Some Paradigms of Conversability in the Eighteenth Century."

they did judge for themselves, with his perfect concurrence and approbation.”⁴⁵ Kippis later replicated this approach in his own teaching while a tutor at Hoxton and Hackney, as well as in his creation and editing of the *New Annual Register*, a yearly publication that provided a leftist counterpoint to Burke’s conservative *Annual Register*.⁴⁶

The concept of thinking for one’s self was not in itself a novel idea as it was at the heart of the Enlightenment project, as Kant would much later point out.⁴⁷ However, the idea that *students* should think for themselves was much more of an innovation. Education in England at the time was primarily didactic in that the instructor was an authoritative figure who transmits knowledge to a largely passive student. The Dissenting academies certainly included instruction of this type, but it was accompanied by a dialogical process that forced the students to test for error and judge for themselves. Furthermore, this pedagogical process was also not a strictly dialectical process in that there was no requirement or assumption of there being only two sides of a matter under discussion at a time. This is a point that is worth spending a moment on to clarify. Some writers, like Doddridge or Kippis above, do not make specific reference to how many sides or stances to an argument may be considered, while other, like Priestley later in the chapter, often explicitly states that “two” or “both” sides of a debate are to be considered. While texts may be murky on the specific language, in practice the Dissenting disposition did not require there to be only two sides to an issue. For example, the divinity/humanity of Christ issue, which was a huge issue that afforded a variety of positions. Instead of traditional Trinitarianism versus anti-trinitarianism, there were various positions on a spectrum: Trinitarian (where God,

⁴⁵ *Biographia Britannica*, vol. 5 (1793), 280, in Rivers, *Defence of Truth*, page 18.

⁴⁶ A later chapter of this text examines more closely how this intellectual heritage may have influenced the young William Godwin, a student of Kippis and writer of the history section of the *New Annual Register* before he quit to focus solely on *Political Justice*.

⁴⁷ Immanuel Kant, “What is enlightenment? [1784],” in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983), 41.

Christ, and Holy Ghost are co-equal, co-eternal and consubstantial), Arianism (believes in the three entities of the Trinity, but that they were not co-equal and consubstantial; the Son was literally begotten by the Father and is therefore distinct from the Father and subordinate to him, but he still may have existed before he was born on Earth), Socinianism (where Christ did not exist before he was born on Earth, but was still God's son and a divine entity), and Unitarianism (where Christ was fully human and not divine at all). So while the phrasing seems to often present a binary, the practice was not necessarily a choice between two polarities.

To highlight the uniqueness of the educational relationship between Doddridge and his students, one need only look to Oxford and Cambridge discussed previously. Both universities employed a primarily didactic method of education where judging for one's self was not emphasized as the duty of the student. In terms of how Locke was taught, Oxford still primarily followed scholastic traditions and, as of 1701, the teaching of Locke's *Essay* was actually banned at Oxford. Cambridge, on the other hand, focused on mathematics and Lockean empiricism, meaning primarily the first two books of the *Essay*. Meanwhile, the Dissenting academies not only included a focus on Book IV of the *Essay*, but also often taught *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). Doddridge even used *Of the Conduct of Understanding* (1706) as a textbook.⁴⁸ Opposed to the clear and undebatable conclusions reached through mathematics and clear empiricism, like those taught at Cambridge, *Conduct* begins,

The last resort a man has recourse to in the conduct of himself is his understanding; for though we distinguish the faculties of the mind and give the

⁴⁸ A. Victor Murray, "Doddridge and Education" in *Philip Doddridge, 1702-51: His Contribution to English Religion*, ed. by Geoffrey F. Nuttall (London: Independent Press, 1951), 114; and Alan P. F. Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity, 1689-1920* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2004), 25.

supreme command to the will as to an agent; yet the truth is, the man which is the agent determines himself to this or that voluntary action, upon some precedent knowledge, or appearance of knowledge in the understanding.⁴⁹

For Locke and Doddridge, understanding and choice were inseparable. The agent makes the choice, but that choice is based on knowledge. The more knowledge, therefore, the better the choice. This is why true understanding is only achieved by learning both sides of an issue and then making a choice based on that knowledge. *Conduct* is in many ways a companion piece to *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and the influence of both can be seen throughout Doddridge's writings on education as well as his students' reflections on Doddridge's methods. One of these influences is the expansion of subjects taught. The core courses under Doddridge were ethics, divinity, and pneumatology, the study of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. However, these core series of lectures were also supplemented, according to Doddridge's student Job Orton, by lectures on natural and civil history, civil law, mythology, and English history with a special emphasis on the history of Dissent.⁵⁰

Doddridge's curricular innovations were part of a radical Protestant educational project that extended back past Locke's *Conduct* to Milton and the Hartlib Circle, an intellectual correspondence network in the mid-seventeenth century organized by Samuel Hartlib. Though locating Locke in a specific religious grouping can be extremely difficult—many considered him a Deist in the eighteenth century, but his acceptance of miracles and complicated relationship

⁴⁹ John Locke. *Posthumous works of Mr. John Locke* (London: A. and J. Churchill at the Black Swan in Pater-Noster-Row, 1706), 3.

⁵⁰ See Job Orton, *Memoirs of the Life, Character, and Writings of the Late Reverend Philip Doddridge, D.D. of Northampton* (Salop: J. Cotton and J. Eddowes, 1766). There is some debate over exactly which subjects Doddridge taught, as other students produced slightly different lists. However, all of the lists share in common a wide expansion of subjects beyond what was being taught at Oxford and Cambridge.

with revelation make that a difficult sell—his heterodoxy and emphasis on toleration meant that he felt like a Dissenter to many, and the Dissenters were more than happy to claim him as one of their own. Milton, on the other hand, was firmly established in the radical Protestant tradition; his support of popular government after the Civil Wars, sanctioning of regicide, and role under Cromwell as his Secretary of Foreign Tongues had solidified that position.

In *Of Education*, Milton is responding to a request from Samuel Hartlib to describe his views “concerning the best and noblest way of education.”⁵¹ Milton’s proposed curriculum was vast: grammar, languages, religion, politics, law, theology, church history, ethics, economics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, physics, trigonometry, logic, agriculture, and of course poetry and rhetoric. Not only does this list bear many similarities to Doddridge’s curricular expansion, but the reasoning behind the purpose of method is also quite similar. Just as under Doddridge, and in most Dissenting academies, all education, not just divinity, was seen as the way to religious truth, so it was for Milton:

The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which, being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection.⁵²

Milton goes on to allude to how that religious truth is to be arrived at, and like Locke and Doddridge, he stands against naked revelation and for an early form of experiential empiricism:

But, because our understanding cannot in this body found itself but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible as by

⁵¹ John Milton, *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 980-1.

⁵² Milton, *Complete Poetry and Essential Prose*, 971.

orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be followed in all discreet teaching.⁵³

For Milton, knowledge or understanding cannot help but be gained through the senses, and the knowledge of God cannot be arrived at except by “conning over the visible and inferior creature,” or, in other words, to study visible creation, the world we perceive.⁵⁴ Here, in Milton’s *Of Education*, we find an early version of the link between true understanding and a form of experiential empiricism that we later find so clearly stated by Locke and then by Doddridge.

Only five months later, in November 1644, Milton published another tract with strong implications concerning his understanding of how true religious knowledge was gained. *Areopagitica* is more widely known as a tract against the practice of licensing books and is often considered the earliest polemic defending free speech in its modern sense. But *Areopagitica* also highlights the importance of the radical Protestant tradition of testing the truth of faith by having it stand up to error and its relationship to personal judgment, in other words, religious free inquiry:

He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 971.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 971.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 939.

For Milton, the “fugitive and cloistered virtue” that “never sallies out and sees her adversary” was any religious authority that would rather censor ideas than have to argue against them, the very type of censorship that Milton had earlier experienced while trying to publish his divorce tracts. Though censorship was not Doddridge’s target, the concept that a true Christian should be able to withstand the test of vice is echoed in Doddridge’s practice of being exposed to all sides of an idea in order to make a proper choice, which obviously led to theological debate. This practice stands in opposition to the practice of Oxford and Cambridge when Doddridge was teaching and their teaching of a standardized religious position with debate frowned upon. Neither Cambridge or Oxford wanted to expose students to error or vice or Spinoza because the student may choose Spinoza. But for Milton, Locke, and Doddridge, belief or faith without choice was no faith at all, but blind dogma. In *Areopagitica*, Milton writes,

Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely and with less danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractates and hearing all manner of reason?⁵⁶

In fact, the freedom of religious free inquiry is arguably one of Milton’s main points in *Areopagitica*: “Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.”⁵⁷ The centrality of this liberty lives on in the teaching of Doddridge, and its

⁵⁶ Ibid., 939.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 960.

necessity is coalesced with a conception of experiential empiricism and a qualifying rationalism to form a Dissenting disposition.⁵⁸

Institutional Establishment and Transmission

The Dissenting disposition as refined by Doddridge while teaching at Northampton academy rippled throughout the progressive Dissenting academies of the second half of the eighteenth century. As Rivers notes, Doddridge's lectures were passed around first in manuscript form and then printed under the title *Course of Lectures on Pneumatology, Ethics and Divinity* in

⁵⁸ Doddridge likely owned, or at least had access to, multiple editions of Milton's prose writings. He directly cites a number of Milton's prose works and poetry in his many writings. Examining the 1776 edition, Doddridge cites Milton's *Prose Works* in his *A Course of Lectures on the Principles of Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity: with references to the most considerable Authors on each subject*. In the "The Catalogue of the Authors mentioned in this Work," at the end of the volume, he specifically writes "Milton's Prose Works, 3 vols. folio." As far as I know, the only 3-volume edition of Milton's prose works that had been printed before Doddridge's writing of his course of lectures was the 1698 edition edited by Toland. Because of this, I am confident that Doddridge had (or at least had access to) the 1698, 3-volume edition of *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1698). Now, Dissenting Academies Online officially catalogues a copy of the single-volume, *The Works of John Milton* (n.p.: n.p., 1697), as part of the "New College: Philip Doddridge Collection," and that does include *Areopagitica*, along with a number of other prose works. Dissenting Academies Online also catalogues two copies of the 1698, 3-volume edition of *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton* edited by Toland has having been part of the Coward College collection.

The Coward Trust supported Northampton academy under Doddridge, and the academy was taken over by the trustees after Doddridge died. After Doddridge's death, the academy was moved to Daventry (where Joseph Priestley attended it), then back to Northampton, then to Wymondley, and then finally to London where it took the name of Coward College. In 1850, Coward College merged with the dissenting academy Highbury College and Homerton College to form New College London. Dissenting Academies Online catalogues two copies that it says belonged to Coward College. Neither of the 1698 3-volume Milton prose works catalogued by Dissenting Academies Online have currently been catalogued as part of the "New College: Philip Doddridge Collection," but that does not preclude the possibility that they could have previously been in the Northampton collection under Doddridge; just that so far they have not been proven to have been part of that collection. I hope to examine the physical copies of these texts in the future.

1763, 1776, and 1794.⁵⁹ Here, however, I want to emphasize the important role his students played in passing this formalized disposition to other academies. Doddridge began a cycle of educational transmission and reproduction from tutor to student that continued for decades and this played an important role in the building of a social network throughout the Dissenting academies.

In much the same way that Doddridge had internalized and then reproduced the foundations of a Dissenting disposition that he received from Jennings, Doddridge's students spread the free-inquiry approach to numerous other academies. Overall, Doddridge educated around 200 men, out of which about 120 went into the ministry.⁶⁰ Among these 200 men, there was John Aikin, tutor at Warrington; Caleb Ashworth, Doddridge's successor at Daventry; Samuel Clark, Jr., tutor at Daventry; Andrew Kippis, tutor at Hoxton and then Hackney New College; Samuel Merivale, tutor at Exeter; Richard Simpson, tutor at Kendal; Stephen Addington, tutor at Hackney Independent Academy; and Thomas Robins, tutor at Daventry.⁶¹ If we then consider the many students that also were taught by Doddridge's protégés—students like Joseph Priestley, William Godwin, William Hazlitt, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Thomas Belsham, Henry Beaufoy—the widespread impact and longevity of Doddridge's free inquiry approach to education and its associated disposition becomes clear.

Joseph Priestley is a key example of the progressive line of Doddridge's intellectual heritage as he published more than any other Dissenter on education in the late eighteenth century. Priestley wrote in his memoirs of his time as a student at Daventry under two former students of Doddridge:

⁵⁹ See pages 4 and 13-26.

⁶⁰ McLachlan, *English Education*, 151.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

Our tutors also were of different opinions; Dr. Ashworth taking the orthodox side of every question, and Mr. Clark, the sub-tutor, that of heresy, though always with the greatest modesty.

Both of our tutors being young, at least as tutors... they indulged us in the greatest freedoms, so that our lectures had often the air of friendly conversations on the subjects to which they related. We were permitted to ask whatever questions, and to make whatever remarks we pleased; and we did it with the greatest, but without any offensive, freedom. The general plan of our studies, which may be seen in Dr. Doddridge's published lectures, was exceedingly favourable to free inquiry, as we were referred to authors on both sides of every question, and were even required to give an account of them.⁶²

Here is Priestley remembering how both sides of a debate were not only considered, but embodied in a pedagogical sense by the two tutors. He even cites Doddridge as the inspiration for this approach as their general plan of studies came from Doddridge and it was "exceedingly favourable to free inquiry." Priestley was at Daventry as a student in the early 1750s. A decade later, while a tutor at Warrington, Priestley's teaching showed similar attributes concerning free inquiry. As a student of Priestley's writes,

At the conclusion of his lecture he always encouraged the students to express their sentiments relative to the subjects of it, and to urge any objections to what he had delivered without reserve. It pleased him when any one commenced such a conversation. In order to excite the freest discussion, he occasionally invited

⁶² *Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley, to the Year 1795, written by himself* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1806), 18.

students to drink tea with him, in order to canvas the subjects of his lectures... His object... was to engage the students to examine and decide for themselves...⁶³

Though Priestley did not task another tutor to specifically argue the opposite position of his, the emphasis on freedom of inquiry that Priestley's student wrote of is remarkably similar to how Priestley wrote of his tutors' methods. In 1765 Priestley published *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life*, in which Priestley writes that free inquiry is the common cause of all scholars and that "[u]nbounded free enquiry upon all subjects may certainly be attended with some inconvenience, but it cannot be restrained without infinitely greater inconvenience."⁶⁴ Thirty-six years later while teaching at Hackney New College, in his "The Proper Objects of Education" (1791), Priestley was still uncompromising on the importance of free inquiry in education.⁶⁵ Still fifteen years later, in 1806, Priestley published memoirs that tied his lifelong support of free inquiry directly to Doddridge. While this type of direct transmission of free inquiry can be traced from tutor to student among the progressive academies where Doddridge's students often became tutors—for example, Doddridge to Ashworth and Clarke to Priestley—it is important to note that there is evidence of the transmission of this approach even among the more conservative, orthodox academies.

I have been referring to the academies that I have been examining simply as Dissenting academies, despite the fact that most current scholarship would divide the Dissenting academies

⁶³ Written by Mr. Simpson, a pupil of Priestley's while at Warrington. See John T. Rutt, *Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley, Vol. 1, Part 1* (Hackney: Printed by George Smallfield, 1831), 50-1.

⁶⁴ Joseph Priestley, *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (London: Printed for C. Henderson, 1765), iii, 177-8.

⁶⁵ Joseph Priestley, *The Proper Objects of Education* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1791), 6, 22.

into at least two groups: progressive academies and orthodox academies.⁶⁶ I have so far focused primarily on the more liberal, progressive schools with ties to either far-from-orthodox Congregationalism like Northampton, Daventry, and Hoxton, or to Rational Dissent like Warrington, Hackney New College, Manchester, and Exeter. These schools taught lay students as well as ministerial students, and included a strong emphasis on individual liberty and free inquiry.⁶⁷ When any Dissenting academy receives attention in Romantic studies, it is almost certainly one of these latter, seemingly more progressive academies. However, it is worth noting that these progressive academies accounted for a minority of all of the Dissenting academies.

The many smaller, more orthodox academies did not accept lay students, and their focus was exclusively the training of nonconformist ministers. Some scholarship on Dissenting academies has portrayed the progressive and orthodox academies as being radically different. For example, I have shown the centrality of free inquiry and its relationship to radical Protestant conceptions of individual liberty at the progressive academies, but, supposedly, the smaller orthodox academies stood adamantly against these practices. As the Dissenting academies scholar Matthew Mercer writes of these orthodox institutions, “They suspected that the admission of lay students and the embracing of liberal and progressive teaching methods such as freedom of enquiry would lead to heterodoxy and student indiscipline.”⁶⁸ Mercer’s essay, “Dissenting Academies and the Education of the Laity,” serves as an important corrective to scholars who forget about the smaller, more orthodox academies. However, I do not believe that

⁶⁶ See Matthew Mercer, “Dissenting Academies and the Education of the Laity, 1750-1850,” *History of Education* 30 (2001): 35-58. See also David Wykes, “The contribution of the Dissenting academy to the emergence of Rational Dissent,” *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 99-139.

⁶⁷ Matthew Mercer, “Dissenting Academies and the Education of the Laity, 1750-1850,” *History of Education* 30 (2001): 37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

the gulf between the progressive and orthodox academies was nearly as large as Mercer might lead one to believe, especially on the subject that I have been examining. While it is true that many of the most important Romantic-era Dissenting intellectuals came from the progressive academies, by no means did all of them, including Richard Price and Thomas Rees, who took over as minister at Newington Green Unitarian Church after the death of Rochemont Barbault. I disagree with the claim the smaller, more orthodox academies avoided the teaching of freedom of inquiry. There are many examples of the direct transmission of free inquiry can be traced from tutor to student among the progressive Dissenting academies, like the one I've described from Doddridge to Ashworth and Clarke to Priestley. It is also important to recognize evidence of this transmission even among the more orthodox academies, specifically through Doddridge's active letter-writing network and the sharing of his lectures.

Recognizing that the Dissenting academies existed along a spectrum from progressive to orthodox helps to demonstrate the wide reach of the Dissenting disposition. Figure 1.1 shows what has been the standard categorization of the Dissenting academies.

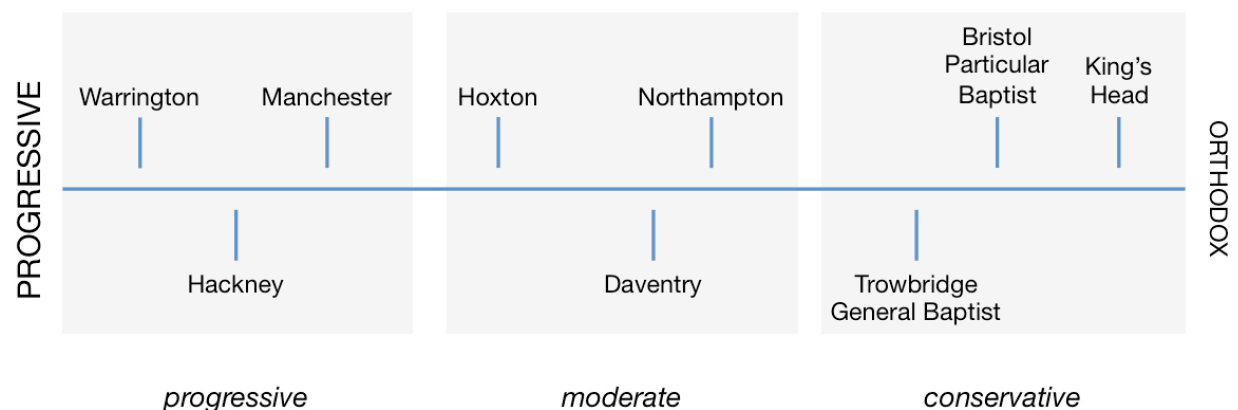


Figure 1.1. An approximation of how contemporary scholarship categorizes the Dissenting academies along a spectrum into progressive, moderate, and conservative academies.

Most current scholars differentiate between progressive, moderate, and orthodox Dissenting academies, and they portray the academies at the two ends of this spectrum—extreme Calvinist orthodoxy and extreme Unitarian heterodoxy—as being radically different. The primary assumption has been that only the progressive academies taught with a strong emphasis on individual liberty and free inquiry. However, the Dissenting disposition was reproduced not only at progressive schools like Warrington and Hackney, but also at moderate schools like Daventry and even more conservative Calvinist academies. As I show in Figure 1.2, evidence of the Dissenting disposition can be found in nearly every academy on the spectrum.

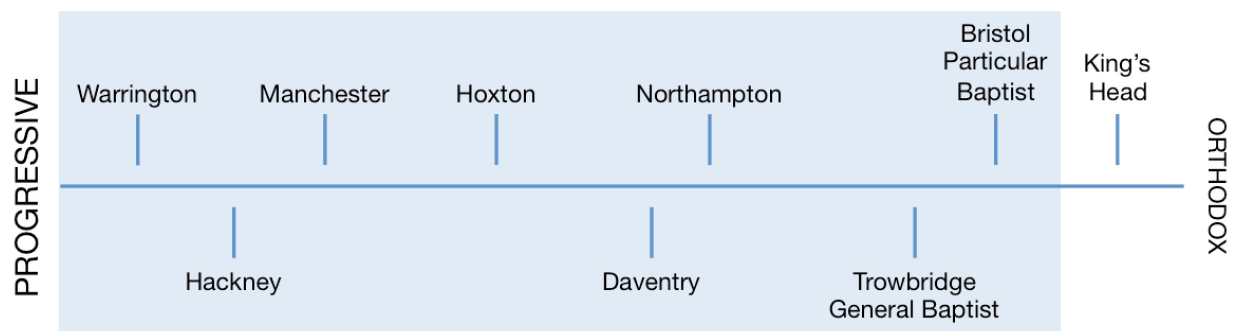


Figure 1.2. The highlighted area shows the widespread nature of the Dissenting disposition amongst all but the most orthodox Calvinist academies.

The prominent Bristol Particular Baptist academy provides the hard test case, as the Particular Baptists were among the most orthodox and Calvinist of the Dissenting denominations in the eighteenth century. Hugh Evans, who had served as assistant head of the academy for 25 years, became head of the academy in 1758 and served until his death in 1779. As head, Evans expanded the curriculum as Doddridge had at Northampton, including more natural and moral philosophy. Also, he published—in the *Baptist Register*, no less—“A Catalogue of a Few Useful

Books,” which was a reading list for Baptist ministers and other educators.⁶⁹ Included in this list are works not only by the Baptist hyper-Calvinists Gill and Brine, but also works by Locke, Doddridge, Doddridge’s protégé Job Orton, and Isaac Watts, a largely ecumenical and fairly liberal minister who was good friends with Doddridge. Evans even writes that “Doddridge is to be valued for sublimity, perspicuity, penetration, and unbounded love.”⁷⁰ This reading list exposes Evans as a Particular Baptist tutor who felt it was important for a minister to have read widely across Dissenting denominations. Even at one of the most orthodox and Calvinist Dissenting academies of the eighteenth century, we find Locke, Doddridge, and Watts as authors amidst a general commitment to being exposed to multiple sides of an issue—free inquiry in practice, if not by name. While free inquiry may not have been as central a focus at the smaller, more orthodox seminaries, there is evidence that the Dissenting disposition had spread throughout the network of Dissenting academies in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, nearly regardless of denomination.

I claim *nearly* regardless of denomination, because—as you can see in Figure 1.2—there is a group of extremely orthodox Calvinist academies where the Dissenting disposition does not seem to have reached. Known collectively as the King’s Head academies—pluralized because the original school regularly moved locations and was renamed—these schools were founded as a reaction against their more progressive equivalents. Sandemanian hyper-Calvinist Samuel Newton, who was not affiliated with one of these academies but did tutor young William Godwin for a few years, exemplified this orthodox position. Thus, the Dissenting disposition was a central feature at all but the most extreme Calvinist Dissenting academies.

⁶⁹ Smith, *The Birth of Modern Education*, 282-4.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Ashley Smith, *The Birth of Modern Education*, 282.

This section has focused on the institutional transmission of the Dissenting disposition, especially Doddridge's role in refining and transmitting this disposition via his students and his publications throughout the Dissenting academies network. Though this Dissenting disposition was far more of an intellectual force in the more progressive academies, it was nonetheless present in the education of all the academies across the denominational spectrum. I want to emphasize that the importance laid on free inquiry at the Dissenting academies does not necessarily show a commitment to science as we now envision it. This is a common error in thinking about the emerging sciences and experimental philosophy in the eighteenth century. In the Dissenting academies, the sciences—then called natural philosophy—were not yet commonly considered to be a secularizing influence in the eighteenth century. The emerging experimental sciences and free inquiry were widely seen as a path to achieving a better understanding of God, a way to help better reform religion. This was not a form of deism, but a thoroughly Protestant and English, thanks to Locke, system aimed at better knowing God and understanding Christianity. Free inquiry and the sciences provided new ways of seeking answers to the questions posed by Christianity. In this way science, from the point of view of Dissent, was not a revolution aimed at overthrowing the present system of religion, it was not inherently a secularizing influence—though obviously it could be. Instead, natural philosophy could provide a new avenue for religious reform and was viewed in continuity with the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The end goal for Dissenting scientists like Priestley was the continual movement ever closer to a truly reformed Protestantism. As such, the history of Christianity, England, and specifically Dissent came to be incredibly important subjects in both debates on religious reform and as a topic of education in the Dissenting academies. The next

section will examine a moment of the Dissenting disposition in action and how it affected the way that history was studied and deployed in debate.

Price, Priestley, and Millenarianism: The Dissenting Disposition in Action

Instances of Dissenting disposition can be found throughout Dissenting writings on education in the second half of the eighteenth century. However, this disposition obviously must have existed outside of the academies if it was truly as powerful of an influence over Dissenting thought as I have claimed in this chapter. One of the most fascinating examples of the Dissenting disposition in the wild was a debate that occurred between Joseph Priestley and Richard Price in the 1770s and 80s over millenarianism, history, and the limits of human free will; a debate that began in letters and concluded with the publication of the book *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity* (1778). Richard Price, like Priestley, was a leading intellectual figure in Rational Dissent, especially on the more progressive end of the spectrum. He is now best known as the author of *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789) that prompted Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in the following year. In this section, I focus on how the Dissenting disposition led to the science of history producing facts that could be used to support millennial beliefs and how the firm belief that free inquiry led to truth underpinned the debate between Price and Priestley on free will and the coming millennium.

In their debate on materialism, free will, and millenarianism, Price and Priestley came to their conviction that Christ would soon return and begin his millennium-long reign on earth largely due to a new way of looking at history. I have previously mentioned that tutors in Dissenting academies considered history to be one of the emerging “sciences” within what was

still standardly referred as natural philosophy during the period. Categorizing history as a science meant that the study of history was capable of producing facts if those facts could be tested by reason. As the leading scholar on Price and Priestley's millenarianism, Jack Fruchtman, Jr., writes:

[B]oth Price and Priestley claimed that reason and revelation could be reconciled so long as reason confirmed revelation. It was in this sense that Priestley, the associationist in the tradition of Gay and Locke, was a rationalist. He used the idea of reason as a means to convince others that his beliefs were founded on rationally qualifiable facts.⁷¹

According to this Dissenting disposition, everything could and needed to be tested by reason. Historical information from a variety of sources, including the Bible, could be considered fact if it had been confirmed by reason. This was not the straightforward empiricism that characterized the interpretation and teaching of Locke at Cambridge, but instead was a coalescence of empiricism with rationalism in the tradition of Milton and Locke as I have shown, or—to lean on Fruchtman's phrasing—the production of rationally qualifiable facts.

To be clear, I am not, nor is Fruchtman, claiming that Priestley, a well-known materialist and empiricist, was secretly a rationalist. The entire argument of *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity* stems from the fact that Priestley and Price begin from essentially irreconcilable epistemological viewpoints; Priestley was an empiricist by way of Hartlian associationism and Price a rationalist via mathematics and neo-

⁷¹ Jack Fruchtman, Jr., "The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A Study in Late Eighteenth-Century English Republican Millennialism," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 73.4 (1983): 37. See this work for an extremely detailed account of Price and Priestley's millenarian beliefs and politics. My analysis in this section is greatly indebted to Fruchtman's work.

Platonism. Yet reason still plays a very important role for Priestley. As Fruchtman points out in the above quote, reason was a key part of how Priestley supported his beliefs, as well as a central test for understanding revelation. This appeal to reason that Priestley consistently made was, I argue, a demonstration of his commitment to the Dissenting disposition. Price and Priestley each saw the world through a completely different, and irreconcilable, epistemological viewpoint. Yet despite this fundamental difference, they shared a faith in the power of debate and reason to expose error and lead to truth. The Dissenting disposition for these thinkers was not tied to an epistemology—even if it was at one point linked to Lockean empiricism. By the late eighteenth century, the Dissenting disposition had moved from a pedagogic tool to become an ingrained, generative process of how to think about truth for those like Priestley and Price who had spent their entire lives living with the structuring structure. Though Price and Priestley shared their millenarian beliefs and views on history, it is important to recognize that they each held very different epistemological assumptions yet shared an understanding of reason's part in the Dissenting disposition.

Understanding the role that reason played for Price and Priestley is essential because they came to their convictions about the coming of Christ's millennium not through naked revelation, but through reason. God did not speak to them, angels did not visit them, and their dreams did not reveal prophecy; their millenarian beliefs were *not* a form of enthusiasm. They saw their own intellectual process as one based on the interpretation of history. History, according to Priestley, was “what we may call the *language of the naked facts*.”⁷² Or more specifically, Priestley writes on the relationship between history and facts:

⁷² Joseph Priestley, “An Essay on the One Great End of the Life and Death of Christ,” *The Theological Repository* 1 (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1773): 20.

If there be any truth in history, Christ wrought unquestionable miracles as a proof of his mission from God, he preached the great doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, he raised several persons from a state of death, and, what was more, he himself died and rose again in confirmation of his doctrine. The belief of these *facts* I call the belief of *christianity*...⁷³

These events in the life of Christ were historical facts according to Priestley. Also, these facts of history also included historical moments that were seen to align with prophecy, such as the American and French revolutions.

Price and Priestley believed that humanity had control over a significant part of the apocalyptic process, as their positive reactions to the American and French revolutions might suggest. Only when society had progressed to a certain point and was properly prepared for the return of Christ would Christ actually return. This was providence and human free will working together—essentially the Whig version of progress taken to another, apocalyptic, level. The fall of the Catholic Church was one of the key requirements for the return of Christ because his true gospel could not flourish as long as the church of the Antichrist was spreading its heresy. Another key requirement for Price and Priestley was wide-scale governmental shift toward republicanism. It is here where the links between late eighteenth-century millenarianism and mid-seventeenth-century millenarianism are the strongest. The dissolution of monarchy and the setting up of a republic were seen by late-eighteenth-century millenarians like Price and Priestley as one of the most important changes that needed to occur before the return of Christ, along with the fall of the Catholic Church. With these requirements in mind, it is easy to see how the events of 1776 and 1789 could lead Price and Priestley to excitement over the future: a republic that

⁷³ Joseph Priestley, “Observations on the Inspiration of Christ,” *The Theological Repository* 4 (London: Printed by Pearson and Rollason, 1774): 456. Italics from original.

valued religious toleration was established in America, and in France the Catholic Church and the monarchy were razed and a republic was erected. These, according to Price and Priestley, were the *facts* of history and prophecy.

Although both felt that humanity had a degree of control over the process leading to the apocalypse, Price and Priestley differed on how they considered the mechanics of this process to work. The key element for both men was proving that humanity had free will while still being guided by providence, an issue most famously tackled in *Paradise Lost*. While Milton determined that humanity was “Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall,” Price and Priestley’s argument was of a more philosophical nature than Milton’s poetic examination of the issue.⁷⁴ As Fruchtman writes, “If they could prove that men were naturally free to choose whatever they wanted to do, then they could argue that it was theoretically within men’s power to choose to create the conditions for the millennium”, those conditions being the creation of a true and final republic.⁷⁵ The key work in this debate was *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity* (1778) co-authored by Price and Priestley. This text is important not only because it is a key text to understanding both men’s thoughts on free will, liberty, necessity, and causation, but also because of the structure of the work which demonstrates central tenets of Dissenting disposition.

A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity is organized as a debate. In the introduction, Priestley describes the scheme that he proposed to Price as one that would

⁷⁴ Milton, *Complete Poetry and Essential Prose*, 363. Quote from *Paradise Lost*, Book 3, line 99.

⁷⁵ Fruchtman, *Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley*, 94.

be useful to others who might wish to see the arguments on both sides freely canvassed, without the mixture of any thing personal, or foreign to the subject, which often constitutes a great part of the bulk of controversial writings, and tends to divert the mind from an attention to the real merits of the question in debate. It was, that he should re-write his remarks... that I would then reply to them distinctly, article by article, that he should remark, and I reply again, &c. till we should both be satisfied that we had done as much justice as we could to our several arguments, frankly acknowledging any mistakes we might be convinced of, and then publish the whole jointly.⁷⁶

This text, then, is essentially a print-version of the free inquiry process that Priestley described from his education at Daventry and of his teaching procedure at Warrington. Priestley aimed for the publication to be “that of two persons discussing, with the most perfect freedom and candour, questions which are generally deemed of the greatest consequence in practice, and which are certainly so in theory.”⁷⁷ Looking at Priestley’s view, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity* was a print-remediation of the Dissenting disposition based on free inquiry and the testing of truth. Having previously established Priestley as operating firmly within the Dissenting disposition tradition, it may be no surprise to find that Priestley would want to organize a debate in print as such. But what about Price, who was not a student of Doddridge, who was not tutored by a student of Doddridge, and who attended one of the smaller, supposedly more orthodox, ministerial academies?⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1778), ii-iii.

⁷⁷ Ibid., i.

⁷⁸ Price attended the smaller, ministerial academy of Moorsfields in London under the tutelage of John Eames, a scientist of renown and friend of Newton.

In a letter that acts as a second introduction to *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity*, Price writes on what he sees as the positive effects this work may have,

Some good ends, however, it may probably answer. It will afford a proof that two persons may differ totally on points the most important and sacred, with a perfect esteem for one another; and it may likewise give a specimen of a proper manner of carrying on religious controversies.⁷⁹

This may appear to be merely a standard moment of eighteenth-century concern with polite society and conversation, and it is definitely participating in that oft-invoked mode. However, Price's statement goes beyond mere politeness. Behind it lie two key assumptions. First, no claims or arguments are off-limits as long as they are presented rationally. Second, and perhaps most importantly, religion is a topic that *should* be debated publicly. Price, like Priestley, believed in the importance of free inquiry and the testing of truth—the entirety of the document is a testament to these men's faith in free and open inquiry in the pursuit of truth. And, as such, is an example of the shared Dissenting disposition that united Dissent even where doctrinal and philosophical disagreement flourished.

Time and time again in his writings, Priestley exposes this same assumption concerning free inquiry and debate. Beyond the examples I have already provided, Priestley began the *Theological Repository* (1769) as a journal committed to the open and rational inquiry of theological debate, even if it did eventually become more of a Unitarian and Arian mouthpiece. Priestley even wrote a sermon specifically on the topic titled *The Importance and Extent of Free*

⁷⁹ Price and Priestley, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity*, xxxvii.

Inquiry in Matters of Religion (1785). The sermon opens with a quote from Matthew 8:9, “He that has ears to hear let him hear.” Priestley then states,

In these words our Lord several times addressed his audience, in order to summon their utmost attention to his doctrine. It was a call to make use of their reason, in a case in which it was of the greatest consequence to apply it, and in which they were likewise capable of applying it with the greatest effect, viz. the investigation of religious truth.⁸⁰

Price was not only one of Priestley’s closest friends, but he was also a fellow traveler seeking religious truth via reason and debate. Both men were firm in their belief that free inquiry will lead to truth, or, as Milton put it in *Areopagitica*, “Let her [Truth] and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?”⁸¹ However, those outside of Dissenting circles did not share this Dissenting disposition, which meant that Dissenters like Price and Priestley had different notions of how knowledge was gained, how truth was determined, and what counted as facts than most of England’s population. This difference proved to have profound political implications in the 1780s and 90s when Dissenters engaged the wider public in debates over their civil liberties.

Conclusion: The Political Impact of Dissenting Disposition

My examination of Dissenting disposition in this chapter has focused on the writings of Dissenters primarily aimed at an audience of fellow Dissenters. However, this disposition governed more than Dissenters’ educational practices and their shared assumptions about the

⁸⁰ Joseph Priestley, *The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry in Matters of Religion* (Birmingham: Printed by M. Swinney, 1785), 3.

⁸¹ Milton, *Complete Poetry and Essential Prose*, 961.

outcome of debate. Priestley, Price, Kippis, and many other Dissenters were also actively involved in politics, especially the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts (1787-1790) and the Revolution controversy (1789-1795). It has long been thought that the overwhelmingly negative response to Dissent's political goals in the 1790s was largely backlash against the support that many Dissenters showed for the French Revolution, but this assessment focuses on political stances rather than on the principles that drove them. Political debate is sure to be problematic when each side has its own ideas of what counts as rational thought and debate.

In contrast to Price and Priestley's shared disposition despite different epistemologies, we find a powerful example of a political misinterpretation of the Dissenting disposition in Burke's response to Price's *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789). Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was a direct response to Price and exposes the former's fundamental misunderstanding of Price's millenarianism. Burke's response to Price's excitement over the French Revolution is worth quoting at length:

These Theban and Thracian Orgies, acted in France and applauded only in the Old Jewry, I assure you, kindle prophetic enthusiasm in the minds but of very few people in this kingdom... At first I was at a loss to account for this fit of unguarded transport... But when I took one circumstance into my consideration, I was obliged to confess that much allowance ought to be made for the Society, and that the temptation was too strong for common discretion; I mean, the circumstance of the Io Paeon of the triumph, the animating cry which called "for *all* the BISHOPS to be hanged on the lampposts", might well have brought forth a burst of enthusiasm on the foreseen consequences of this happy day. I allow to so much enthusiasm some little deviation from prudence. I allow this prophet to

break forth into hymns of joy and thanksgiving on an event which appears like the precursor of the Millennium and the projected fifth monarchy in the destruction of all church establishments.⁸²

Burke was correct that Price saw the events in France as a “precursor of the Millennium.” But as can be seen in the above passage, Burke incorrectly thought that Price was guilty of enthusiasm, which was widely associated with seventeenth-century revolutionaries and regicides. The Fifth Monarchists that Burke alludes to in this quote were an English Civil War-era group that believed that the fifth great monarchy prophesized in the Bible was about to come to pass—that of Christ on Earth—and that the seizing of power by the Godly during the Civil Wars was an obvious sign that Christ would soon return. By alluding to the Fifth Monarchists and their millenarianism, Burke linked the enthusiastic seventeenth-century sect of the Fifth Monarchists to Price, Priestley, and other Rational Dissenters who shared their millenarian beliefs.

The link that Burke made between seventeenth-century enthusiasm and Price’s millenarianism was particularly easy to make as just two years earlier Price had published a lecture titled *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind, with the Means and Duty of Promoting It* (1787). This lecture on his millenarian beliefs was given to “the Supporters of a New Academical Institution among Protestant Dissenters,” almost exactly one year after Kippis gave his lecture “On Occasion of a New Academical Institution,” which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Still only seven years later, Kippis re-edited and published Doddridge’s key work, *A Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity...* (3rd edition, 1794). Kippis added footnotes to Doddridge’s lectures to “point out such sources of information as may be serviceable to them in their future

⁸² Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1790), 107-8.

enquiries.”⁸³ He is very clear about the reason behind these additions in his Preface: “My sole aim is to mention, with freedom and impartiality, the writers on all sides of the different questions which are the objects of discussion, that hereby the mind of the student may be duly enlarged, and that he may be able, with greater advantage, to prosecute his searches after truth.”⁸⁴ Millenarianism, enthusiasm, the opening of a new Dissenting academy in the Greater London area, Hackney New College, and Doddridge’s free inquiry approach to finding truth were thereby easily linked by Burke and in the public imagination in the 1790s. For Burke, a religious stance like millenarianism was inherently anti-rational and a form of enthusiasm. However, this chapter has shown the role that reason played in the groups labeled Rational Christian (an eighteenth-century term) and Rational Dissenter (the current scholarly term for the same group). Price and Priestley’s millenarianism was arrived at via a rigorous intellectual process that I have called a Dissenting disposition, a disposition that Burke neither shared nor understood.

Yet Burke was right to see the roots of late eighteenth-century Dissent in the seventeenth century. For many Dissenters, their beliefs could indeed be traced back to a seventeenth-century tradition, but that tradition was of Milton and Locke, not of the Fifth Monarchists and other revolutionary enthusiasts. However, the link that Burke made between Dissent and enthusiasm was one of his strongest tactics for discrediting the Dissenters’ position in the public debates over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 1790, as the next chapter will show. What we find in the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts is not just a difference

⁸³ Andrew Kippis, “Preface,” in Philip Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity... 3rd edition* (London: Printed for S. Crowder, 1794), n.p. Quote is from the 3rd paragraph of the “Preface.”

⁸⁴ Ibid., n.p. Quote is from the 4th paragraph of the “Preface.”

in opinion, but a difference in what counts as fact, what counts as reason, and the expected outcome of rational argument and free inquiry—truth.

While this chapter may be about the creation and rise of a Dissenting disposition—which held considerable cache amongst the Dissenting intellectuals like Priestley, Price, Kippis, and others—the 1790s would see Dissenting disposition peak and decline. The “qualifiable” truths concerning the French Revolution and the millennium proved false, as Godwin was forced to face when he revised *Political Justice* away from the necessity-driven 1793 edition into the contingency-based 1798 edition.⁸⁵ Coleridge was forced to confront Dissenting disposition as well when he very nearly became a Unitarian minister in 1798 and ended up abandoning the faith, as I will explore in a later chapter. William Hazlitt—born, raised, and educated in the Dissenting tradition—struggled with the legacy of Dissenting disposition as he abandoned the theology, but remained true to the Dissenting approach to free inquiry and a faith in truth and liberty.

⁸⁵ See Jon Klancher, “Godwin and the Republican Romance: Genre, Politics, and Contingency in Cultural History,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 56.2 (1995): 145-65.

Chapter 2

Dissent, Parliament, and the Debates to Repeal the Test and Corporation Acts

If we are a party, remember it is you who force us to be so.

– “A Dissenter” [Anna Laetitia Barbauld], *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790)

Anna Laetitia Barbauld was the only woman to publicly participate in the hotly contested debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 1790. Three times the liberal publisher Joseph Johnson printed Barbauld’s *Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* in 1790. Barbauld’s pamphlet “explicitly linked the domestic political questions of religious toleration that had originated in the English Revolution of the 1640s with the international ones of 1789.”¹ In her *Address*, Barbauld encounters the same difficulty that all Dissenters ran into when trying to argue for repeal: how does one make an argument for secular civil rights when the state controls a national church and your party is defined by its religious beliefs?

This chapter will examine the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts that occurred between 1787 and 1790, primarily through the scores of pamphlets these debates produced. Its purpose is twofold. First, this examination will act as a case study to support an underlying goal of this project: that scholarship on Dissent must find a more nuanced balance between the two ways Dissent has tended to be represented, between complete unity and

¹ Anne Janowitz, *Women Romantic Poets: Anna Barbauld and Mary Robinson* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2005), 64.

complete fragmentation. As I argued in the Introduction, for some time scholars saw Dissent as a unified whole, both religiously and often politically. A backlash against this assumption followed and Dissent was newly seen as heavily, if not completely, fragmented.

For instance, in his essay “Disconcerting Ideas: Exploring Popular Radicalism and Popular Loyalism in the 1790s” (2007), the political historian Mark Philp argues that explanations of radicalism and loyalism in the 1790s should be examined through “the relationship between political theory, ideology and political practice.”² Religion is essentially ignored throughout this essay as a possible organizer of political belief. Philp concludes,

There is little or no unity of ideology among reformers – no whole-hearted accepted radical programme, and no sense of the implications of holding one view necessitating other views. So if it is a radical movement it is not by virtue of a consistent ideology. That also means that the tradition of radicalism is not likely to be an ideologically consistent tradition. The 1790s may have borrowed from earlier periods, such as the Civil War and the Country Party opposition movement, just as later generations borrowed from the 1790s, but the borrowings do not establish the case for a consistent tradition.³

In many ways, it makes sense to not see religion as a vehicle for unified political ideology and action in the 1790s. Philp shows in this essay the variety of ideologies present in popular political societies such as the London Corresponding Society and the Society for Constitutional Information. On the other hand, there do seem to be issues around which a broad coalition of Dissent could be formed and, as this chapter will explore, the repeal of the Test and Corporation

² Mark Philp, “Disconcerting Ideas: Exploring Popular Radicalism and Popular Loyalism in the 1790s” *English Radicalism, 1550-1850*, ed. Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 157.

³ *Ibid.*, 183-84.

Acts was such an issue. For many participants seeking reform, the link between their religious nonconformity and their radicalism was fundamental. Furthermore, Dissent did more than just borrow from the Civil War; Dissent was defined by it. By creating penalties and civil disabilities for nonconformists as an outcome of the Civil Wars and Restoration, British law created a consistent Dissenting tradition. The heritage of Dissent was equally religious and political and, as the latter, was inseparable from a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition.

As for the second purpose of this chapter, I expand the history of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 1790 by analyzing the discourse—equally political and religious—that debate participants used, offering a close textual analysis of the tensions between how the participants in the debates framed their arguments and the groups to which they claimed membership. Although the general historical outlines of these debates are well known,⁴ this discourse-based approach, adopted from the discipline of rhetoric, provides a new layer of evidence for the continuing importance of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition.⁵ My texts will be the public debates and my analysis will center on the contributions to the debate over repeal that were printed and saw at least some level of public distribution. I will not be focusing on private correspondence, autobiographical remembrances published at a later date, or

⁴ Ursula Henriques, *Religious Toleration in England, 1787-1833* (London: Routledge, 1961); G. M. Ditchfield, "The Parliamentary Struggle over the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts" *English Historical Review* 89 (1974): 551-77; Thomas W. Davis, *Committees for Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: Minutes 1786-90 and 1827-8* (London: London Record Society, 1978); Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English democratic movement in the age of the French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1979); and John Seed, *Dissenting Histories: Politics, History and Memory in Eighteenth-Century England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

⁵ More specifically, I work within the subfield of rhetoric called critical discourse studies as influenced by the works of Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Tuen A. van Dijk. Major works include Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) and Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," *Discourse as Social Interaction*, ed. Tuen A. van Dijk (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 258-84.

printed accounts of the Parliamentary debates that did not see print until much later. Instead, the majority of my sources will be from a heated exchange through pamphlets that produced well over a hundred publications between 1787 and 1790. These pamphlets include original works, reprints of popular pamphlets from similar debates earlier in the eighteenth century, and the reprint of the occasional seventeenth-century text that was seen as a historically authoritative contribution to the debate, like Milton's *A Treatise of Civil Power*. The pamphlets by contemporary authors were written by individuals representing varying religious, political, and social positions. For example, William Pitt's speech during the 1787 House of Commons Parliamentary debate, published soon after, received a near immediate response in print from the Dissenting clergyman, educator, theologian, and chemist Joseph Priestley, and this in turn received a response in print from "A Layman," presumably a member of the Anglican laity.⁶ My analysis of these public debates highlight the tensions inherent in the arguments produced over framing and defining secular and religious positions and goals.

To provide context, I begin with a brief history of the Test and Corporation Acts, from their inception in the 1660s to their repeal in the late 1820s. I then explain my theoretical and methodological approach, beginning with an examination of the concept of tradition and then

⁶ Pitt's speech was published in a pamphlet aiming to reproduce the entire debate in the House of Commons, *Debate on the repeal of the test and corporation act, in the House of Commons, March 28th, 1787; Containing the speeches of Mr. Beaufoy, Sir Harry Houghton, Lord North, Lord Beauchamp, Mr. Smith, Sir James Johnstone, Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, Mr. Young, Mr. Courtenay, and Sir W. Dolben* (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1787). Priestley's response was printed in two editions as *A letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt, first Lord of the Treasury, and Chancellor of the Exchequer; on the subjects of toleration and Church establishments; occasioned by his speech against the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, on Wednesday the 28th of March, 1787. By J. Priestley* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1787). The response to Priestley's *Letter* was printed as, *Cursory remarks on the Reverend Dr. Priestley's letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer: containing Hints, humbly offered in Favour of the Establishment, and opposed to the Principles contained in that Publication; in a letter addressed to the doctor, by a layman* (London: Printed for John Denis, 1787).

taking a rhetorical turn in the analysis of public political debate. Finally, I examine two short series of heavily dialogic pamphlets that bookend the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts: one from the beginning of the debates in 1787 and the other from the end of the debates in 1790. I will claim that the consequences of the Dissenting disposition—a disposition not shared by their opponents in the debate—are one of the reasons for the Dissenters’ failure to make a successful campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. In the end, after underscoring the fact that the existence of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition was inescapable in the early Romantic era, I explore the implication of this argument on two related issues: the history of religious toleration and media event that created the French Revolution debate.

A Brief History of the Test and Corporation Acts

The Test and Corporation Acts were a direct consequence of the English Civil Wars and the following Interregnum. Among King Charles II’s most pressing concerns after his restoration to the crown was to ensure that what happened to his father, did not happen to him—beheading being as desirable a death in the seventeenth-century as it is today. This section will provide a brief history of the Test and Corporation Acts, from their creation and naming during the Restoration through their successful cumulative repeal in 1828 and 1835.⁷ In this history, I will highlight the waxing and waning of religious tolerance toward Dissenters and, eventually, their three waves of organized attempts in the 1730s, 1770s, and late 1780s and early 1790s to influence the repeal of laws that prohibited their full civic engagement.

⁷ For a more detailed overview of the entire history of the Test and Corporation Acts, see David L. Wykes, “Introduction: Parliament and Dissent from the Restoration to the Twentieth Century,” *Parliament and Dissent*, eds. Stephen Taylor and David L. Wykes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 1-26.

As a phrase, the Test and Corporation Acts began with the naming of two specific laws but also came to function as a blanket term for a whole series of penal laws aimed at nonconformists. With regard to the former, the Test and Corporation Acts refer specifically to the Corporation Act of 1661 and the Test Act of 1673. The foremost effect of the Corporation Act of 1661 was the requirement of all municipal officials to have taken Anglican Communion within one year prior to taking office. However, the Corporation Act of 1661 also included language that made it quite clear that the Act was a response to the English Civil Wars. Not only did a potential municipal official have to take the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England and take the normal Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy, but he also had to swear to the unambiguous illegality of civil insurrection and formally reject the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643:⁸

I. A. B. do declare and beleive That it is not lawfull upon any pretence whatsoever to take Arms against the King and that I do abhor that Traiterous Position of taking Arms by His Authority against His Person or against those that are co[m]missioned by Him So helpe me God.

and subscribe the following Declaration...

I. A. B. do declare That I hold that there lyes no Obligation upon me or any other person from the Oath commonly called The Solemn League and Covenant and

⁸ The Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 was essentially a treaty between English Parliamentarians and Scottish Covenanters, allying the two groups against what they saw as a common enemy, Charles I. The Presbyterian Scottish Covenanters would aid the protestant leaders of the embattled English parliament against the “papists,” Charles I’s Royalist army that was potentially going to be strengthened by Irish Catholic troops. In return, the Parliamentarians would make the Scottish system of church government the standard in England. As many of the members of the English Long Parliament were Presbyterian to begin with, this was an acceptable condition.

that the same was in it selfe an unlawfull Oath and imposed upon the Subjects of this Realm against the knowne Laws and Liberties of the Kingdome.⁹

The Test Act of 1673 later expanded many of the same restrictions to more offices by requiring that all persons filling *any* civil or military office take the Oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance, subscribe to a declaration against transubstantiation, and receive the sacrament from the established Church of England within three months after admittance to office. By excluding all nonconformists from any form of public office, Charles II and the Royalist Parliament were working to ensure that Parliament and community leaders would not be in a position to enact laws that were not in the best interest of the King and Church, as happened in the 1640s. Essentially, these laws sought to prevent nonconformists from wielding any form of political power.

The second use of the phrase “Test and Corporation Acts” was as a blanket term for all of the penal laws aimed at non-Anglicans, of which the Test Act and the Corporation Act were two of the most prominent and unambiguously interpreted. However, this use of the term had become incredibly complicated by the 1780s because it not only referred to these two pieces of legislation, but also over a century’s worth of other laws that amended, suspended, and added to the Test and Corporation Acts. The most important piece of legislation aimed at nonconformists not explicitly named in the blanket term was the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which effectively formed the basis of the Restoration religious settlement. The Act of Uniformity required the use of all the rites and ceremonies in the Book of Common Prayer in Church of England services. It also required episcopal ordination for all ministers, a requirement that had been removed by

⁹ "Charles II, 1661: An Act for the well Governing and Regulating of Corporations," in *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5, 1628-80*, ed. John Raithby (s.l: Great Britain Record Commission, 1819), 321-323. *British History Online*, accessed September 5, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/pp321-323>.

Parliament during the Civil Wars. These two aspects of the Uniformity Act led to nearly 2,000 clergymen leaving the established church in what became known as the Great Ejection. As David L. Wykes writes, “Dissent became a significant political force only as a result of the refusal of so many ejected ministers and their lay supporters to conform.”¹⁰ This single act of mass opposition eventually led to the creation of eighteenth-century English Dissent as a political entity by providing the burgeoning Dissent movement with a large body of well-trained nonconforming Clergy throughout England who were ready to form their own congregations and organize opposition to laws that infringed on private religious judgment.

In addition to referring to the Test, Corporation, and Uniformity Acts, the Test and Corporation Acts as a blanket term could also include a series of other legislative acts that created civil disabilities for nonconformists. The Corporation Act of 1661 and the Uniformity Act of 1662 were the first two pieces out of four of what is sometimes referred to as the Clarendon Code.¹¹ The rest of the Clarendon Code included the Conventicle Act of 1664 and the Five Mile Act of 1665. The Conventicle Act of 1664 forbade conventicles (a meeting for unauthorized worship) of more than 5 people who were not members of the same household. The purpose was to prevent dissenting religious groups from meeting. The Five Mile Act of 1665 was aimed at nonconformist ministers, who were forbidden from coming within five miles of incorporated towns or the place of their former livings. They were also forbidden to teach in schools. In addition to the Clarendon Code, the blanket term also generally included the 1678 Test Act, which extended the original Test Act to peers and members of the House of Commons.

¹⁰ Wykes, “Introduction,” 3.

¹¹ These four pieces of legislation have long been referred to as the Clarendon Code because Clarendon held great power at the time and it was largely assumed that he was instrumental in getting the acts pushed through. However, we now know that Clarendon was not actually involved with the drafting of these laws, nor did he even approve of their content. These four acts are still referred to as the Clarendon Code simply as shorthand at this point.

It is in this second way of referring to the Test and Corporation Acts as signifying all of the penal laws passed against nonconformists in the 1660s and 1670s that is often found in the public debates and the way that I will be using the term unless otherwise noted.

These penal laws would define the religious settlement for more than a century and a half, until the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed piecemeal in the 1820s and 1830s. However, as mentioned earlier, the Test and Corporation Acts as a set of penal laws for nonconformists did not remain static during this time: religious tolerance in English law waxed and waned, leading Dissenters to hope for further improvements and even to mount three major waves of attempts to repeal. Although periodically altered, the Test and Corporation Acts remained on the books and therefore a primary concern of Dissenters.

Of all the amendments to the Test and Corporation Acts, the first, and most important, resulted from a move to solidify power by the new King of England, William of Orange. The Toleration Act of 1689 was among the earliest laws that Parliament passed, both as a continuation of the tradition of Dutch toleration and as a bulwark against Dissenter unrest. Though a minority, Dissenters did have significant power in local communities, the City and business, and electoral influence, which explains William's interest in gaining their support, or at least their pacification.¹² The Toleration Act of 1689 granted freedom of worship to nonconformists who had taken the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy, formally rejected transubstantiation, and accepted the Trinity. In other words, the Toleration Act established freedom of worship to Protestants who did not conform to the Church of England, such as Baptists and Congregationalists, but not to Catholics due to their belief in transubstantiation or Quakers due to their heterodox views on the Trinity. Under the Toleration Act, certain

¹² Wykes, "Introduction," 15.

nonconformists were allowed their own places of worship and their own teachers, assuming that the teacher took certain oaths of allegiance.

Though the Toleration Act was a significant step forward for Dissenters, the toleration it enforced was far from complete. The Toleration Act did not apply to Catholics or non-trinitarians like Quakers, and, later, Unitarians. And most importantly for Dissenters, the majority of existing social and political disabilities continued: Dissenters were still excluded from political office and attending Oxford or Cambridge; Dissenters had to register their meeting locations; all Dissenting preachers had to be licensed; and Dissenters were still forbidden from meeting in private homes. It is important to note that this act did not permanently overrule or remove the Conventicle Act; it only temporarily suspended it. The Toleration Act purposely did not change the penal aspects of the Test Act or the Corporation Act.

In the early eighteenth century, two new acts that placed further restrictions on Dissenters were passed, then repealed, in rapid succession. Tories and high Anglicans saw two primary abuses of the Toleration Act, and they worked hard to close these loopholes. The first perceived loophole was occasional conformity, which was the practice of a non-Anglican taking “occasional” communion in the Church of England. This was seen as a way for Dissenters and possibly Catholics to work around the Test and Corporation Acts and therefore become eligible for public office. Bills designed to prevent occasional conformity were debated in 1702 and 1704, and then passed in 1711 as the Occasional Conformity Act, “An Act for preserving the Protestant Religion, by better securing the Church of England as by Law established.”¹³

¹³ For more on the passing of the Occasional Conformity Act, see: Mark Knights, “Occasional Conformity and the Representation of Dissent: Hypocrisy, Sincerity, Moderation and Zeal,” *Parliament and Dissent*, eds. Stephen Taylor and David L. Wykes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 41-57. Also see: John Flaningam, “The Occasional Conformity

The second perceived abuse of the Toleration Act was in the area of education. Officially titled “An Act to prevent the growth of Schism, and for the further security of the churches of England and Ireland, as by law established,” the Schism Act of 1714 was an attempt to slowly strangle Dissent by preventing Dissenters from educating their own children. According to the Schism Act, anyone who wanted to run a public or private school, or even act as a tutor, had to be granted a license by an Anglican bishop, which would likely never occur for Dissenters. Wykes describes the reasoning behind the Schism Act: “The setting up by dissenters of their own places of education was perceived by churchmen as helping to perpetuate dissent, not only by training up the next generation of ministers and children, but by inculcating values hostile to the Church.”¹⁴ My previous chapter showed how the Dissenting academies also taught their students the Dissenting disposition, creating entire generations of Dissenters who thought differently about the nature of knowledge and truth than the majority of England. Soon after the Hanoverian succession, which Dissenters had supported, the bulk of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts were repealed in 1719 with the passing of “An Act for Strengthening the Protestant Interest in these Kingdoms”.¹⁵ However, the Test and Corporation Acts remained in place as amended by the Toleration Act.¹⁶ At this point, even partial relief for Dissenters was still 60 years away.

Controversy: Ideology and Party Politics, 1697-1711” *Journal of British Studies* 17.1 (1977): 38-62.

¹⁴ Wykes, “Introduction,” 9.

¹⁵ This act was proposed in 1718 but was not passed until 1719, which is why different sources label it as either a 1718 or a 1719 act.

¹⁶ For more on the repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, see: G. M. Townend, “Religious Radicalism and Conservatism in the Whig Party under George I: The Repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts” *Parliamentary History* 7 (1988): 24-44; and David L. Wykes, “Religious Dissent, the Church, and the Repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, 1714-19,” *Religion, Politics and Dissent, 1660-1832*, eds. Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), 165-83.

Though relief was distant, Dissenters' three waves of organized attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in three different decades demonstrate that they proactively attempted to improve their situation. The first major attempt to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts occurred in the 1730s. The Dissenters' initial step was the formation of Protestant Dissenting Deputies in 1732 to manage and promote the upcoming attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts.¹⁷ Though the attempts at repeal in 1736 and 1739 were both unsuccessful, historians have shown a number of positive aspects to come out of these efforts: Bradley agrees with Zaret on the importance of religious dissent in opening up the public sphere for political debate in periodicals like the *Occasional Paper* and the *Old Whig*;¹⁸ Wykes sees the claims made by Thompson and Bradley as also providing evidence for the 1730s debates pushing English Presbyterianism toward doctrinal changes on the centrality of private judgment that would ultimately lead to the development of rational dissent and eventually Unitarianism;¹⁹ and the

¹⁷ For an excellent overview of Dissent's influence on electoral politics in the eighteenth century, see James E. Bradley, "Nonconformity and the Electorate in Eighteenth-Century England" *Parliamentary History* 6.2 (1987): 236-260. For more in-depth work on the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, see: N. C. Hunt, *Two Early Political Associations: Quakers and the Dissenting Deputies in the Age of Sir Robert Walpole* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); and Bernard Lord Manning, *Protestant Dissenting Deputies*, ed. Ormerod Greenwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952). For an exploration specifically of the 1730s attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, see: James Bradley, "The Public, Parliament and the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, 1732-1740," *Parliament and Dissent*, eds. Stephen Taylor and David L. Wykes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 71-90; and Andrew Thompson, "Contesting the Test Act: Dissent, Parliament and the Public in the 1730s," *Parliament and Dissent*, eds. Stephen Taylor and David L. Wykes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 58-70.

¹⁸ David Zaret, "Religion, Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 212-235.

¹⁹ James E. Bradley, "The Public, Parliament and the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, 1732-1740," *Parliament and Dissent*, eds. Stephen Taylor and David L. Wykes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 71-90; Andrew Thompson, "Contesting the Test Act: Dissent, Parliament and the Public in the 1730s," *Parliament and Dissent*, eds. Stephen Taylor and David L. Wykes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 58-70.

1730s debates began the Dissenting argumentative position of attempting to separate civil laws from church laws that, though it would take a century, would eventually lead to the end of the Test and Corporation Acts.²⁰

Forty years after their first attempt, Dissenters again petitioned Parliament to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. They were once again unsuccessful, though they came much closer to achieving their goals in the 1770s than in the 1730s. This was both a blessing and a curse. In 1772 and 1773, the Dissenters' cause passed in the House of Commons, but both attempts were shot down in the House of Lords.²¹ Seemingly moving closer to victory may have encouraged some Dissenters, but Ditchfield points out that the debates in the 1770s moved public opinion more and more toward the belief that Dissent was increasingly heterodox. The idea that Dissent as a whole was moving farther and farther into Socinianism was particularly damning at the time and this accusation of increasing heterodoxy would continue to haunt later reform attempts. On the other hand, the failures of the early 1770s likely set the foundation for the slight, but important, step forward in the late 1770s.

In 1779, the Dissenters won their first modest victory since the repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts in 1719. The Dissenter's Relief Bill of 1779 did not achieve anywhere near all of the Dissenters' goals, but it was nonetheless an important step forward for Dissenters. The most unqualified and immediately felt victory in the 1779 act was that it granted an exemption to schoolmasters. But in the long run, as Ditchfield points out, the Dissenter's

²⁰ Bradley, "Public, Parliament and the Protestant Dissenting Deputies," 88; Wykes, "Introduction," 17.

²¹ For more detailed analysis of the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in the 1770s, see: G. M. Ditchfield, "The Subscription Issue in British Parliamentary Politics 1772-1779," *Parliamentary History* 7 (1988): 45-80; G. M. Ditchfield, "'How Narrow will the Limits of Toleration Appear?' Dissenting Petitions to Parliament, 1772-1773," *Parliament and Dissent* eds. Stephen Taylor and David L. Wykes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 91-106.

Relief Bill of 1779 “helped to entrench legal toleration in such a way that its vulnerability to subsequent attempts to bring about its abridgment... was reduced.”²² This victory was one reason that the Dissenters believed that the civil disabilities imposed on them by the Test and Corporation Acts would soon be overturned.

Dissenters had other reasons to be hopeful for repeal as well, all of which helped to launch their third wave of major attempts to repeal in the late 1780s. To begin with, Dissenters had supported William Pitt in the 1784 general elections and had expected Pitt’s support for repeal in return.²³ Equally important was the feeling that the world was finally on their side. Davis observes:

Another cause for optimism was the belief that throughout Europe the tide was running in favour of a broader definition of religious toleration. The expanded civil rights of Protestants in France were referred to, as were the steps taken by Emperor Joseph II to remove civil disabilities imposed on individuals for their religious opinions. As far as the advocates of repeal were concerned, the theory that had supported the test laws had lost whatever validity it might have had, especially in light of the Dissenters’ record of loyalty to the state in the eighteenth century.²⁴

²² Ditchfield, “Subscription Issue,” 65.

²³ Davis, *Committees for Repeal*, ix. The Dissenters’ support of Pitt in 1784 also came back to haunt them by shifting Edmund Burke’s stance on Dissenters from support to distrust. As Seed writes, Dissenters had been early supporters of the Fox-North coalition, but that support quickly turned to disdain and Dissenters deserted the Foxite Whigs in favor of Pitt. This earned Dissenters the ire of Burke who found his opportunity for revenge in the 1790 debate for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (Seed, *Dissenting Histories* 162-6).

²⁴ Davis, *Committees for Repeal*, ix.

However, despite these reasons for optimism, and the support of three important members of the House of Commons—Henry Beaufoy, William Smith, and Sir Henry Hoghton—repeal was defeated on March 28, 1787, by a vote of 176 to 98.²⁵

In 1789 and 1790, the Dissenters made two final attempts to repeal. Where the Dissenters had sought a full repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1787, they now sought a partial repeal in 1789 with the hope of winning greater support in Parliament. Specifically, they looked to Parliament to conduct an inquiry into the working of the sacramental test laws.²⁶ This repeal was defeated in the Commons on May 8, 1789, in a closer vote of 122 to 102. Given this smaller margin of loss, the Dissenting committee decided to attempt one more time to motion for repeal, which would produce the most heated debate on the issue in the Acts' entire existence.

As Dissenters moved for repeal in 1790, they returned to their former goal of full repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Both sides stepped up the vehemence of their arguments. As Seed points out, "More publications for and against the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts poured from the press at this time than in all three previous years of debate together. Polite debate about the limits of civil and religious liberty was increasingly replaced by passionate

²⁵ For more detailed historical accounts of the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787-90, see: Thomas W. Davis, *Committees for Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: Minutes 1786-90 and 1827-8* (London: London Record Society, 1978), 1-61; G. M. Ditchfield, "The Parliamentary Struggle over the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-1790," *English Historical Review* 89 (1974): 551-77; G. M. Ditchfield, "Debates on the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-90: The Evidence of the Division Lists," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 50 (1977): 69-81; G. M. Ditchfield, "The Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire for Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-1790," *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, CXXVI (1977 for 1976); Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English democratic movement in the age of the French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1979); and Ursula Henriques, "Chapter 3," *Religious Toleration in England, 1787-1833* (London: Routledge, 1961).

²⁶ Seed, *Dissenting Histories*, 144.

tirades, especially from the side of the church.”²⁷ On Tuesday, March 2, 1790, the motion for repeal suffered a resounding defeat of 294 to 105 votes. This rout quieted attempts at repeal for decades.

The history of the Test and Corporation Acts is, in many ways, the history of English Dissent as a unified political force. Barbauld called this force “a party”; two centuries later Bradley identifies Dissenters as a “distinct political bloc” whose “cohesiveness was based on mutual interest.”²⁸ This mutual interest was, of course, the removal of the Test and Corporation Acts. As Wykes points out so succinctly, “Protestant religious dissent was the consequence of a long-term desire for a more godly religion, *but modern dissent in England is essentially the unintentional creation of parliamentary legislation and dates from the Restoration settlement and the 1662 Act of Uniformity.*”²⁹ A pre-condition for political Dissent in the eighteenth-century was a seventeenth-century Restoration settlement that re-solidified a state-run church and imposed laws that created penalties and civil disabilities for not conforming to the Church of England. As such, the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in the late 1780s were attempts at relegating the meaning of the term “Dissenter” to a discriminatory past. After the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 with the Sacramental Test Act and then the 1835 Municipal Reform Act, the very term “Dissenter” changed meaning. There were still nonconformists in the sense of people who would not conform to the Church of England, but Dissent transformed into a tradition in England’s past. There were no longer “Dissenters” once the legal category that defined an individual as a Dissenter no longer existed. Only tradition

²⁷ Ibid., 144.

²⁸ Bradley, “Nonconformity and the Electorate,” 237.

²⁹ Wykes, “Introduction,” 1. Emphasis mine

remained—a tradition that could be traced back over a century and a half to the English Revolution.

Framing a Tradition: A Rhetorical Approach

John Seed writes, “A spectre was haunting the corridors of dominant institutions in eighteenth-century England: the spectre of the ‘Great Rebellion’.”³⁰ Seed’s choice of words here is evocative. A specter brings to mind a memory come alive, one that haunts by acting subtly, usually just out of sight. Yet, in its effect on dominant institutions, the specter of the Great Rebellion wielded very real, very public influence. This suggestive analogy does an excellent job of conjuring the type of relationship we can see between the memory of the English Civil Wars, the possibility of eighteenth-century inheritors, and its effect in Parliament. The primary form the specter took for Dissenters was via the issue of seventeenth century revolutionary tradition.

What nearly all considerations of a tradition have in common is that the scholar positions themselves as the appropriate decider of whether or not what we see in the late eighteenth-century “counts” as a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition. The purpose of this chapter is not to understand the use and functions of categories *better* than those who were involved or

³⁰ Seed, *Dissenting Histories*, 180. The Great Rebellion is one amongst a family of titles for what happened in England in the 1640s. The naming difficulty here is best summed up by Ian Gentles who writes, “there is no stable, agreed title for the events... They have been variously labeled the Great Rebellion, the Puritan Revolution, the English Civil War, The English Revolution, and most recently, the Wars of the Three Kingdoms” (*The English Revolution and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms* 3).

Evoking Marx’s opening to *The Communist Manifesto*, Seed highlights how many Tories in the late eighteenth century felt about the Great Rebellion: a specter, in the negative sense, that needed to be exorcised because it still wielded power in the form of Dissent. However, I would rather invoke Derrida’s use of the specter in *Specters of Marx*. Though many saw the death of communism with the fall of the Berlin Wall, Derrida sought to emphasize Marx’s continuing relevance. For Derrida, the specter of Marx was a positive philosophical force; for Dissenters, the specter was a driving force toward reform.

implicated, but to understand them in the ways that they were demonstrably used by those involved. In this case, that means those writers producing pamphlets on the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. Based on this premise, this chapter argues that, in certain areas of eighteenth-century life, the existence of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition could not be avoided. The argument, then, was over defining that tradition, not its existence. One of the areas of contested tradition was the education of future Dissenters within Dissenting academies, as the previous chapter revealed. Another was during the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 1790.

To get around the blind spots of a New Historical approach—as discussed in the Introduction—and the shortcomings of how tradition has been analyzed in Romantic studies, I want to use two interrelated methods of examining language that are used in modern rhetorical analysis, but employ them as tools for considering historical situations: membership categorization and framing analysis.³¹ Membership categorization is a form of analysis that focuses on the classifications used to describe persons and/or groups. This form of analysis is useful because membership categories are inference rich: “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society is stored in terms of these categories.”³² Thinking in terms of categorizations and the relationships between categorizations helps to highlight and identify key argumentative positions in these debates that tend to exist less as strictly defined

³¹ My approach to membership categorization and framing analysis poaches heavily from the intersection of rhetoric and sociology that is critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis. I do not consider the work that I am doing in this chapter to actually be Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) or framing analysis, as I am not an ethnomethodologist or a sociolinguist. However, my work here is absolutely informed by key works from those fields. Specifically, I am poaching concepts from the works of Harvey Sacks and Hester & Eglin on MCA and the works of Erving Goffman and Jim A. Kuypers on frame analysis.

³² Harvey Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation*, ed. Gail Gefferson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 40.

positions and more as loosely related groups of positions that shift throughout the debate. Or, in other words, categorizations like Dissenter or Nonconformist were often less about firm doctrinal agreements or disparities, but were considered in terms more along the lines of Wittgensteinian family resemblances.

Seen in this light, religion was not only an internalized set of spiritual beliefs, but also a potent form of categorization that invoked an array of implications toward the identities of those within any category. In examining the use of the term “Dissenter” as a categorization in the context of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, Wittgenstein’s family resemblances help illustrate how the term was *employed* in the debates: as a “complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.”³³ A “Dissenter” could politically be a liberal, a Whig, or a revolutionary. Conversely, a “Dissenter” could be a Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, Unitarian, Congregationalist, etc. A Dissenter could be a Millenarian, a man of enlightenment, or an heir to fanatical regicide. The doctrinal differences that have been so important in recent scholarship on the religions of the Romantic era are often ignored in the actual debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in favor of a focus on what are seen as the most important differences: Anglican³⁴ versus Nonconformist, Protestant versus Catholic, Trinitarian versus non-trinitarian—us versus them. Thinking of Dissent in the context of the debates to repeal the Test and

³³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Transcombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 27

³⁴ I realize that the term “Anglican” didn’t come into common usage until the nineteenth century, but I also find it a concise term to describe a member of the Church of England.

Corporation Acts allows us to see Dissent, not as a loose collection of nonconformist sects, but as a unified party.³⁵

James Bradley's work on eighteenth-century electoral politics helps to highlight the way that Dissent can be seen as a unified group and how this religious group membership was a political categorization. On the topic of how Dissent was viewed by contemporaries, Bradley writes that there was a consensus on Dissent on three related points:

First, contemporaries agreed on the political strength of the Dissenters; throughout the [eighteenth] century they were thought to be an important force in politics. Second, the Dissenters' political influence was centred in the constituencies and expressed at election time, rather than at Westminster. Third, the politicians and the Dissenters themselves agreed that the Dissenting voters acted together, their cohesiveness was based on mutual interest, and they formed a distinct political bloc.³⁶

Bradley here outlines the civic power of a group who is defined by a shared ecclesiastical position. This tension between a minority religious group exercising a form of civic, increasingly secular, power is at the very heart of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts.

The concept of categorization, itself a useful tool, is most potent when coupled with an analysis of framing. As defined by Kuypers, framing "is the process whereby communicators act—consciously or not—to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, with some facts made more noticeable than

³⁵ I want to emphasize the importance of context for this type of analysis. The use of the category Dissenter, like the idea of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition, is always locally contextual. There are many instances where considering Dissent as a unified political party would make little sense. The debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts are a very specific, though not wholly unique, context where Dissent can indeed be claimed to be a political party.

³⁶ Bradley, "Nonconformity and the Electorate," 237.

others.”³⁷ Framing analysis then focuses on the construction and effects of these frames. Frame analysis can be particularly valuable for examining frames attached to a social movements, which the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts definitely were. Social movements “frame, or assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists.”³⁸ An analysis of the categorizations of Nonconformists in the debates provides a clear example of how powerful the framing of membership categories can be.

The label of Nonconformist referred to anyone who did not conform to the Church of England, and therefore included Dissenters. However, it is important to note that this label also includes Catholics and potentially Muslims. This is why Dissenters preferred the term Dissenter; a Dissenter was Protestant. This difference is very important during the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. The State, and therefore the Established Church, did not want to seem opposed to fellow Protestants. In fact, the State positioned itself as a protector of Protestantism against the ever-present fear of Catholicism. For the State to categorize Dissenters as Nonconformists was a way of framing the debate so as to lump Dissenters with Catholics as threats. Against this tactic, the Dissenters attempted to re-frame the debate to show themselves as fellow Protestants standing with the State/Church against the threat of Catholicism. Under this framing through re-categorization, Dissenters were able to argue for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts *as they affected Dissenters*, keeping the civil disabilities in place for the common enemy, papists. In other words, the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts

³⁷ Jim A. Kuypers, *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, eds. Paul D’Angelo and Jim A. Kuypers (New York: Routledge, 2010), 300.

³⁸ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 198.

were attempts to resituate the categorization Dissenter in relationship to the majority of dominant English institutions.

There is little work on the Test and Corporation Acts debates that attempts to interpret and analyze the debates through any form of theoretical or methodological framework other than traditional methods of historiography.³⁹ The following analysis will use a combination of rhetorical, sociological, and historical approaches to produce a cultural history of the debates surrounding the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 1790. This approach will highlight the ways that the debates center around arguments over the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups and how the framing and defining of these groups are key points of dispute.

The Debates to Repeal the Test and Corporation Acts: Framing Dissent

On Friday, December 29th, 1786, fifteen merchants, bankers, doctors, attorneys, and members of Parliament met at Dr. Williams's Library in Red Cross Street. This group—comprised largely of men who had been educated within Dissent—formed the “committee appointed to conduct the application to Parliament for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.” Edward Jeffries chaired this meeting, as he did for nearly all of the meetings of the committee from 1786-90. Like most of the committee, Jeffries was an affluent Londoner. His various titles included London factor, treasurer of St. Thomas's hospital, a trustee of Dr.

³⁹ For example: James E. Bradley on voting data, particularly the “Evans List” (1715-29) and the “Thompson list” (1772-3): “Nonconformity and the Electorate in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Parliamentary History* 6.2 (1987): 236-260. See also G. M. Ditchfield on determining the size of what could be seen as a Dissenting “lobby” in Parliament: “The Parliamentary Struggle over the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: 1787-1790,” *English Historical Review* 89 (1974): 551-597.

Williams's Library, a member of the Presbyterian Board representing St. Thomas's Chapel in Southwark, and chairman of the Dissenting Deputies from 1785 to 1801.⁴⁰ Also present at this meeting were James Bogle French, a Dissenting Deputy and treasurer of the Deputies from 1791 to 1793; Thomas Boddington, a West India merchant who became treasurer after French; Thomas Rogers, a banker and former M.P.; Mr. Bond Hopkins, M.P. for Ilchester; and Mr. Lowdell, a leading General Baptist layman and physician at St. Saviour, Southwark.⁴¹

The size of the committee swelled over the next few meetings as more influential individuals were invited. Many of them were Dissenters, but by no means all. A week after the initial meeting, on January 5th, 1787, eleven more M.P.s joined the committee, but only five of these eleven were Dissenters.⁴² Perhaps the most important M.P. to join at this meeting was Henry Beaufoy, the M.P. who would speak for the committee before parliament in both 1787 and 1789 on the topic of repealing the Test and Corporation Acts.

There are two things that stand out when one looks at the Committee's membership. First, the committee was not comprised of those professions commonly associated with late eighteenth century radicalism, professions like artisans and mechanics. Instead, the committee consisted almost entirely of what we might now call upper middle-class professions like lawyer, doctor, merchant, etc. Second, the committee was definitely not comprised of those we would now label as the intellectual elite, or what Roy Porter has called "a hothead minority."⁴³ From the very beginning, this committee was a moderate, bourgeois undertaking for reform on the topic of

⁴⁰ Davis, *Committees for Repeal*, x.

⁴¹ For more on the attendance for this first meeting, see Davis, Davis, *Committees for Repeal*, x, 1.

⁴² The Dissenters were Hoghton, Lee, Martin, Milnes, and William Smith. Also, the meetings had by now moved from Dr. Williams's Library to King's Head Tavern in the Poultry.

⁴³ Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century, revised edition* (London: Penguin, 1990), 181.

religious toleration. And they worked hard to keep it this way. The minutes from the committee meeting on February 27, 1787, point to a strong concern with how their cause was being portrayed either in gossip or in the media:

This committee having been informed of a report that they have other objects in view than those which are described in their printed *Case* in which they only ask for a restitution of their civil rights, and that they are secretly preparing for an attack on the privileges and revenues of the established church.

Resolved unanimously that this committee neither have nor ever had any such design and that the report is entirely without foundation.

Resolved that 1,000 of the foregoing resolution be printed and signed by the chairman and sent to members of both houses of parliament.⁴⁴

This quick and decisive response is an example of how sensitive the committee was to outside attempts to re-frame their group's intentions and the committee's desire to protect its own identity as a group of respectable businessmen with moderate goals as opposed to a more radical, militant version of Dissent that was linked by some to the Wilkes agitation and the Gordon Riots.

Yet the committee's strident anti-radicalism may come as a surprise to many because the most prolific author in the debates is Dissenting radical Joseph Priestley, while the most well known publications of the debates on the Test and Corporation Acts are rarely even recognized as participants: the Revolution Controversy's inaugural publications Richard Price's *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789) and Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). It may come as even more of a surprise to learn that neither Joseph Priestley nor Richard Price was ever invited to a committee meeting. In fact, they are only mentioned briefly as

⁴⁴ Davis, *Committees for Repeal*, 7.

individuals who the committee intended to send propaganda material to for distribution.⁴⁵ That so many think of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts primarily in terms of the very end of the debate, when the most radical voices dominate, is not a reflection on the debates on a whole, but instead points to one of the reasons that the attempts at repeal failed, particularly in the crushing 1790 defeat.

The most commonly cited cause for the overwhelming defeat of the attempt at repeal in 1790 is the conservative response to the revolution in France, and this is indeed a key reason. However, in this portion of this chapter, I will argue that the conservative response to the events in France was so effective in the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Laws because of a failure by the Dissenting committee to control the framing of the public debates, allowing both the more radical elements of their own group and the opponents of repeal to frame the Dissenters and their movement as inheritors of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition, a frame that was linked by many to religious enthusiasm, chaos, and the overthrow of the government, if not regicide itself.

It is with this claim in mind that I will examine the pamphlets published debating the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 1790.⁴⁶ Specifically, I will analyze six pamphlets that comprise two short but heavily dialogic series of pamphlets: one series from the beginning of the debates in 1787 and a second series from the very end of the debates in 1790. The publication to introduce the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts was *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with Reference to the Test and Corporation Acts*. Produced by

⁴⁵ For example, Priestley's one mention consists of the committee's intention to send him fifty copies of *The Case*: Davis, *Committees for Repeal*, 6.

⁴⁶ There are over 100 pamphlets published as part of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 1790. Obviously, I will not examine all of these pamphlets individually in this chapter, but will be highlighting pamphlets that particularly pertain to my topic.

Jeffries's committee and then published in early 1787, *The Case* was the opening volley by Dissenters and attempted to build the argumentative groundwork for framing the debate as a debate about liberty, and not about religion. This proved to be a difficult case to make. The influence and importance of *The Case* also proved to be immense.

Setting the Terms: The Case of the Protestant Dissenters (1787)

The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with Reference to the Test and Corporation Acts produced by Jeffries's committee was the single most important document when considering the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts between 1787 and 1790 because it laid the groundwork upon which all debate would follow. Over this period *The Case* would propel Dissenters, anger Catholics, alarm Anglicans, and eventually produce responses that kicked off the Revolution Controversy. Reprinted numerous times over this four-year period, *The Case* opens by defining the categorization binary most important to the Dissenters argument: Protestants versus Catholics.

The opening sentence of *The Case* begins by addressing the Test Act of 1673, though unless one was familiar with the Test Act's original full title, it might not have been clear which Act was under discussion. According to *The Case*, the "Act for preventing dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants" (25 Car. II, c. 2) was passed during a very dire time in the history of England: "Papists were indulged in their religion, and many of them were employed in the great offices of state. The king himself was suspected of popery; and the Duke of York, his presumptive heir, had openly declared himself of that religion."⁴⁷ The circumstances were so dire that "the minds of all zealous protestants were in the utmost fear and consternation; and,

⁴⁷ *The Case of the Protestant dissenters, with Reference to the Test and Corporation Acts* (n.p.: n.p., 1787), 1.

accordingly, the design of the act was, as the preamble declares, to quiet the minds of his Majesty's good subjects, by preventing dangers, which might happen from popish recusants."⁴⁸ *The Case* works very hard to ensure its reader that the Test Act was aimed specifically at saving England from those dastardly Papists, or as *The Case* says, the Test Act was "made wholly against papists, and not to prevent any danger which could happen to the nation or church from the dissenters."⁴⁹ This brief history of the Test Act paints a very different picture of early-Restoration England than we are accustomed to. There is no mention of the recent return of monarchy to England. No mention of the Civil War or Interregnum. No mention of regicide. No, according to *The Case*, England was under attack by papists.

Moving on from this supposedly damning fact concerning the purpose of the Test Act, *The Case* continues to build its argument for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts by positioning Dissenters with the Church of England and against the papists. One of the ways that *The Case* does this is by continually mixing and matching certain categorizations in opposition to the consistently defined papists and popish recusants. Notice the shifting group titles used to identify the Dissenters in the presentation of the group's loyalty to the safety of the Nation and Church:

The Protestant Dissenters apprehend, therefore, that this Act; as the title sets forth, was made wholly against Papists, and not to prevent any danger which could happen to the Nation or Church from the Dissenters. Indeed, so far were the Protestant Nonconformists from being aimed at in this Act, that, in their zeal to rescue the nation from the dangers which were at that time apprehended from Popish Recusants, they contributed to the passing of the Bill; willingly subjecting

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1.

themselves to the disabilities created by it rather than obstruct what was deemed so necessary to the common welfare.⁵⁰

The variety of categorizations are used virtually interchangeably: Protestant Dissenters, Dissenters, Protestant Nonconformists, and later in the paragraph simply Nonconformists and Protestants. These categorizations share an interest in preventing “any danger which could happen to the Nation or Church” and *The Case* argues that none of these groups were targeted by the Test Act.⁵¹ The effect of these shifting categorizations is to create a shared group definition as Protestant. By ignoring the seventeenth-century rupture in and from the Church of England and framing the Test Act as providing protection for the Protestant Church/Nation of England against papists, *The Case* seeks to make an argument for giving Dissenters equal civil rights as members of the Church of England.

The Case makes a powerful argument for repeal of the Test Act as it concerns Dissenters, and Dissenters alone, but the Corporation Act of 1661 is a trickier matter that *The Case* cannot ignore. As the Corporation Act was passed right after Restoration, it would seem more difficult to ignore the fact that the new Parliament saw Nonconformists as a threat to the crown and the nation. *The Case* even admits that the Corporation Act was passed “in a period of great heat and violence.”⁵² And, as such, its authors are willing to admit that the act “was probably designed against some of the protestant dissenters.”⁵³ However, this is quickly qualified: “For’, as a noble lord expresses himself, ‘in those times, when a spirit of intolerance prevailed, and severe measures were pursued, the dissenters were reputed and treated as persons ill-affected and

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1.

⁵² Ibid., 2.

⁵³ Ibid., 2.

dangerous to the government.”⁵⁴ To a historically informed reading audience, as the audience for repeal pamphlets certainly were, it is of little surprise that a new government might consider that the groups who had the previous king beheaded were “ill-affected and dangerous to the government.” It’s also worth noting that the above quote from a “noble lord” was not contemporary to the passage of the Corporation Act, as the context could lead one to believe, but was actually from a 1767 speech by Lord Mansfield. With such a weak argument concerning the Corporation Act, it is no wonder that *The Case* quickly moves on to detailing nine reasons supporting repeal.

The final third of *The Case* consists of nine reasons why the Test and Corporation Acts should be repealed. The first of which is heavily indebted to Priestley’s argument in *An Essay on the First Principles of Government* (1768) and is also the only point that addresses the problematic conception of toleration: “Every man, as it is now universally acknowledged, has an undoubted right to judge for himself in matters of religion; nor ought his exercise of this right to be branded with a mark of infamy.”⁵⁵ This conception of toleration was far from as universally acknowledged as Priestley or *The Case* might have one believe, as can be seen from the following eight points. Knowing that the case for toleration or institutional secularism was a weak argument, only this one sentence makes that argument. The vast majority of *The Case* is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 2. It is worth noting that the argument for repeal of the Test and Corporation via an appeal to civil rights did not originate with Priestley, though in the late eighteenth century Priestley was the most common touchstone on the subject. Andrew Thompson comments on the appeals to civil rights by Dissenters in the 1730s attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts: “While prepared to accept that toleration of worship was acceptable, anglicans argued that this was toleration enough. Civil rights, as such, did not enter the picture. Therein lay the difference of opinion. It was not so much a question of whether dissent should be tolerated, as how much and in what ways. For all the emphasis on protestant unity, it remained difficult to remind anglicans that true religion existed outside their parish churches” (“Contesting the Test Act” 70). From the point of view of the committee, the 1787-1790 campaigns were largely forgoing appeals to civil rights in favor of a focus on Protestant unity.

devoted to the real issue: the relationship between Dissenters and the established Church. For example, the two points that receive the most space are also the most contentious points: point four on how occasional conformity already means that the Test Act does not provide any “real or effectual security to the Church of England,” and point six which deals with how repeal “would no way affect the established Church.”⁵⁶ While there is a move in *The Case* toward secular civil rights, the bulk of the argument is devoted to minimizing the differences between Dissenters and the Church of England as both Protestants against a common enemy to the safety of the established Church and Protestantism as a whole—papists. In doing so, the majority of *The Case* works quite hard to ignore or obscure the circumstances under which the Test and Corporation Acts were established. One could perhaps even go so far as to say that the authors of *The Case* were desperate to avoid any mention of the Civil Wars and their consequences. Instead, the committee and *The Case* were led by the assumptions of the Dissenting disposition, which most of the committee would have gained in their education at Dissenting academies.⁵⁷ These assumptions led *The Case* to address what the committee felt were the most important argumentative points for repeal within the contemporary moment; the original reasons for the implementation of the Test and Corporations Acts were seen to have little to no effect on the argument for repeal over a century later. Whether this was a misplaced faith in their audience or a severe misunderstanding of what we might now call public relations, this miscalculation would eventually be used by those opposed to repeal.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁷ For example: Henry Beaufoy attended Hoxton and then Warrington, Thomas Rogers attended Newington Green under Dr. Price, Sir Henry Hoghton attended Northampton, William Smith attended Daventry, and James Martin either attended Hoxton or Homerton (sources differ, but all point to one of these two Dissenting academies). For those who didn’t attend a Dissenting academy, most were still educated within Dissent—i.e., Benjamin Bond Hopkins, Thomas Boddington, and John Lee—meaning that the educational works of Philip Doddridge likely played a major role in their education.

Contesting The Case: Berington and Priestley

One of the key responses to *The Case* came from one of the most prominent British Catholic writers of the time, *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters* (1787) by the Rev. Joseph Berington. In response to the committee's *Case*, Berington writes that he "can say with truth that I was pleased when I heard of your design of petitioning parliament for a further redress of grievances."⁵⁸ Berington approved of having the Test and Corporation Acts repealed, as they applied to Catholics as well. But when reading *The Case*, Berington "soon received a severe shock."⁵⁹ In fact, there were "a few clauses so illiberal, and so unfounded, that my [Berington's] mind recoiled in horror."⁶⁰ Berington claims that the Dissenters' *Case* made to Parliament throws "out insinuations, at once false and malevolent, when the object of them merited no such treatment from you [Dissenters]" concerning Catholics.⁶¹ What caused this horror and shock? Berington was exceedingly surprised that, according to *The Case*, the Civil Wars had apparently never happened and all the Test and Corporation Acts were passed to protect England from Papists. Berington writes,

That, regarding corporations, you observe, passed in a period of great heat and violence, the year after restoration, and *probably*, you say, was designed against *some* of the protestant dissenters. How gently is this expressed! The fact, as our historians you well know, relate it,⁶² was – The king, with his ministers, and the

⁵⁸ Joseph Berington, *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters, Who Have Lately Petitioned for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. By the Rev. Joseph Berington* (Birmingham: printed by M. Swinney, 1787), 2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶² Berington is primarily referring to Hume, amongst others, here when he writes of "our historians."

majority in both houses, hated the Presbyterians, whom they considered as the authors of the late rebellion.⁶³

The outrageousness of this omission in *The Case* is brought to the forefront repeatedly throughout his pamphlet:

To be so very guarded, therefore, in your expressions, was too punctilious. Probably, you say, the act was designed against some of your ancestors. Indeed, Gentlemen, it was obviously designed against the whole family, though every branch might not have equally deserved it. Why should truth be with-held?⁶⁴

The responses from members of the established church mirrored this response from the Catholic Berington on this point. The Test and Corporation Acts were passed to save England from a repeat of the English Civil Wars, and nearly 150 years later, this same danger was felt as the primary reason *not* to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. By not attempting to address the obvious counter-argument presented by the Civil Wars, the Dissenters were left to deal with this particularly damning frame hanging over the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts for the entirety of the 1787 to 1790 campaign.

Despite this attack on the history presented in *The Case*, Berington attempts to walk a very careful line in *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters*. On the one hand, he supports the move toward religious toleration in England and would have been more than happy to join with Dissenters in support of a repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. On the other hand, he had to dispute the central framing of the Dissenters case for repeal since they choose to frame the debate primarily as simple binary categorization of us versus them, in this instance meaning Protestants versus Catholics. In some ways, Berington appropriates part of the Dissenters

⁶³ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.

strategy by focusing on the safety of the established Church. However, his re-framing shifts the obvious danger to the church away from the quiet Catholics to the hated “Presbyterians” and their “whole family.” In other words, Dissenters, the heirs of the authors of the Civil War, were perhaps the largest danger to the established Church. Of course, Berington must hedge these accusations a bit since it would benefit Catholics to join with the Dissenters in support of repeal, but he must also re-frame the debate in such a way as to remove the focus of Catholics as “other,” which he does by subtly aligning Catholics as on the same side of the binary with Anglicans against the heirs of seventeenth-century rebellion, the Dissenters.

Up to this point, the committee had done a good job of publishing answers to critiques to their *Case*, thereby producing a consistent framing of the debate as moderate, bourgeois reform. The main difficulty with maintaining this consistent framing was that the committee could not control what non-committee members wrote or published. Unfortunately for the committee, the more prominent names of Dissent who had the ability to publish without help from the committee were also among the most radical Dissenters. The committee loses control of their framing when Joseph Priestley enters the conversation. As one of the most well known Dissenters, and considered by many to be an intellectual leader of Dissent, the committee could not disown Priestley. On the other hand, he consistently undermined their efforts to keep their campaign a moderate bourgeois undertaking.

The first instance of this occurred with the printing of the second edition of Berington’s *Address*, which also contained a letter from Joseph Priestley to Berington. In this letter, Priestley admits that he read Berington’s *Address* with “much satisfaction” and that he too shared many of

Berington's complaints against *The Case*.⁶⁵ This begins Priestley's re-framing of the primary binary in such a way that would eventually come to be at the center of the conservative response to repeal. Priestley first praises contemporary Catholic states for having adopted the "good sense" of toleration and then condemns England: "I am sorry that Protestant states (and especially this country, whose greatest boast has been its tolerant spirit) should be so backward to follow the example you [Catholics] are setting them."⁶⁶ England, and therefore the church and state, are framed as the enemies of toleration while the Catholics are framed as tolerant friends. However, the most problematic categorization that Priestley puts forward has long-reaching implications for those concerned with the safety of the established Church: "This is a cause in which the Catholic, the Presbyterian, the Independent, the Baptist, and the Quaker, are equally concerned; and by the joint support of which they would certainly have done themselves credit."⁶⁷ Here, Priestley has called for coming together of the Catholics with the four primary branches of Old Dissent, those denominations of Dissent that trace their origins back to the seventeenth century.⁶⁸ In other words, Priestley has called for a coalition of all the still existing Christian denominations that had been considered at some point an enemy of the established

⁶⁵ Joseph Berington, *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters, Who Have Lately Petitioned for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. By the Rev. Joseph Berington. Second edition. Containing a Letter from Dr. Priestley to the Author* (Birmingham: printed by M. Swinney, 1787), 57.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 58.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁸ Old Dissent, with its seventeenth-century origins, is not to be confused with what is often now called New Dissent. New Dissent was an Evangelical movement that first existed *within* the Church of England as a reform movement. This means that at the time of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts groups that would later gain the title of New Dissent, like Methodists, were still part of the Church of England were not subject to the civil disabilities created by the Test and Corporation Acts. Methodism, for example, did not split from the Church of England until after John Wesley's death in 1791.

Church over the last two centuries.⁶⁹ It was exactly these types of radical re-framings that led to rumors or outright claims that Dissenters were “secretly preparing for an attack on the privileges and revenues of the established church,” which the committee had been working against from the very beginning of their campaign (the committee, Davis 7).⁷⁰

Not much changed on the status of the debates over the next couple years. Priestley continued to publish, becoming the single most active author in the media debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. Numerous editions of *Dr. Priestley's letter to the Rt. Hon. William Pitt* were published in 1787, which had an even more radical focus to that of his response to Berington. For example, though *The Case* and the committee went out of their way to argue that they meant no danger to the established Church, Priestley writes in his letter to Pitt:

You alluded to some Dissenters as of a more dangerous complexion than others, in consequence of their being enemies to all ecclesiastical establishments; and, in order, I suppose, to pay a compliment to the rest, you said it was against *these* only that it was necessary to be upon your guard. I avow myself to be of this class of Dissenters, and I glory in it.⁷¹

Priestley also reprinted his much earlier *A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters* in 1788 and then published *The Conduct to be Observed by Dissenters in Order to Procure the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* in 1789 based on a popular sermon he gave, also printed multiple times. Priestley really raised eyebrows with this pamphlet because of his choice of date on which

⁶⁹ Other seventeenth-century groups like the Levellers no longer existed.

⁷⁰ Davis, *Committees for Repeal*, 7.

⁷¹ *A letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt, first Lord of the Treasury, and Chancellor of the Exchequer; on the subjects of toleration and Church establishments; occasioned by his speech against the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, on Wednesday the 28th of March, 1787. By J. Priestley, L.L.D. F.R.S. Ac.Imp.Petrop.R. Paris. Holm. Taurin. Auriel. Med. Paris. Harlem. Cantab. Americ. Et. Philad. Sosius*, First edition (London: printed for J. Johnson, 1787), 13.

to give the original sermon. Priestley chose to give a sermon on repealing the Test and Corporation Acts on November 5, 1789, the anniversary of the Gun Powder Plot, thereby linking repeal, Dissent, and attempted insurrection. Meanwhile, the committee stuck to their guns as well, by now reprinting a shortened version of *The Case* that removed the discussions about the reasons behind the instituting of the Test Act and the Corporation Act, thereby fully ignoring the Civil War and Restoration origins of these laws. The committee also continued publishing both new and old material in response to attempts to re-frame their cause, with the important exceptions being that the committee never explicitly refuted Priestley directly or distanced themselves from their seventeenth-century Puritan forefathers.

A surprising characteristic of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporations Acts is that there is a consistent, almost naïve, assumption by the Dissenters that a good, convincing argument made in favor of repeal amongst free and open public debate will eventually lead to their desired outcome. The committee's *Case* clearly falls into this category, but so do most of the publications arguing the Dissenters' side ranging the ideological Dissenting spectrum. From the moderate *Case* to nearly all of Priestley's more radical contributions, all of the Dissenters' publications assume that a well-made argument will persuade the public and Parliament that it is indeed time to finally repeal, usually ignoring widespread anti-Dissenting prejudice and political reality. This naiveté is surprising because, in many ways, the campaign for repeal is remarkably sophisticated and modern. The dedicated committee leadership, the urban/rural network of pamphlet distribution, and the way the committee lobbied specific members of Parliament are now all familiar aspects of political campaigns, but were then quite novel. I believe that the problem was rooted in the assumptions of the Dissenting disposition that was shared throughout all levels of the Dissenters' campaign. One of the foundational assumptions of the Dissenting

disposition was, as I argued in the previous chapter, that considering all sides of an issue and submitting that issue to intense debate would result in the banishment of error and the truth rising to the surface. This shared assumption led these Dissenters to ignore the aspects of the issue that they did not consider to be legitimate arguments against repeal, such as the seventeenth-century counter-revolutionary origins of the Test and the Corporation Acts and the public perception of Dissenters as a threat to the established Church.

In 1789, still amongst heated media activity, Henry Beaufoy once again made a motion concerning the Test and Corporation Acts before the House of Commons. Though the motion failed, the vote was closer than in 1787 with a vote of 122 to 102. However, whether this was evidence that the committee was making headway is debatable. Though the vote was closer, the goal of the motion was less contentious than full repeal. In 1789, Beaufoy, as the mouthpiece of the committee, was merely asking for Parliament to conduct an inquiry into the working of the sacramental test acts, and the House of Commons voted down even this modest goal.

The Debate Peaks: Price and Burke in 1790

The debate over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1790 was fierce. In his catalogue of the publications on repeal, John Disney, a London minister, listed 96 titles for 1790 alone, many of which were hostile to repeal.⁷² It was also during the 1790 debates that the link between the Dissenters seeking repeal and a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition rose more fully to the surface. Priestley continued to make this connection easy. However, the most damning publication on this topic was Dr. Richard Price's *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789). It is Price's *Discourse* that extends the significance of the Test and Corporation

⁷² Davis, *Committees for Repeal*, xii.

Acts debates well past 1790. Price's *Discourse* is a key to understanding Burke's well-known response, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and thus to understanding political debate throughout the Romantic era.

Though known for being a sermon on the French Revolution and igniting the Revolution Controversy, this is only one aspect of Price's *Discourse*; it also concerns defining liberty in England and responds to current debates on the topic, specifically the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. The impetus for the sermon was, of course, a celebration of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and this indeed was a key aspect. However, Price takes pains to point out that the Glorious Revolution was not flawless:

I would farther direct you to remember, that though the Revolution was a great work, it was by no means a perfect work... In particular, you should recollect, that the toleration then obtained was imperfect. It included only those who could declare their faith in the doctrinal articles of the church of England.⁷³

This is an obvious allusion to the contemporary debates on the Test and Corporation Acts, but Price was not satisfied with merely an allusion:

The TEST LAWS are also still in force; and deprive of eligibility to civil and military offices, all who cannot conform to the established worship. It is with great pleasure I find that the body of Protestant Dissenters, though defeated in two

⁷³ Richard Price, *A discourse on the love of our country, delivered on Nov. 4, 1789, at the meeting-house in the Old Jewry, to the Society for commemorating the revolution in Great Britain. With an appendix, containing the report of the Committee of the Society; an Account of the Population of France; and the Declaration of Rights by the National Assembly of France. By Richard Price, D.D. LL.D. F.R.S. and Fellow of the American Philosophical Societies at Philadelphia and Boston* (London: printed by George Stafford, 1789), 35.

late attempts to deliver their country from this disgrace to it, have determined to persevere.⁷⁴

Price could not help but compare the liberty so recently achieved in France to the lack thereof experienced by Dissenters, experience that had been brought to the forefront by three years of constant debate over the Test and Corporation Acts. Seed describes the point precisely when he writes, “For Dissenters, debates about the Test and Corporation Acts and about liberty of conscience were inevitably about the unfinished business of the seventeenth century.”⁷⁵ Seed’s between-the-lines reading leads to a vision of Price viewing his forefathers of the English Civil Wars as patriots who made the first strong push against monarchical tyranny and for religious liberty in England, a failed one. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 was a step in the right direction, but by no means did it go far enough to ensuring liberty. The events in France gave Price hope that now might be the time for the aims of the English Civil War to finally be achieved in England. By the time the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts reach 1790, the argument was no longer whether there was a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition behind the Dissenters, but what that tradition was.

Price and the supporters of repeal saw their inheritance of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition as an inheritance that highlighted religious liberty and a fight against the use of civil power to endorse, and enforce, a state religion. For example, Price writes, “They [men of worth who do not conform to a national religion] may bear a testimony against that application of civil power to support of particular modes of faith, which obstructs human improvement, and perpetuates error.”⁷⁶ For some, this may have sounded vaguely of Milton. For

⁷⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁵ Seed, *Dissenting Histories*, 145.

⁷⁶ Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*, 18.

those who didn't catch the nod, radical publisher Joseph Johnson made the allusion more obvious the following year by reprinting Milton's 1659 tract *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*. The 1790 reprint of *Civil Power* opens with a dedication to Rev. Richard Price along with a short piece of text that links Price's recent efforts to those of Milton's in *Civil Power*. In *Civil Power*, Milton argues against the civil government imposing any restrictions or punishments concerning the practice of any chosen religion: "That for belief or practice in religion according to this conscientious persuasion no man ought to be punished or molested by any outward force on earth whatsoever."⁷⁷ Price makes this same argument in *Discourse* and ties it to the contemporary debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts and the French Revolution, and, through Milton, to the mid-seventeenth-century fight for religious liberty in England. However, the most prominent response to Price's *Discourse*, Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, painted a very different picture of the Dissenters' seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition.

Many of us have a tendency to refer to Burke's *Reflections* without registering the whole title. The book was published in late 1790 as: *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event. In a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris*. The finished work, published in October, had been announced in February with the following title: *Reflections on certain proceedings of the Revolution Society, of the 4th November 1789, concerning the affairs of France*. This title describes a polemic against Price's *Discourse*. Though the work grew beyond this initial polemic, much of the original content remained. From the very beginning of *Reflections*, Burke works hard to connect Price

⁷⁷ John Milton, *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* (London: Re-Printed for J. Johnson, 1790), 3.

with a seventeenth-century tradition of revolution and enthusiasm.⁷⁸ Burke begins by setting up a frame for Price's sermon that focuses solely on the French Revolution, largely ignoring that it is only one small part of a large picture:

...a very extraordinary miscellaneous sermon, in which there are some good moral and religious sentiments, and not ill expressed, mixed up in a sort of porridge of various political opinions and reflections: but the revolution in France is the grand ingredient of the cauldron.⁷⁹

This singular framing signals a shift of focus and strategy in the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. Burke essentially ignores Price's comments on the Test and Corporation Acts and instead sets his sights solely on the French Revolution and conceptions of liberty. In doing so, he escalates the significance of these debates by framing the very safety of an English way of life to be at stake, what I am calling Burke's strategy of aggrandizement.

Burke founds his strategy of aggrandizement in a re-categorization of Dissenters as heirs of 1648, not of 1688. For example, Burke compares Price's speech to a sermon from Hugh Peter, a Puritan tried at the Restoration and executed with the regicides:

That sermon is in a strain which I believe has not been heard in this kingdom, in any of the pulpits which are tolerated or encouraged in it, since the year of 1648, when a predecessor of Dr. Price, the Reverend Hugh Peters, made the vault of the king's own chapel at St. James's ring with the honor and privilege of the Saints...⁸⁰

⁷⁸ For more on this reading of Burke's *Reflections*, see chapter 6 of John Seed's *Dissenting Histories*, a work to which this analysis is heavily indebted.

⁷⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1790), 12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

Burke continues to hammer away at this re-categorization of Dissenters through his re-framing of Price's *Discourse*:

These gentlemen of the Old Jewery, in all their reasonings on the Revolution of 1688, have a revolution which happened in England about forty years before, and the late French revolution, so much before their eyes, and in their hearts, that they are constantly confounding all three together.⁸¹

Unfortunately for the Dissenters, this was an easy argument for Burke to make since many felt as Burke did. Though the specter of the Civil Wars was always present, it had previously been dealt with rather carefully in the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. Burke brought it inescapably to the forefront. Later in *Reflections*, Burke writes that Price's speech "differs only in place and time, but agrees perfectly with the spirit and letter of the rapture of 1648."⁸² And in doing so, Burke follows in a long line of anti-Puritan writers who conflate contemporary Dissent with seventeenth-century revolutionary Puritanism and regicide.

At the beginning of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, when the Dissenters' framing was largely controlled by the many-denominational, affluent committee, the possibility of a seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition was avoided at all costs. However, as the debates escalated, there was a shift in both framing and membership categorization that can be seen most clearly when it culminates in Price versus Burke.

The key to understanding this shift is by understanding that categories exist in hierarchies. For example, English citizen is a 'higher' categorization than any religious affiliation. The highest category in the hierarchy of the debates to repeal the Test and

⁸¹ Ibid., 21.

⁸² Ibid., 98.

Corporation Acts is that of an English citizen, which for most of the debate has been a given for all other categorizations. Price, in *Discourse*, makes a powerful move up this metaphorical hierarchy when he attempts to define liberty in England. He moves the categorization, and thus the stakes of this categorization, past “fellow Protestant” all the way up to “English citizen.” Others had previously made somewhat similar moves, but usually by claiming that the security of the Established Church was good for a secure nation. But Price re-frames the argument in terms of a nation and the citizen and, in doing so, popery takes a backseat in 1790 as it is no longer the primary derogatory categorization. Instead, via the immediate concerns with the French Revolution, the primary derogatory categorization becomes an enemy of the state. Burke’s success in *Reflections* is not in making a convincing argument against liberty of conscience, but in successfully painting the Dissenters as heirs of a chaotic and regicidal seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition and potentially enemies of the state.

Once Dissenters could be framed as enemies of both the Established Church and the state, when the English way of life was at stake and the Dissenters were framed as pushing England toward its own version of the French Revolution, there was no longer any chance of repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. But this escalation created a new debate through the climax of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts over the terms of nation and liberty. The end of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts created the argumentative conditions necessary for the Revolution Controversy.

Conclusion: Romantic Secularization and Toleration

This analysis of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts underscores the continuing importance of a seventeenth century revolutionary tradition in late eighteenth century

English politics. No matter how diverse Dissenters were doctrinally or politically, they sometimes presented themselves as a unified group, and they were definitely treated as a unified party in the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. However, the significance of this analysis goes well beyond this specific claim to impact two related issues: 1) England's history of religious toleration was more significantly compromised by the Test and Corporation Acts than has been recognized, and 2) the pamphlet war surrounding the Test and Corporation Act debates between 1787 and 1790 was a key media event that set the terms for the French Revolution debate. This conclusion will explore these avenues.

As I stated earlier in this chapter, the Romantic period has increasingly been understood as the birth of the modern and the secular. Mark Canuel's essay "Romantic Fear" (2008) is an excellent example of this understanding. Canuel's primary argument is that "one of the most historically significant notions of the secular arose from a particular turn that appeared in the English discourse of toleration in the eighteenth century."⁸³ Citing thinkers like Locke, Priestley, and Bentham, Canuel claims:

...a particular kind of toleration arose as a new disposition toward belief rather than as a new belief or set of beliefs that could be counted as tolerant. This is because the traditional apparatus of the confessional state, enforced through oaths of allegiance and religious tests, was shown to be not only oppressive but also inefficient as a means of securing social order. The problem of how to tolerate different modes of belief... is central to secularization because of the inescapable connection between toleration and a tolerating governing body. Secularization in

⁸³ Mark Canuel, "Romantic Fear," *Romantic Circles Praxis Series: Secularism, Cosmopolitan and Romanticism* (Aug. 2008): n. pag. Web. 5 October 2012.

its late eighteenth century manifestation, in other words, was not a mental phenomenon but an institutional one; it was not visible in the beliefs that people held but in the way that political, educational, and military patterns of affiliation took political inclusion, rather than ideological coherence, to be their central ambition.⁸⁴

My analysis of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts highlights a significant problem with this description of secularization in the late eighteenth century. While this discourse on toleration can be found in the works of a few writers, it was not a discourse that could be found in the English political institutions that Canuel points to. In fact, the most prominent English political institution, Parliament, supported the idea that the best means of securing social order was through the “oaths of allegiance and religious tests” and legislated *against* toleration three times during the late eighteenth century. For many, the fear was not of penal sanctions, but of religious, cultural, and ideological adversaries. The Birmingham Riots of 1791 confirm the general feeling in the masses as equal to the feeling of Parliament: the state could not afford to, and should not, fully tolerate religious difference.

While the argument could be made that the attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts point to only three instances where this theory of secular toleration does not hold up, the publication of over 160 pamphlets over four years strongly points to the more widespread importance of this topic with a need to communicate the issue across distance and varying interest groups. But, also, if one were to look for instances of institutional tolerance in the late eighteenth century, wouldn't the obvious—and most important—place to look be institutional debates over tolerance? The Dissenters attempted to make the same type of argument for

⁸⁴ Ibid., n.p.

toleration that Canuel points to, so it's no surprise that he finds Priestley at the center of that school of thought, but this argument failed precisely because of the "visible beliefs that people held" concerning religion and fear, both in "the crowd" and in Parliament. Canuel's essay is an excellent examination of the idea of toleration and the influential thinkers behind the development of the concept. However, the analysis of the debates in this chapter provide a contextual element necessary for more fully understanding toleration in late eighteenth century England: an analysis of this pamphlet war as a significant media event.

Every published pamphlet is a mediation and, as Siskin and Warner state, "mediations can be more easily pinned down to specific times and places than 'ideas,' we can track more of them accurately—and thus more readily identify patterns in those interactions."⁸⁵ My analysis of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts are essentially a series of largely dialogic interactions that track public thought on a series of key terms and binaries across time, distance, and diverse interest groups. This approach allows for a much different picture of the history of secularism in late eighteenth-century England to come to the forefront.

Canuel begins with Locke, and then points to thinkers like Priestley and Bentham who elaborated on Lockean principles, for his early history of an institutional secularism that he then finds in the writings of Coleridge as an example of Romantic secular thinking. Canuel oscillates between making claims about the late eighteenth century in general and only Romantic writers like Coleridge, making it difficult to pin down the scope of his claims at times. Nonetheless, using Priestley as support for the claim that "[s]ecularization in its late eighteenth century

⁸⁵ Clifford Siskin and William Warner, "This is Enlightenment: An Invitation in the Form of an Argument," *This is Enlightenment*, eds. Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 11. My thoughts on media and mediations are also highly influenced by John Guillory's essay "Genesis of the Media Concept" and Jon Klancher's portion of the *Studies in Romanticism* book review of *This is Enlightenment*.

manifestation... was not a mental phenomenon but an institutional one,” without acknowledging that the secularism of Priestley’s “Essay on the First Principles of Government” was not widely accepted by the people or institutions of England, seems either a methodological slide back into the old history of ideas’ tendency to ignore historical context, or is a bit disingenuous.⁸⁶

Instead, I propose a different history of the idea of secularism, one mediated by print. Like Canuel, I begin with Locke and Priestley. Canuel sites Priestley’s *Essay on the First Principles of Government*, first published in 1768. This text is not only an important early work of modern liberal political theory, and largely a re-articulation of Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government* from 1689, but its primary purpose was as an argument against the Test and Corporation Acts. Having circulated throughout the Dissenting communications network, Priestley’s ideas of a separation between church and state on the issues of education and religion can be found rearticulated in *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters* in 1787. The distribution network of the committee for repeal successfully communicated the primary argument for repeal via *The Case* throughout rural England,⁸⁷ which thereby helped to put pressure on even rural MPs who knew the electoral influence that Dissenters could wield. But this same process of communication allowed for the re-framing of the positions held by the Dissenters.⁸⁸ Via the

⁸⁶ Canuel, “Romantic Fear,” n.p.

⁸⁷ For an example of the committee’s concern with broadly distributing *The Case* in the 1787 campaign, see the minutes from meetings on 16 Feb. 1787, 20 Feb. 1787, 23 Feb. 1787, and 6 March 1787 in Davis, *Committees for Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*.

⁸⁸ Kuypers points to framing’s power to position an argument in reality: “When highlighting some aspect of reality over other aspects, frames act to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. They are located in the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture at large” (“Framing Analysis from a Rhetorical Perspective” 301). Snow and Benford point to how social movements can “frame, or assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (“Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization” 198). Dissenters and their opponents were continually engaged this type of positioning, framing, and re-framing.

dialogic nature of the pamphlets, we can see the binaries created and how these binaries highlight what was really at the center of the debates. In fact, these binaries are quite clear and well known still today: individual freedom versus the best interests of the nation; secular toleration versus ideological hegemony; and the vexed issue of the separation of church and state.

While Canuel moves from Priestley to Bentham and then Coleridge, my media history makes a rather unexpected turn at the end of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts to a very different set of important writers of the Romantic period. As Siskin and Warner state, “Without a media sphere that is open, public, and (relatively) cheap, there could not have been the highly coherent and widely disseminated Anglophone ‘debate about the French Revolution’ as it was developed by Dr. Richard Price, Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine.”⁸⁹ Nor, I would add, could there have been a pamphlet debate over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts that produced well over one hundred publications between 1787 and 1790. In fact, the debate to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts directly led to the debate about the French Revolution. The very beginning of the debate about the French Revolution is also the end of the debate over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. The texts that tend to signify the first volley in the French Revolution debate are Price’s *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* and Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. These are the very texts that I have argued signified the beginning of the end for any hope of successful repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1790. In other words, the media sphere responsible for the French Revolution debates was a product of the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts.

Eventually England does see the exact type of institutional secularization that Canuel describes, but it does not come via Priestley or Bentham, and it doesn’t happen in the eighteenth

⁸⁹ Siskin and Warner, “This is Enlightenment,” 22.

century. Just over forty years after Dissenters argued in *The Case* that they were trustworthy and loyal citizens, but that the Catholics could not be trusted, both were granted toleration within only one year of each other. The Sacramental Test Act of 1828 for Dissenters and the Catholic Relief Bill of 1829 for Catholics broadened toleration in England to all forms of Christianity.⁹⁰ The passage of these laws were not the result of a broad ideological acceptance of toleration, or of an acceptance of the importance of the separation between the church and state, instead it was institutionally necessitated political inclusion. The key shift was in the attitude of the state concerning its own self-interest. Only when the state considered the potential danger from disenfranchised religious minorities to be greater than the potential danger from allowing religious minorities to participate in the governing of the nation was toleration finally accepted.

Though Canuel and I both begin with Priestley's rearticulation of Locke in *An Essay on the First Principles of Government*, our accounts quickly diverge. By combining cultural history with a focus on the process of communication, a very different version of the development of toleration and secularism in England emerges. Though the French Revolution has traditionally been credited with the beginning of an explosion of the spread of secularism in the West, we can see that the issue had already been under debate in England and that the French Revolution likely delayed the institutional acceptance of toleration by three decades.

This chapter has primarily examined the debates to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts with the goal of highlighting the continuing importance of a seventeenth century revolutionary tradition in late eighteenth century English politics. I have also linked the failure of the

⁹⁰ Some sort of religious test remained on the books for over another half a century because the Sacramental Test Act only applied to Christians. Jews were not allowed to hold public office until 1858 and atheists till 1886.

campaigns to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts to the foundational assumptions of the Dissenting disposition on a wide scale—e.g., the shared belief that a good, convincing argument alone would be sufficient to convince their opponents, thereby ignoring public perception and the Civil War era origins of the Acts. In the second half of this project I will shift my focus from institutions to individuals, from cultural history to literary history. In the following chapter, I will examine the centrality of the Dissenting disposition for understanding the numerous changes of position on varying topics that William Godwin's thought undergoes over the course of his career. Then, in the final chapter, I will analyze Samuel Taylor Coleridge's participation in the early Romantic sonnet revival, his relationship with the poetry of John Milton, and how his lack of the Dissenting disposition contributed to his eventual departure from Unitarianism and return to the Church of England.

Chapter 3

The Education of William Godwin:

The Dissenting Disposition and Intellectual Consistency

In the previous two chapters, I have considered the Dissenting disposition at the level of institutions, from its formalization and dissemination through the Dissenting academies to its role in the arguments for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Now, in this and the next chapter, I turn to the Dissenting disposition at the level of the individual. In focusing on William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, I compare two individuals who both underwent multiple religious and political conversions that can be traced through their writings. Yet these men differed dramatically in the circumstances that led them to these conversions, the extent to which they struggled with the process of conversion, and ultimately their adherence to or departure from the Dissenting community. The fact that they both considered themselves Dissenters, at least for a period of time, renders them powerful case studies for exploring different experiences of the Dissenting disposition. My next two chapters will explore Godwin and Coleridge's different intersections of family backgrounds, educational experiences, and even genre choices with the Dissenting disposition—individual microcosms of the larger institutional and historical contexts that I have described earlier.

Noted essayist and fellow Dissenter William Hazlitt described William Godwin's importance and fame in the 1790s in no uncertain terms: "Five-and-twenty years ago he was in the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity; he blazed as a sun in the firmament of

reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after.”¹ Yet Hazlitt was only slightly exaggerating when he wrote in 1825 that:

Mr. Godwin’s person is not known, he is not pointed out in the street, his conversation is not courted, his opinions are not asked, he is at the head of no cabal, he belongs to no party in the State, he has no train of admirers, no one thinks it worth his while even to traduce and vilify him, he has scarcely friend or foe, the world makes a point... of taking no more notice of him than if such an individual had never existed.²

The spark for Godwin’s meteoric rise had been the publication of *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* in 1793. A stunningly rigorous and ambitious work of political philosophy, *Political Justice* catapulted Godwin into the public eye with its radical argument for equality, justice, and the dismantling of the institutions of government. In concert with Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* (1791), *Political Justice* set the grounds and tone for the English debate on the French Revolution and its aftermath. A year later, Godwin published the novel *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). *Caleb Williams* was Godwin’s attempt to popularize through fiction the ideas of *Political Justice* and has since become known as the quintessential Jacobin novel.³ Together, *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* not only brought Godwin fame, but also set his readers’ expectations for the views expressed in any future writings.

¹ William Hazlitt, “William Godwin [1825],” *The Spirit of the Age in The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, Volume 11*, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, LTD., 1932), 16-28.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

³ The term and concept of the Jacobin novel was coined by Gary Kelly in his influential *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

In the second half of the 1790s, Godwin slowly withdrew from the rigorous and militant rationalism in the first edition of *Political Justice*. The second edition of 1796 and the third edition of 1798 increasingly qualified the power of pure rationality by complementing reason with the affections and subjectivity. To some readers, these shifts seemed an abandonment of the first edition's philosophical rigor. This sentiment only increased with Godwin's publication of *The Enquirer* (1797), a work that foregoes the comprehensive and systematic approach of *Political Justice* altogether in favor of a series of speculative essays that emphasized education's importance for reform. The aforementioned swing from rigorous philosophy to speculative essays, combined with a shift in focus on a range of topics, led to concerns about Godwin's consistency and potentially even his apostasy. To understand these shifts, I propose a new consideration of Godwin's upbringing and education that illustrates his embrace of the Dissenting disposition and, in turn, provides an alternate view of his apparent retreat from rationalism.

Born and raised a Dissenter, William Godwin experienced the full range of Dissenting education, from homeschooling by relatives to small country schools, from being the sole live-in student under a doctrinaire private tutor to being one student amongst many at a liberal Dissenting academy. The Godwins were a moderate Calvinist family and from the prosperous middle class. Godwin's father and paternal grandfather were ministers, and his maternal grandfather was a merchant. Godwin's earliest education came from Mrs. Sothern, a relative who lived with the Godwins and taught young William the hymns, catechisms, and prayers of mild Calvinist Dr. Isaac Watts, as well as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, with "its gloomy Calvinist stress on human depravity and predestination."⁴ Beginning at age five, William was taught the

⁴ Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 14.

Bible by a local schoolmistress, Mrs. Gedge. There are few details about William's time with Mrs. Gedge, other than that with her William read both the Old and New Testaments, as well as moderate Calvinist Philip Doddridge's *The Family Expositor*.⁵ Upon her death, Godwin, now age eight, began attending a nearby school of about a hundred pupils at Hindolveston in Norfolk—about two and a half miles from home—under Robert Akers, where he was introduced to mathematics, Latin, and calligraphy. Akers was a surprisingly good teacher for not having been trained as such, and Godwin was a star pupil even though he found the religious laxity of the school a disturbing problem.⁶ From this fairly large school, Godwin next transitioned to being the sole boarder of his new private tutor, Samuel Newton. Newton was a very strict and conservative Dissenter and an adherent of Sandemanian Calvinism.⁷ Then, in the fall of 1773, Godwin began his higher education at Hoxton Academy and became one of the many students sent by middle-class, moderate Calvinist parents to Dissenting academies. The educational culture shock must have been significant for the seventeen-year-old Godwin. Whereas Newton had been harsh and doctrinaire, Hoxton was one of the most liberal of the Dissenting academies under the guidance of Samuel Morton Savage, Abraham Rees, and, most importantly, Andrew Kippis.

When Godwin finished his schooling at Hoxton, he was both a Tory and a Calvinist. Over the next decade and a half, he would undergo a number of conversions that were both religious and political. After a moderate Calvinist upbringing, he had become a somewhat

⁵ William Godwin, "Autobiography 1756-1772," *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, Volume I*, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering, 1992), 17-18.

⁶ See Marshall, *William Godwin*, 15, and Godwin, "Autobiography," 21-22.

⁷ For a brief overview of Godwin's education, Marilyn Butler and Mark Philp, "Introduction," *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, Volume I*, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering, 1992), 7-9. For more on Godwin's time with Samuel Newton, see Chapter 2 of Marshall's biography, *William Godwin*.

stricter Calvinist under Samuel Newton. After departing Hoxton, he then became a Deist, a Socinian, and finally an atheist. While still a Calvinist, however, Godwin switched political allegiances and became a Whig. In his “Autobiographical Fragments,” he wrote: “The first cause of my conversion in the present year [1779] was the newspaper reports of the speeches of Burke and Fox, to whom from this time I conceived an ardent attachment, which no change of circumstance or lapse of time has ever been able to shake.”⁸ It is curious that Godwin did not describe his changes in religious affiliations as conversions but did so for his new political affiliation. Regardless, these changes reflect not only a willingness to continually reconsider his views, but also comfort and faith in the process of doing so.

It is in the Dissenting disposition that Godwin’s comfort and faith were grounded. Even though his religious and political views became relatively settled by the early 1790s, his positions on specific philosophical issues continued to change. In this chapter, I will argue that Godwin embraced and remained faithful to the Dissenting disposition throughout his life and that this adherence can be traced across his lifetime of writings. The influence of the Dissenting disposition is most clearly found in Godwin’s early writings, particularly in the three editions of *Political Justice*. What makes the Dissenting disposition visible in *Political Justice* is less what Godwin’s views in any given edition were and more that his views changed across the two subsequent editions in 1796 and 1798. Thus, the consideration of all sides of a debate, the role of debate and conversation in determining truth, and the relationship between reason and truth are central to Godwin’s revisions of *Political Justice*.

Because scholars have viewed the shift in Godwin’s thought from the various editions of *Political Justice* to its follow-up, *The Enquirer* (1797), as significant, I take the latter as an

⁸ William Godwin, “Autobiographical Fragments,” *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, Volume 1*, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering, 1992), 43.

important test case for Godwin's faithfulness to the Dissenting disposition. In *The Enquirer*, Godwin explores a variety of topics, with a special focus on education, in essays that demonstrate an apparent shift away from reason and toward sensibility. Godwin did change his views on a number of issues between the first two editions of *Political Justice* and *The Enquirer*. However, his way of determining truth remained consistent between and beyond these texts. Therefore, where other scholars see *The Enquirer* and other subsequent works, including the third edition of *Political Justice* (1798), as downplaying, abandoning, or explicitly disowning the early thought of the 1793 edition of *Political Justice*, I see a continuity via the Dissenting disposition. In other words, there is an important consistency in intellectual process across Godwin's many conversions. Ironically, these conversions were seen as so drastic that they drew accusations of political and intellectual apostasy for nearly a century—and have again in recent years. Understanding how Godwin learned and embraced a way of knowing that emphasized reasoning rather than doctrine illuminates the consistency of his thinking and its origin in Dissent.

A Dissenting Education and the Dissenting Disposition

Godwin addresses his childhood and education directly—if briefly—in his partial “Autobiography 1756-1772,”⁹ a brief account in his “Analysis of Own Character” (1798), a couple paragraphs in the “Autobiographical Fragments” (1800), and a couple paragraphs in “The

⁹ “Autobiography 1756-1772” was written over the course of many years. For more on the complicated dating of this text, see the “Introductory Note,” *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, Volume 1*, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering, 1992), 58.

Principal Revolutions of Opinion” (1800).¹⁰ It would, therefore, seem that there is an authoritative account on Godwin’s education by Godwin himself. However, this account is also severely lacking in detail, leading to most scholarship dealing with Godwin’s education in a brief, matter-of-fact manner. In this section, I will take a closer look at Godwin’s education, paying special attention to the role that his family played in his education, why the importance of his time with Samuel Newton has been overstated, and how Godwin’s education at Hoxton solidified his adherence to the Dissenting disposition.

Most of young William’s educational history that I laid out earlier would have been similar for many young men coming from middle-class Dissenting families, with the important exception of Godwin’s time under the private tutelage of Samuel Newton in Norwich. It is unclear precisely why Godwin was sent to study with Newton. As a Sandemanian Calvinist, Newton was by all accounts far more extreme in his Calvinism than William’s father. Sandemanianism was an ultra-orthodox form of Calvinism that attempted to conform to what was understood to be a primitive form of Christianity. Sandemanian Calvinism was also defined by an extremely strict understanding of Calvinist predestination. Godwin writes of Newton’s Sandemanian creed:

His doctrines were drawn from the writings of Sandeman, a celebrated North-county apostle, who, after Calvin had damned ninety-nine in a hundred of mankind, has contrived a scheme for damning ninety-nine in a hundred of the followers of Calvin. Calvin had sufficiently guarded against the merit of good-works; but Sandeman undertakes to show a flaw in the passport for the elect, and

¹⁰ All of these are part of the Abinger Collection at the Bodleian Library and all have been published for the first time in volume 1 of *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin* (1992), edited by Mark Philp.

demonstrates that, after we have dispossessed the devil of the battery of good-works, he gains possession of the citadel by imposing on us the merit of faith...

This scheme for damning those good, simple souls, who never suspected a word of the matter, but thought themselves cock-sure of everlasting life, was the favourite topic of Newton's discourse.¹¹

Why did William's father, himself a moderate Calvinist, send his son to the Calvinist extremist Newton? Godwin did not exactly answer this question in his "Autobiography," though he did offer a brief narrative that might shed some light on the matter.

Godwin wanted to be trained to join the clergy, though he felt this wish stood against his father's misgivings. Godwin wrote,

During all this time my religious impressions / were unvaried; and my resolution was constant, of devoting myself to the clerical profession. To this my father strongly opposed himself. I was never his favourite. He was never so frank and communicative with me as with my elder brothers, particularly the second. And I believe he was seriously impressed with the notion that there was a sort of pride and unsubmittingness of spirit in me, incompatible with the humility of the gospel. He did me injustice, when he imputed to me a temper too volatile for the gravity of a divine. His opposition ultimately yielded to my pertinacity [sic], and the pleadings of my female protector and friend, Mrs. Sothren.¹²

The idea to send William to Samuel Newton may have been the idea of Mrs. Sothren, who apparently pled William's case to his father. That Mrs. Sothren may have been a more strict Calvinist than William's father seems entirely possible based on her choice of teaching

¹¹ Godwin, "Autobiography," 30-31.

¹² Godwin, "Autobiography," 29.

materials—Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is not traditionally considered appropriate bedtime reading for four-year-olds.

Young William, then, seems to have been raised in a household with two religious creeds at work on his young mind. First, there was the fire-and-brimstone Calvinism of Mrs. Sothern, which may have led to William’s tutelage under Newton. Second, there was the moderate-to-mild Calvinism of his father, more in the vein of Philip Doddridge or Isaac Watts. Though I argue that it was at Hoxton Academy, after his time with Newton, that the Dissenting disposition became a central aspect of Godwin’s thought, as it was for so many graduates of the Dissenting academies, it is likely that a young Godwin had been exposed to the Dissenting disposition earlier in life, thanks in part to the family’s relationship with Doddridge.

Philip Doddridge’s teachings and writings were central to the formalization and spread of the Dissenting disposition—as I argued in Chapter One—and Godwin’s family had first-hand experience. William’s grandfather, Edward Godwin, was a Dissenting minister and a close friend of Doddridge who “superintended the Family Expositor of Dr. Philip Doddridge in its passage through the press.”¹³ Doddridge wrote of Godwin’s grandfather in the “Advertisement” to the first volume of the first edition of *The Family Expositor* (1739):

... I am obliged to pay my publick and most thankful Acknowledgements to my worthy Brother and Friend the Reverend *Mr. Godwin*, who generously undertook the great Trouble, not only of revising each *Sheet* as it came from the Press, but also of inspecting the *Manuscript* before it went thither, and of making several Alterations in it, very much for the better, of which I should have been ready to

¹³ Godwin, “Autobiography,” 7.

have given a more particular Account, if his Modesty and Goodness would have permitted it.¹⁴

Just as Edward was involved in the creation of one of Doddridge's best-known publications, so his son John was there for the other. William's father, John, was a student at the Dissenting academy at Northampton under Doddridge while he was writing *A Course of Lectures on Pneumatology, Ethics and Divinity*, which became a standard textbook at Dissenting academies throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the high regard for Doddridge was certainly passed on to young William. William writes that his father "retained during life a more affectionate [recollection of] veneration for Dr. Doddridge, his tutor, than, I believe, for any other human being."¹⁵ Combine this with the close relationship his grandfather Edward had with Doddridge—a grandfather whom William "consciously took as a model"—and a picture of the reputation of Doddridge in the Godwin family comes clearly into focus.¹⁶ It is no surprise, then, that when looking back at his childhood, Godwin's earliest educational memories turn to Doddridge: "My first education was in the most grave and solemn style of the school of religious opinions, formed principally under the auspices of Dr. Isaac Watts and Dr. Philip Doddridge."¹⁷

¹⁴ Philip Doddridge, "Advertisement," *The Family Expositor* (London: Printed by John Wilson, 1739), xxviii. For more on Edward's role in the publication of *The Family Expositor*, its publication history, and just how well *The Family Expositor* sold, see Tessa Whitehouse's "The Family Expositor, the Doddridge Circle and the Booksellers," *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 11.3 (2010): 321-44. *The Family Expositor* was published seven times in the eighteenth century, stayed in print well into the nineteenth century, and was well known throughout the Dissenting community.

¹⁵ Godwin, "Autobiography," 8.

¹⁶ Marshal, *William Godwin*, 8. Marshall cites the Abinger Manuscripts as his source. I have not been able to confirm this paraphrase, but the entirety of the Abinger Manuscripts has not been published or made publicly available at the time of this writing.

¹⁷ William Godwin, "The Principal Revolutions of Opinion," *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, Volume 1*, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering, 1992), 52. Edward Godwin was a fellow student at the Dissenting academy at Tewkesbury with Isaac Watts, who was also a

It is worth emphasizing that one of the key principles of Doddridge's pedagogical approach was the centrality of teaching all sides of a debate, even to the point of teaching texts that he vehemently disagreed with. Indoctrination was not Doddridge's goal; free inquiry was. This style of teaching, though widely used across Dissent in the eighteenth century, was not universally accepted. While a young William was a direct descendant of the Dissenting disposition through his grandfather and father's relationships with Doddridge, this inheritance would be tested during his time under the tutelage of the Sandemanian, Samuel Newton.

Whereas Doddridge's writings encouraged free inquiry, Newton favored proselytization. Intending to eventually join the clergy, Godwin was sent to study under Newton: "In September 1767 I was removed to Norwich, and became the solitary pupil of Mr Samuel Newton, minister of the independent congregation of that city... Mr Newton was the most wretched of pedants."¹⁸ Godwin did not enjoy his time with Newton, who favored the rod and found young William constantly guilty of pride and "of having a stiff neck."¹⁹ Instead of being expected to choose for himself, Godwin was expected to conform to Newton's teachings and, as William St. Clair writes, "Godwin was conscientiously whipped for any suspicion of deviationism."²⁰ After a brief interlude back at Hindolveston during the second half of 1770, Godwin returned to Newton at the beginning of 1771. By the end of the year, Newton dismissed Godwin, "pronouncing that I was

member of Doddridge's intellectual circle and an incredibly important individual within Dissent in his own right (Marshall 9).

¹⁸ Godwin, "Autobiography," 29.

¹⁹ Godwin, "Autobiography," 35. For more on Godwin's time with Samuel Newton, see William Godwin, "Autobiography," 29-36; chapter two of Marshall, *William Godwin*, 17-31; William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 7-9; and Robert M. Maniquis, "Godwin's Calvinist Ghosts: *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*," *Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, eds. Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 25-58.

²⁰ St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, 7-8.

sufficiently qualified in point of languages for the Dissenting College at Homerton.”²¹ A former student of Homerton himself, Newton must have been confident his pupil would be accepted, but Homerton did not accept Godwin because they suspected him of Sandemanianism, which was likely far too illiberal for Homerton and considered heretical by many.²² This charge seems obvious considering that Newton was a Sandemanian Calvinist, but, shockingly, Godwin was unaware of just what Newton had been teaching him. In the summer of 1773, just before entering Hoxton, Godwin writes, “I subscribed to a circulating library at Rochester, and among other books, procured the writings of Robert Sandeman, that I might compare them with my previous habits of thinking and know whereof I was accused.”²³ Godwin had previously only known Sandemanianism as “Newton’s creed.”²⁴ In comparison to the Dissenting disposition, where a well-rounded knowledge of the entire issue was to be taught, Newton was not even clear that what he was teaching Godwin was Sandemanianism, much less how it fit into the larger world of Dissent. At Hoxton, where he enrolled after being denied by Homerton, Godwin would be taught according to the principles of Dissenting education as laid out by Philip Doddridge in his *Lectures* and his teaching practices handed down through his former students—in other words, the Dissenting disposition. Though the Dissenting disposition, and its requisite search for truth through debate and reason, would come to be widely associated with Unitarianism and Rational Dissent by the end of the eighteenth century, it was developed originally within the mainstream veins of moderate Calvinism. However, Newton and Sandemanianism were far from mainstream and the ultra-orthodox nature stood at odds with the Dissenting disposition.

²¹ Godwin, “Autobiography,” 37.

²² Godwin, “Autobiographical Fragments,” 41.

²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴ Godwin, “Autobiography,” 35.

Contrasting with Newton, deviationism was far from forbidden at Hoxton Academy. Unlike Newton's laser-focused Sandemanian teaching, the tutors at Hoxton came from a spectrum of Dissenting belief systems. While all three were related at some point to both the Independents and the Presbyterians, the head of the academy, Samuel Morton Savage, was a Calvinist, Abraham Rees was an Arian and eventually a Unitarian, and Andrew Kippis was a Socinian. Their devotion to individual judgment and open debate—central aspects of the Dissenting disposition—led to a considerably novel educational experience for Godwin. To begin with, he was never birched for his stubbornness as he was under Newton. Quite the opposite, in fact, as his single-mindedness served him well at Hoxton. Godwin remained a Sandemanian Calvinist and a Tory throughout his five years at Hoxton. These views made him something of an outsider in a school full of moderate-to-radical Dissenters. At Hoxton, his views were allowed to be voiced and his positions defended. This was not just a sociable politeness at work, but the core of Dissenting pedagogical theory. A powerful example of this openness to challenge and debate was what Godwin referred to as “a curious paper war” that occurred during his last year at Hoxton on the topic of God with a fellow student, Richard Evans. Godwin states that he “took the negative side, in this instance as always, with great sincerity hoping that my friend would enable me to remove the difficulties I apprehended.”²⁵ No further details as to this incident exist, but, for my purposes, this tidbit of information is sufficient: all debates central to Dissenting faith were allowed to occur in the academy, Godwin was free to take the most controversial positions, and, perhaps most importantly, he saw this debate as hopefully leading to new ideas that would allow him “to remove the difficulties” that he apprehended in accepting certain aspects of doctrine. This incident, recalled over 20 years later, exactly fits the Dissenting

²⁵ Godwin, “Autobiographical Fragments,” 42. Marshall's version of this incident can be found on Marshall, *William Godwin*, 41-42.

disposition route to true knowledge. Only through free and open debate could the truth of a position be tested or error exposed. This incident is one of many I will highlight throughout this chapter as evidence that this approach to gaining knowledge remained a guiding force throughout Godwin's life: through his shifts from Tory schoolboy to leftist political theorist to a more moderate thinker, from Calvinist to Socinian to atheist.

Once one recognizes that the Dissenting academies taught a unique understanding of how to gain knowledge and identify truth—the Dissenting disposition—then the links between the academies, individuals, and the disposition become numerous and apparent. For example, the same quote that I use from Priestley in Chapter One as evidence for the Dissenting disposition is used by Marshall to describe Godwin's experience at Hoxton:

The principal method of teaching was extraordinarily liberal in the sense of being quite undogmatic. Priestley recalled that the academies were “exceedingly favourable to free inquiry” and that the students were referred to authors on both sides of every question, and were even required to give an account of them.

Doddridge, the most famous Dissenting pedagogue in the eighteenth century, further decided to substitute English for Latin as the language of the lecture room at Northampton Academy. Since there were very few textbooks written in English, tutors were obliged to write their own or to circulate the manuscripts of their lectures. A singular kind of scholarship therefore developed within the academies, and the tutors exerted a pervasive influence on their pupils.²⁶

Marshall's chapter on Hoxton is well researched and thorough. The important addition that needs to be made to his account of Godwin's time at Hoxton is giving specificity to a vague idea

²⁶ Marshall, *William Godwin*, 33.

expressed throughout the chapter and throughout much of his biography. In the above passage, Marshall recognized the uniqueness of the type of education that those in the Dissenting academies received, but he did not have a name for this “singular kind of scholarship.” Elsewhere he writes that “Hoxton Academy was to give a permanent and distinctive tenor to his [Godwin’s] thinking.”²⁷ Others have noticed the singular nature of the Dissenting education; for example, Paul Hamilton writes, “Dissenting culture possessed features of its own, even when from the late 1780s, much of it became characterized more by political than by religious non-conformity, its tradition more identifiable through the educational influence of the Dissenting colleges than in worship.”²⁸ I have been calling this unique approach the Dissenting disposition. While Chapter One considers the Dissenting disposition in a broad sense, an analysis of Godwin’s education at Hoxton can provide a more specific experience of the Dissenting disposition and how its effects could ripple through an individual’s intellectual life.

If Newton provided a lasting negative influence, as Maniquis argues, then Andrew Kippis—tutor of classics, philology, and history at Hoxton—provided the most enduring positive influence. Though Godwin may not have met Kippis until attending Hoxton, he was known in the family. Kippis was a student of William’s grandfather’s friend, Philip Doddridge, and—at least for one academic year—a classmate of Godwin’s father, John.²⁹ After graduating from

²⁷ Ibid., 32.

²⁸ Paul Hamilton, “Coleridge and Godwin in the 1790s,” *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, eds. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990) 45.

²⁹ While I have struggled to find the exact dates for when John was enrolled at Northampton under Doddridge, I do know that he graduated and that Kippis was only two years younger than John. And while the age at which a student entered the academy could vary, as could the number of years that a student took to graduate, Kippis and John Godwin must have overlapped at least a year, if not more.

Hoxton, Godwin failed twice at being a Dissenting minister.³⁰ Godwin had begun to stray from his conservative Calvinism after reading the French philosophes and politically he had begun to drift toward republicanism. After reading Joseph Priestley's *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1772-74), Godwin became a Socinian by accepting the existence of God but denying the divinity of Christ.³¹ While the four or five years Godwin spent as a Socinian kept him within the denominational realms of Dissent, his beliefs were at odds with the rural and conservative ministries of Stowmarket and Beaconsfield where he tried his hand at his lifelong dream of being a minister. After his congregations had become hostile against his ministering, Godwin needed a new line of work. Andrew Kippis helped Godwin transition to a new career as a writer by helping him find employment and introducing him to the London Dissenting scene. As Martin Fitzpatrick writes,

...it was Andrew Kippis who enabled him to make a permanent career as a writer by facilitating his appointment as the writer responsible for the historical part of the *New Annual Register* for a stipend of sixty guineas. It was also through Kippis that he gained a private tutorship which yielded an annual income of eighty guineas in 1785 and 1786. Kippis was as at home in the literary world as he was in that of reform politics and theology, and his publishing contacts could be invaluable to a young writer. It was he who first found Helen Maria Williams a publisher and he may have been instrumental in gaining access for Godwin to her coterie late in 1787.³²

³⁰ For a solid account of Godwin's time as a minister, see chapter four of Marshall, *William Godwin*, 46-55.

³¹ Marshall, *William Godwin*, 53.

³² Martin Fitzpatrick, "William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters." *The Price-Priestley Newsletter* 3 (1979): 14.

Looking back after the passing of Kippis, Godwin wrote, “I reflect at all times with pleasure on the memory of Dr. Kippis, as having been very sincerely my friend.”³³ The fondness with which Godwin remembers Kippis most certainly began at Hoxton and continued until Kippis’s passing in 1795. While Kippis was obviously a friend and patron to Godwin in the 1780s, what I am most interested in is the role Kippis played in teaching Godwin the Dissenting disposition that I have claimed he picked up while a student at Hoxton.

Andrew Kippis was a leading figure in Dissenting education in the late eighteenth century. Beyond his role as tutor first at Hoxton Academy and later at New College at Hackney, Kippis contributed heavily to the development of commonly used textbooks. Kippis not only always taught from Doddridge’s *A Course of Lectures*, but he also edited its third and fourth editions.³⁴ Kippis added further footnotes to the *Lectures* to point the reader toward works that would add context to Doddridge’s reading and to update the references to include new works that commented on the issues at hand. Following the Dissenting disposition’s focus on truth being accessible only through the application of reason after knowing all sides of an issue, Kippis’s additions followed this principle: “My sole aim is to mention, with freedom and impartiality, the writers on all sides of the different questions which are the objects of discussion, that hereby the mind of the student may be duly enlarged, and that he may be able, with the greater advantage, to prosecute his searches after truth.”³⁵ Here we see Kippis applying the Dissenting disposition that he learned from Doddridge to his scholarly work on the central textbook for the majority of

³³ Godwin, “Autobiographical Fragments,” 46.

³⁴ Kippis also wrote “A Life of the Author” that was included as a prologue to the seventh—and onward—edition of Doddridge’s *Family Expositor*, a commentary on the New Testament.

³⁵ Andrew Kippis, “Preface,” *A Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity* by Philip Doddridge. Third Edition (London: Printed for T. Longman, 1794), n.p.

Dissenting academies, much as he taught in the classroom. Compare Kippis's approach to editing Doddridge's *Lectures* to Godwin's remembrance of his time at Hoxton:

During my academical life, and from that time forward, I was indefatigable in my search after truth – I was perpetually prompting myself with the principle, Sequar veritatem [Follow the truth] – I read all the authors of the greatest repute for and against the trinity, original sin, and the most disputed doctrines – but I was not yet of an understanding sufficiently ripe for impartial decision, and all of my enquires terminated in Calvinism. – I was famous in our College for calm and unpassionate discussion...³⁶

Godwin was dedicated to reading all sides of an issue, reading “all the authors of the greatest repute for and against” and issue in his “indefatigable... search after truth.” This concept—the Dissenting disposition—stayed with Godwin throughout his life. Five years before his death, written over 50 years after he left Hoxton, Godwin writes in *Thoughts on Man* (1831):

During my college-life therefore, I read all sorts of books, on every side of any important question, or that were thrown in my way, that I could hear of. But the very passion that determined me to this mode of proceeding, made me wary and circumspect in coming to a conclusion. I knew it would, if any thing, be a more censurable and contemptible act, to yield to every seducing novelty, than to adhere obstinately to a prejudice because it had been instilled in me in youth. I was therefore slow of conviction, and by no means “given to change.” I never willingly parted with a suggestion that was unexpectedly furnished to me; but I

³⁶ Godwin, “Autobiographical Fragments,” 42.

examined it again and again, before I consented that it should enter into the set of my principles.³⁷

Though the language varies from Kippis's editorial remarks in 1794, to Godwin in 1800, and finally to Godwin in 1831, the concept is identical.

Since Godwin remained a Calvinist and a Tory throughout his time at Hoxton, some scholars have downplayed the importance of his education thereby assuming that if the school had been influential, Godwin would have left behind his former beliefs and become more religiously and politically liberal, as the majority of the tutors and students were at Hoxton.³⁸

Others *have* recognized the importance of his time at Hoxton:

Godwin came away from the college with a good education in Greek, Latin, and French, together with a broad knowledge of theological and classical literature.

On his own report, he remained resistant to Hoxton's liberalism in politics and its leanings to Rational Dissent in religion, preferring the Tory and Calvinist line in most controversies; but there can be little doubt that his later innovations in moral and political philosophy owed much to the principles of Rational Dissent and the tolerant intellectual community which he found in college.³⁹

However, even here there is an ambiguity concerning just what exactly is "owed" to this education. By linking the Dissenting disposition to Godwin's five years at Hoxton, I have argued for a very specific educational influence: a way of thinking about how knowledge is gained and truth determined that was learned under Andrew Kippis and the other tutors at Hoxton. In the

³⁷ William Godwin, *Thoughts on Man, His Nature, Productions, and Discoveries* (London: E. Wilson, 1831), 334.

³⁸ Fitzpatrick, "William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters," 4.

³⁹ Butler and Philp, "Introduction," 8.

following section, I will show how the Dissenting disposition lies at the heart of Godwin's *The Enquirer*.

An Examination of Godwin's Dissenting Disposition: The Big Picture

If I am correct in claiming that Godwin internalized the Dissenting disposition while at Hoxton and that it remained central to his thought throughout his lifetime, then I should be able to show clear links between his writings and the Dissenting disposition over the entirety of his career. In this section of the chapter, I am going to examine these links through three ongoing concerns over the course of Godwin's career. This examination will not be exhaustive, but a suggestive sampling. As I pointed out in the previous section, a good deal of scholarship has already highlighted the uniqueness of Godwin's education and how he thought about truth. I will add specificity to these claims by way of the Dissenting disposition. The three areas that I will examine are the importance of considering all sides of a debate, the role of debate and conversation in determining truth, and the relationship between reason and truth. Though Godwin's positions changed on a variety of topics over time, I will show a continuity of thought for how Godwin approached determining the truth in a matter.

The importance of considering all sides of a debate

Godwin wrote of his college years that he "read all sorts of books, on every side of any important question."⁴⁰ My goal now will be to find this aspect of the Dissenting disposition in practice. Consider a letter exchange between Godwin and Joseph Priestley from 1785. In 1784, Godwin began writing for the *English Review* under John Murray and he soon "undertook to review the controversy between Priestley, Samuel Horsley, and others, concerning the nature of

⁴⁰ Godwin, *Thoughts on Man*, 334.

the early Christian Church.”⁴¹ Sent on January 9, 1785, Godwin writes a letter to Priestley as “the author of the article in the English Review relative to your vindication of HC [Priestley’s *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*].”⁴² Though Godwin claims himself a Socinian and states that he agrees with Priestley’s position in the letter, he has been hired by a publication friendly to the established church and therefore he cannot defend Priestley’s thoughts and writing in the *English Review*. However, Godwin writes,

I am the more easy under this restriction, as the immediate business of a reviewer is not undoubtedly to make himself a party, but to represent candidly the arguments from both sides. Perhaps too, if the cause of Socinianism be the cause of truth, it cannot be more effectually served than in the manner I have chalked out to myself.⁴³

For Godwin, “if the cause of Socinianism be the cause of truth,” then only his impartiality will allow the truth to be discovered. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Priestley’s response only confirms this view of truth. Priestley replied on [Feb. 9th]: “I am far from wishing that you should be otherwise than perfectly *impartial*, and really had rather you should be too much than too little favourable of my antagonist.”⁴⁴ Godwin’s—and Priestley’s—language here is clearly indicative of the Dissenting disposition. Despite Godwin’s personal belief in Priestley’s views, his commitment to

⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, “William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters,” 5. Much of the background for this exchange comes from Martin Fitzpatrick, who has also focused on this exchange, but with a different purpose in mind and therefore comes away with a different idea of its importance. Fitzpatrick writes, “William Godwin’s spiritual and intellectual debt to Dissent is well known, but it has not attracted the specific and detailed investigation which it deserves. This paper is an attempt to rectify in part that neglect by examining his connections with Rational Dissent and especially with Richard Price and Joseph Priestley” (4). This exchange for Fitzpatrick, then, highlights the role that Priestley played in Godwin’s intellectual growth.

⁴² William Godwin, “To [Joseph Priestley], [January 9, 1785],” *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume 1: 1778-1797*, ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 27.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

the Dissenting disposition encourages him to write an impartial review because only a clear presentation of all sides of the argument can allow the reader to apply their reason and arrive at the truth. Only a year before this exchange, Godwin had been more explicit about the connection between impartiality and truth when he wrote in *Sketches of History* (1784), “Unwarped and impartial, at least to a certain degree, we have an ear for the voice of truth... But as we go forward in the world, as we become more acquainted with the objects around us, we become more attached and less impartial. Truth sounds more dissonant.”⁴⁵ This concern with impartially presenting an argument—a keystone of the Dissenting disposition—would stay with Godwin throughout his career. However, the goal of impartiality was not always so easy to achieve.

Though he had also been writing the historical section of the *New Annual Register* since 1783, *Sketches on History* (1784) was his earliest reflection on the writing of history; the preface to the first volume of his *History of the Commonwealth of England* (1824) would be his last. In terms of focus, much about his views on the writing of history had remained the same over this time. For example, biography was still at the heart of the project of the historian—a stance that he had stated in *Sketches* but explored more fully in “Of History and Romance” in 1797. Impartiality also remained a goal of the historian, though in 1824 it was a goal that required explicit attention and explanation. In the preface to the *History of the Commonwealth*, Godwin makes a similar if/then move to what he wrote in 1784: in *Sketches* he writes that “if the cause of Socinianism be the cause of truth,” then his impartial presentation of both sides will provide that route to the truth of Socinianism for the reader. In *History* he writes,

If there be any semblance of truth in the dictum of Warburton, that, “When Cromwell subdued his country, the spirit of liberty was at its height, and its

⁴⁵ William Godwin, *Sketches of History. In Six Sermons* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1784), 49.

interests were conducted and supported by a set of the greatest geniuses for government that the world ever saw embarked together in one common cause,” *it follows that*, till the interval in which they flourished has been adequately developed, and their proceedings have been related in the language of sobriety and justice, the character of our countrymen can never be fully understood, and the history of England can never be written.⁴⁶

In other words, if the period of the English revolution, civil war, and interregnum really did see the “spirit of liberty at its height,” then only a sober history of that time can bring forth the true character of those countrymen and a true history of England be written. The calls to truth that I am including in this evaluation are here only implied, but Godwin makes the link more explicit elsewhere in the preface. Following the above statement, Godwin feels the need to explore what it means to be impartial. He writes, “I will inform my readers what impartiality I aim at, and consider commendable. Its essence consists in a fair and severe examination of evidence, and the not suffering any respect of persons, or approbation of a cause, to lead the writer to misapprehend or misrepresent the nature of facts.”⁴⁷ By combining this statement with the if/then statement above, we arrive at a formulation of historical writing that is in line with the Dissenting disposition: if there is truth to a historical claim, then only by an impartial, “fair and severe examination of evidence” can that truth be proven.

⁴⁶ William Godwin, *History of the Commonwealth of England, Volume 1* (London: Printed for Henry Colburn, 1824), vi-vii. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, viii.

The role of debate and conversation in determining truth

The relationship between debate, exposing error, and determining the truth is perhaps the aspect of the Dissenting disposition that has already been most examined in prior Godwin scholarship. My goal here is to highlight an example of Godwin's continued conviction in this aspect of the Dissenting disposition, and then to examine some of the scholarship on the topic with the intention of showing how this well-known aspect of Godwin's thought has roots in his Dissenting education—a much earlier origin than is generally proposed.

While there are many examples of the importance of debate—or conversation—in determining the truth in Godwin's writings, one quotation is cited most frequently. In the first edition of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin writes:

Indeed, *if there be such a thing as truth, it must infallibly be struck out by the collision of mind with mind.* The restless activity of intellect will for a time be fertile in paradox and error; but these will be only diurnals, while the truths that occasionally spring up, like sturdy plants, will defy the rigour of season and climate. *In proportion as one reasoner compares his deductions with those of another, the weak places of his argument will be detected, the principles he too hastily adopted will be overthrown, and the judgements, in which his mind was exposed to no sinister influence, will be confirmed.* All that is requisite in these discussions is unlimited speculation, and a sufficient variety of systems and opinions.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness. Volume I*, First edition (London: Printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1793), 21. Emphasis mine.

Here is as clear a statement of this aspect of the Dissenting disposition as one is likely to find. Only through “the collision of mind with mind” can error be overcome and truth confirmed. This statement was written while Godwin was at his most politically radical, and while he was most involved in the Dissenting social circles that Mark Philp examines in his *Godwin’s Political Justice* (1986). Much has been made of Godwin’s revised positions as reflected in the second edition of *Political Justice* in 1795 and the third edition of 1798, even to the point of claims of apostasy—a topic I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. So does this quote survive into the revised editions of *Political Justice*? It does not, though the concept remains under a different topic.

In the 1793 edition of *Political Justice*, the importance of conversation and debate to determining truth was considered in the chapter titled “Three Principal Causes of Moral Improvement Considered.” In the 1798 edition—after the failure of the French Revolution and Godwin’s explicit turn against impassioned politics of the masses—the importance of conversation surfaces in a later chapter titled “Of Political Associations.”⁴⁹ While Godwin sees inherent problems with political associations, as one would commonly define them, he also sees the impartial conversation of politics as a path to political truths: “But, though association, in the received sense of that term, must be granted to be an instrument of very dangerous nature, unreserved communication, especially among persons who are already awakened to the pursuit of truth, is of no less unquestionable advantage.”⁵⁰ After a brief discussion of book learning versus conversation as a means of education, Godwin continues, “It follows, that the promoting

⁴⁹ For an in-depth analysis of Godwin’s shift in views on this topic, see Mark Philp, “Godwin, Thelwall, and the Means of Progress,” *Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, eds. Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 59-82.

⁵⁰ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, Volume I*, Third edition (London: Printed for G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798), 294.

the best interests of mankind, eminently depends upon the freedom of social communication.”⁵¹

He then describes his ideal for “social communication”:

Let us figure to ourselves a number of individuals, who, having stored their minds with reading and reflection, are accustomed, in candid and unreserved conversation, to compare their ideas, suggest their doubts, examine their mutual difficulties, and cultivate a perspicuous and animated manner of delivering their sentiments. Let us suppose, that their intercourse is not confined to the society of each other, but that they are desirous extensively to communicate the truths with which they are acquainted. Let us suppose their illustrations to be not more distinguished by impartiality and demonstrative clearness, than by the mildness of their temper, and a spirit of comprehensive benevolence.⁵²

Though Godwin has amended his earlier “collision of mind with mind,” he has not forsaken it. Instead, he has tempered his previous position based on his experience of how popular protest developed in England during and following the Treason Trials of 1794. In 1798, Godwin’s “collision of mind with mind” must be combined with a call for “mildness” of “temper” and a “spirit of comprehensive benevolence” because he has seen conversation turn into riots. This line of reasoning, based on experience, is in line with his critique of Thelwall and popular protest in *Considerations on Lord Grenville’s and Mr Pitt’s Bills, concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices, and Unlawful Assemblies* (1795).⁵³ Though in 1798 Godwin is careful to differentiate his ideals of political conversation from the impassioned political rhetoric of someone like his

⁵¹ Ibid., 295.

⁵² Ibid., 295-96.

⁵³ For a detailed reading of this work, see the previously mentioned essay by Mark Philp, “Godwin, Thelwall, and the Means of Progress.”

friend John Thelwall by redefining the idea of political association, Godwin is nevertheless committed to the power of “candid and unreserved conversation” leading to truth.

As I mentioned earlier, Godwin’s conception of how conversation and truth are related has in many ways already been articulated in Godwin scholarship, though not under the title of Dissenting disposition. Perhaps the most important work in this category is Mark Philp’s seminal *Godwin’s Political Justice* (1986) that argues that there are three dominant themes in *Political Justice* and that the second of these three are “that persons are capable of grasping... truths through public discussion and the exercise of private judgment.”⁵⁴ Philp writes that for Godwin,

Truth does not appear *sui generis*; our knowledge of it rests on what is currently known and on the gradual expansion of our cognitive capacities. At the same time necessity ensures that “error is perpetually hastening to its own detection” and thus provides for the fact that we are continually developing in our understanding of truth. And *public discussion, because it ensures the detection of our errors when we speak our minds with utmost candour, is the most important vehicle for the development of truth.*⁵⁵

Philp’s description of how error is exposed and truth detected through discussion falls directly in line with the Dissenting disposition, but I am locating Godwin’s participation in this intellectual tradition as originating well before Philp’s dating of it. Philp sees this conception of idealized conversation as a result of Godwin’s participation in the London Dissenting social circles between 1788 and 1792: “Far from being a ‘fantasy of reason’, *Political Justice* was an albeit one-sided sketch of a possible social order—a sketch which simply extrapolated from conditions

⁵⁴ Mark Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 82.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 94-5. Emphasis mine.

already present in Godwin's circles."⁵⁶ As most Godwin scholars have also done, Godwin's formal education is ignored in favor of his unofficial social education, yet the formulation Philp highlights is identical to what I have argued is the shared Dissenting disposition that was central to Dissenting education in the second half of the eighteenth century—and not particularly unique to Godwin. Godwin did, however, expose the assumptions of the Dissenting disposition more visibly than perhaps any other Dissenting intellectual.

The existing scholarship on the issue of conversation and its relationship to truth for Godwin has most recently been examined as part of the turn toward studying Romantic sociability. In particular, Jon Mee's work on the importance of conversation to Godwin resonates nicely with the argument of this chapter.⁵⁷ Mee writes, "Through ancestry, education, and in his social life, Godwin was a beneficiary of a culture of vigorous conversational exchange."⁵⁸ Mee also highlights a Hoxton textbook as influential, though he looks to Isaac Watts instead of Philip Doddridge. Watts was also a friend of Godwin's grandfather and a close colleague of Doddridge.⁵⁹ And, as I have shown above, Mee sees both continuity and change in how Godwin thought about the relationship between conversation and truth in the 1790s:

Between its first edition [*Political Justice*, 1793] and the essays gathered in *The Enquirer* (1797), Godwin shifted between two different paradigms of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 173. This is a conclusion maintained in Hamilton, "Coleridge and Godwin in the 1790s," 46.

⁵⁷ Jon Mee, "'The Use of Conversation': William Godwin's Conversable World and Romantic Sociability," *Studies in Romanticism* 50 (2011): 567-90. Also see Jon Mee, "Chapter 3 – Critical Conversation in the 1790s: Godwin, Hays, and Wollstonecraft," *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, & Community, 1762-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 137-67. In many ways, Mee's work builds on Victoria Myers's earlier work on Godwin and conversation; however, Myers's focus is equally on oratory and politics instead of the more currently in vogue sociability: Victoria Myers, "William Godwin and the 'Ars Rhetorica,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 41.3 (2002): 415-44.

⁵⁸ Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 148.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 147-8.

conversation. In the writing of both Godwin and Wollstonecraft, an earlier idea of “rational” conversation is to some extent revised and overtaken by a more affective model of the conversable world... but both still continued to hold open the possibility of conversation functioning as a republican political modality.⁶⁰

Building on Mee’s point, I am also arguing for a conception of conversation for Godwin that is not just about political truths, but any form of truth. Elsewhere in *Conversable Worlds*, Mee succinctly describes what I have claimed is a central concept for the Dissenting disposition: “nonconformity’s commitment to conversation as a species of enquiry after truth.”⁶¹ Mee’s insightful work on Godwin and conversation, then, can both be seen as an important contribution to Romantic sociability and—at least through the lens of this study—an exploration of Godwin’s continuing practice of the Dissenting disposition’s conception of conversation as an “enquiry after truth.”

The relationship between truth and reason

Due to the popularity of public sphere studies and Romantic sociability studies, the previously discussed “collision of mind with mind” statement Godwin wrote in 1793 has been a common point of analysis. Here I want to return to that important moment in the first edition of *Political Justice* to examine a less frequently cited portion of that statement. Godwin writes:

Indeed, if there be such a thing as truth, it must infallibly be struck out by the collision of mind with mind. The restless activity of intellect will for a time be fertile in paradox and error; but these will be only diurnals, while the truths that occasionally spring up, like sturdy plants, will defy the rigour of season and

⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁶¹ Ibid., 121.

climate. In proportion as one reasoner compares his deductions with those of another, the weak places of his argument will be detected, the principles he too hastily adopted will be overthrown, and the judgements, in which his mind was exposed to no sinister influence, will be confirmed. All that is requisite in these discussions is unlimited speculation, and a sufficient variety of systems and opinions.⁶²

The act of conversation and debate is central in this collision of mind with mind, but it is equally important that each participant is, as Godwin writes, a “reasoner.” Reason and private judgment are given the final say in the determination of truth. This function of reason lays the foundation for a great deal of *Political Justice*. Philp sees this relationship as underpinning Godwin’s faith in progress in that “positive and permanent change is possible and that emancipation is not simply a matter of throwing off chains, but must involve a progressive unpicking of them through the exercise of *reason* and the development of *truth*.”⁶³ Though the revisions of *Political Justice* shifted numerous assumptions and conclusions, this belief in the power of reason makes it to the third edition of 1798 not only unscathed but even more powerfully stated. Godwin writes in the third edition, “Sound reasoning and truth, when adequately communicated, must always be victorious over error.”⁶⁴ Godwin’s new emphasis on feeling in the 1798 *Political Justice* is not meant to take the place of reason, but in addition to reason. This foundational assumption of the Dissenting disposition remains constant throughout Godwin’s writings of the 1790s, yet at the same time this complete faith in the power of reason has also been at the core of a longstanding belief by scholars that Godwin’s belief in reason was inherently unreasonable.

⁶² Godwin, *Political Justice* (1793), I: 21.

⁶³ Philp, “Godwin, Thelwall, and the Means of Progress,” 67. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁴ Godwin, *Political Justice* (1798), I: 86.

Contrasting Philp's assessment on Godwin's reason is a view of Godwin's reliance on reason as reason run amok. In the early twentieth century, the essayist John Churton Collins wrote of Godwin, "Reason seems to have had the same effect on him as mere enthusiasm has on other men," thereby bringing Godwin's reason into direct comparison to the unreasonable enthusiasm of the English Civil War era's more radical sects.⁶⁵ More recently, Don Locke goes so far as to title his important book on Godwin's life and thought *A Fantasy of Reason* (1980). Locke succinctly identified the relationship between truth and reason for Godwin: "Truth, therefore, will make us wise, virtuous, happy and free. But how are we to arrive at truth? Not through authority, much less through force, but only through reason, through each individual's exercise of his capacity to think and judge for himself."⁶⁶ However, the lengths to which Godwin took the power of reason were deemed fantasy by Locke: "Godwin's faith in human reason was unbounded. He even thought it possible, by sheer strength of argument, to halt in his tracks the assassin bent on murdering us."⁶⁷ This faith in the sheer strength of argument and the ability of the challenger to use reason to arrive at the correct truth makes perfect sense in the context of Godwin's experience at Hoxton Academy. For the Dissenting disposition, true knowledge is gained by unfettered debate and the application of an individual's reason. The utopian experience of the Dissenting academies, where this theory often operated unobstructed, gave Godwin and many other Dissenters a deep faith in the power of argument and reason to lead to truth. As he remained a Tory throughout his time at the more radical Hoxton, Godwin usually was the challenger. This gave him a unique position from which to observe the power of reason and argument in arriving at truth. He himself had been the adversary whose mind was changed

⁶⁵ John Churton Collins, "William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft," *The Posthumous Essays of John Churton Collins* (London: J.M Deni & Sons, 1912), 69.

⁶⁶ Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

through debate and private judgment, reasoning himself from a Tory to a Whig, a Sandemanian Calvinist to a Socinian to—through the process of writing *Political Justice* and exploring the doctrine of necessity—an atheist.⁶⁸ It was not simply his participation in the society of Dissenters in the late 1780s and early 1790s—who also shared the Dissenting disposition—that gave Godwin such faith in reason’s ability to arrive at truth and proper knowledge, as has been suggested by Fitzpatrick, Philp, and White.⁶⁹ Rather, thanks to his experiences as a child reading Doddridge and at Hoxton with Kippis, his personal experience of the Dissenting disposition’s ability to question assumptions in a search for truth helped him to later shake the foundation of Sandemanian Calvinism that Newton laid. By taking the Dissenting disposition that was at the core of the teachings at Hoxton and pursuing that route to truth during his time in London in the society of Rational Dissenters, Godwin found his way to political and religious conversion. In other words, though he may have left Hoxton still a Tory and a Calvinist, he also left Hoxton with a faith in the power of examining all sides of an issue, debating the merits of all the positions, and using one’s reason and private judgment to arrive at true knowledge. This faith in the Dissenting disposition laid the foundation for his conversion to Socinianism through his search for truth via the reading of Priestley, the effects of conversations within London’s circles of Dissenting intelligentsia, and the conversion to atheism during the writing, researching, and discussion of the 1793 edition of *Political Justice*.

This same unrestrained faith in the Dissenting disposition is what I identified in the second chapter as being central to the failure of the committee supporting the repeal of the Test

⁶⁸ For more on Godwin’s transition to atheism, see Marshall, *William Godwin*, 95-96.

⁶⁹ Both Fitzpatrick in “William Godwin and the Rational Dissenters” and Philp in *Godwin’s Political Justice* make such claims. Daniel White makes a similar claim, except revisited through the lens of public sphere studies: Daniel White, “Chapter 4 – Godwinian scenes and popular politics: Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and the legacies of Dissent,” *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87-118.

and Corporation Acts. For all the committee's political savvy in its coordinated campaign and use of a distribution network for its pamphlets, its faith in the power of a clear presentation of facts and argument meant that the committee had completely lost control of their message by 1790, having allowed others to reframe their campaign. The committee saw no need to push back against this re-framing because the truth would prevail once the members of Parliament applied their reason. The extremity of Godwin's faith in debate and reason was a product of his education and the Dissenting disposition, just as it was for the members of the committee who were nearly all trained in Dissenting academies. Indeed, the changes in Godwin's thought, especially in the 1790s, that have from time to time garnered him charges of apostasy can be better understood through the lens of the Dissenting disposition. The final two sections of this chapter will take a closer look at the Dissenting disposition manifested in *The Enquirer* as a specific text, as well as in the renewed charges of apostasy within Godwin studies.

An Examination of Godwin's Dissenting Disposition: *The Enquirer*

The shift in Godwin's approach from *Political Justice* to *The Enquirer* has been widely recognized by scholars as significant in Godwin's career and has been described in a variety of ways. As a topical move, Gary Handwerk writes, "Godwin's writings on education are in fact strikingly different from his early philosophical work."⁷⁰ As a move away from rationalism and toward sentiment, Mark Philp declares that "Godwin's rationalism ebbed and he endorsed a sentiment-based theory of moral judgment and moral motivation."⁷¹ In addition, Jon Klancher,

⁷⁰ Gary Handwerk, "'Awakening the Mind': William Godwin's *Enquirer*." *Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, eds. Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 106.

⁷¹ Mark Philp, "General Introduction," *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin, Vol. 1*, ed. Martin Fitzpatrick (London: William Pickering, 1993), 10.

Jon Mee, and Kristen Leaver see the shift as occurring in Godwin's varying forms of engagement with, or removal from, public and political discourse.⁷² Indeed, Godwin himself recognizes this shift in *The Enquirer's* "Preface." As a move from deduction to induction, Godwin describes his new approach as based more on induction, "an incessant recurrence to experiment and actual observation."⁷³ Recognizing this shift does not preclude claiming and recognizing *The Enquirer's* coherence with Godwin's previous works, and in this section I will show how *The Enquirer* continues to manifest Godwin's Dissenting disposition, both in the Preface and in a representative selection of essays.

The assumptions behind the Dissenting disposition are that in any search for truth, one must consider both sides of the debate, engage in conversation on the debate, and then use one's reason to make an informed decision. As I have shown in the previous section, Godwin's oft-quoted "collision of mind with mind," when the passage is extended, identifies the same route to truth as the Dissenting disposition:

[I]f there be such a thing as truth, it must infallibly be struck out by the collision of mind with mind... In proportion as one reasoner compares his deductions with those of another, the weak places of his argument will be detected, the principles he too hastily adopted will be overthrown, and the judgements, in which his mind was exposed to no sinister influence, will be confirmed.⁷⁴

The Dissenting disposition, despite Godwin's altered approach to argument, continues to be the route to truth in *The Enquirer*. Godwin writes in the Preface to *The Enquirer*,

⁷² Jon Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences: Knowledge and Cultural Institutions in the Romantic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 189. See also note 16 on page 265.

⁷³ William Godwin, *The Enquirer* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965), vi.

⁷⁴ Godwin, *Political Justice* (1793), I: 21.

The Essays are principally the result of conversations, some of them held many years ago, though the Essays have all been composed for the present occasion.

The author has always had a passion for colloquial discussion; and, in the various opportunities that have been afforded him in different scenes of life, the result seemed frequently to be fruitful both of amusement and instruction. There is a vivacity, and, if he may be permitted to say it, a richness, in the hints struck out in conversation, that are with difficulty attained in any other method.⁷⁵

Conversation is once again given a unique and powerful role in the attainment of truth.

Conversation here has the power to amuse and instruct in a way that is, at best, difficult to attain via any other method. Because Godwin's goal is truth, all sides of an issue must be considered.

Though stated quite clearly in the above quote from *Political Justice*, the same concept is rephrased in a somewhat more oblique manner in *The Enquirer*: "Truth was the object principally regarded; and the author endeavored to banish from his mind every modification of prepossession and prejudice."⁷⁶ To consider a single side of an issue would be to maintain "prepossession and prejudice" and is thus to be avoided. The primary difference between *Political Justice* and *The Enquirer*, at least as seen through the latter's Preface, seems to be Godwin's decreased emphasis on the "reasoner" and his "judgments." This difference appears to point to Philp's claim about the ebb of Godwin's rationalism.

Philp is correct that there is an ebb in the value that Godwin attaches to rationalism in *The Enquirer*, but it is important to note that this ebb is relative. Where *Political Justice* espoused a firm belief in humanity's innate rationality, *The Enquirer* takes into account emotions and motives that can contest rationality. However, the goal is still to be or become a fully

⁷⁵ Godwin, *Enquirer*, vii.

⁷⁶ Ibid., ix.

rational individual. We can see in essays throughout *The Enquirer* that Godwin consistently holds up the concept of the rational being as the ideal being. For example, in Essay IX, “Of the Communication of Knowledge,” Godwin identifies the intrinsic motives for the acquisition of knowledge as the absolute best:

To be governed by such motives is the pure and genuine condition of a rational being. By exercise it strengthens the judgment. It elevates us with a sense of independence. It causes a man to stand alone, and is the only method by which he can be rendered truly an individual, the creature, not of implicit faith, but of his own understanding.⁷⁷

Godwin goes on to claim that the cultivation of an intrinsic motive to learn should be the goal of education and that, although the end goal is not these intrinsic motives, their cultivation is a necessary step toward the cultivation of a rational being. This goal is expressed in a variety of ways throughout *The Enquirer*. In Essay I, “Of Awakening the Mind,” the cultivation of a rational being requires an education that teaches the child to “[l]earn to think, to discriminate, to remember and to enquire,” all of which are qualities also required by the Dissenting disposition.⁷⁸ In Essay XI, “Of Reasoning and Contention,” Godwin imagines an ideal relationship between parent and child where both are perfectly rational beings:

Let it be supposed that a parent, accustomed to exercise a high authority over his children, and to require from them the most uncontending submission, has recently been convinced of the impropriety of his conduct. He calls them together, and confesses his error. He has now discovered that they are rational beings as well as himself, that he ought to act the part of their friend, and not of their

⁷⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 6.

master; and he encourages them, when they differ in opinion with him as to the conduct they ought to pursue, to state their reasons, and proceed to a fair and equal examination of the subject.⁷⁹

In this mental experiment, I see a newly refined version of the Dissenting disposition. The failures and the violence of the French Revolution had proven to Godwin that the rationality he had assumed in *Political Justice* must be actively cultivated instead. Whereas *Political Justice* stemmed from “the most considerable French writers upon the nature of man” and the “ideas suggested by the French Revolution,” *The Enquirer* is his response to his own enthusiasm for the French Revolution and his subsequent disappointment both in the Revolution and in how it highlighted the limits of his own rationality, much less the direct participants of the Revolution.⁸⁰ Godwin’s goals had not changed, but he now took a different approach to those goals—specifically, recognizing the importance of education in establishing one’s foundational rationality. In this way, Godwin had enacted the Dissenting disposition in order to refine his own understanding of what was required in the search for truth.

Conclusion: William Godwin and the Charge of Apostasy

Apostasy is a principled, lonely diversion from the mainstream, and can therefore be felt to be courageous and good. But it is also the desertion of a position, or of a loyalty formerly held, and can therefore be felt to be a betrayal, a renunciation—at the very least a manifestation of inconsistency [*sic*] in one’s character.

– Charles Mahoney, *Romantics and Renegades*

Romantic studies have long had an interest in the accusations of political apostasy aimed at many prominent early Romantic writers, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey being the most

⁷⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁸⁰ Godwin, *Political Justice* (1793), I: viii.

common. The charges of Romantic apostasy began with Hazlitt's various critiques of the Lake School poets in "Illustrations of 'The Times' Newspaper: On Modern Apostates" in *The Examiner*, *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), and other writings.⁸¹ In modern scholarship, E. P. Thompson brought the issue of apostasy back to the forefront in his essay, "Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon."⁸² More recently, the charges, or defenses against the charges, of apostasy against the Lake School poets have been examined in Jerome Christensen's essays "Once an Apostate Always an Apostate" (1982) and "The Politics of Apostasy: Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Lake School Literary Conservatism" (1986), Philip Connell's "The Politics of Apostasy: Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Lake School Literary Conservatism" in *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of "Culture"* (2001), Charles Mahoney's *Romantics and Renegades: The Poetics of Political Reaction* (2003), and David M. Craig's *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy: Political Argument in Britain, 1780-1840* (2007). Though Godwin was for some time commonly charged with apostasy, those accusations faded after Mark Philp's publication of *Godwin's Political Justice* (1986). However, claims of Godwin's apostasy have been recently renewed, most visibly by Roland Weston.⁸³

The traditional version of the story of Godwin's apostasy goes something like this: the young, radical Godwin, author of *Political Justice* (1793), later turned conservative and went

⁸¹ Hazlitt's *Examiner* articles can be found in No. 466 (Dec. 1, 1816), 759-61; No. 467 (Dec. 8, 1816), 770; No. 468 (Dec. 16, 1816), 785-7; No. 469 (Dec. 22, 1816), 801-3; and No. 472 (Jan. 12, 1817), 26-8. For more on Hazlitt's accusations of apostasy aimed at the Lake School poets, see Charles Mahoney, "Introduction," *Romantics and Renegades: The Poetics of Political Reaction* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 1-12; Kevin Gilmartin, "Introduction," *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-46.

⁸² E. P. Thompson, "Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon," *Power and Consciousness*, eds. Conor Cruise O'Brien and William Dean Vanech (NY: New York University Press, 1969), 149-81.

⁸³ Roland Weston, "Radical Enlightenment and Antimodernism: The Apostasy of William Godwin," *Journal of the Study of Radicalism* 7.2 (2013): 1-30. See also, Ian Ward, "A Man of Feelings: William Godwin's Romantic Embrace," *Law and Literature* 17.1 (2005): 21-46.

against many of his former friends—like Thelwall—and against many of his former convictions, as seen in the revised editions of *Political Justice* in 1795 and 1798, the populism of *Caleb Williams* (1794), the shift away from revolution toward education in *The Enquirer* (1797), and his complete turn on domestic relations with his marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft (1797). Paul Hamilton implies it was Hazlitt in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) that originated the claim.⁸⁴ However, a closer look at Hazlitt's essay on Godwin reveals that, while Hazlitt is indeed chronicling Godwin's fall from the public eye, he does not make a charge of apostasy. In fact, in "On Paradox and Common-Place," first published in 1821, Hazlitt uses Godwin as an example of a French Revolution-era radical who *maintained* his principles while attacking the Lake Poets:

I myself remember several instances of this sort of unrestrained license of opinion and violent effervescence of sentiment in the first period of the French Revolution. Extremes meet: and the most furious anarchists have since become the most barefaced apostates. Among the foremost of these I might mention the present poet-laureate and some of his friends [Southey and his friends Wordsworth and Coleridge]. *The prose-writers on that side of the question, Mr. Godwin, Mr. Bentham, &c. have not turned around in this extraordinary manner: they seem to have felt their ground (however mistaken in some points), and have in general adhered to their first principles.*⁸⁵

Thus, it was not Hazlitt, who saw in Godwin a consistency of character and intellect, who originated the charge of political apostasy against Godwin.

⁸⁴ Hamilton, "Coleridge and Godwin in the 1790s," 43.

⁸⁵ William Hazlitt, "On Paradox and Common-Sense," *Table Talk; or, Original Essays* (London: John Warren, 1821), 359-60. Emphasis mine.

The earliest charge that I have found is from 1885 in Volume 2 of John Cordy Jeaffreson's *The Real Shelley* where he writes of "William Godwin's shameful act of apostasy from his own lovely doctrines, in making Mary Wollstonecraft his lawful wife at St. Pancras Church."⁸⁶ Wherever it may have originated—and it may be that the charge of apostasy does not originate in Godwin's lifetime—the charge of apostasy against Godwin was for a time a reference point for Godwin studies, but those accusations have been recently renewed. Roland Weston's article, "Radical Enlightenment and Antimodernism: The Apostasy of William Godwin," has made the boldest claims for Godwin's apostasy.⁸⁷ In this essay, Weston argues that Godwin's novel *St. Leon* (1799) represents Godwin's disillusionment and complete turn away from Reason and rationalism.⁸⁸

I argue that a better understanding of Godwin's Dissenting education, and his fidelity to the Dissenting disposition, ultimately offers a better account of Godwin's supposed apostasy by connecting why Godwin's positions on certain issues changed over time, not to an inconsistency of character, but a specific approach to determining the validity of knowledge. The advantage of

⁸⁶ John Cordy Jeaffreson, *The Real Shelley: New Views on the Poet's Life, Volume 2* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1885), 19.

⁸⁷ Roland Weston, "Radical Enlightenment and Antimodernism: The Apostasy of William Godwin," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 7.2 (2013): 1-30.

⁸⁸ There are significant issues with many aspects of Weston's article. Examples of such issues include: David Collings's argument in "The Romance of the Impossible: William Godwin in the Empty Place of Reason" *ELH* 70.3 (2003): 847-74, makes essentially the exact opposite argument of Weston's reading about *St. Leon*, but Collings's article is never mentioned, much less sufficiently addressed; Weston puts a great deal of importance on Godwin's Sandemanian Calvinism, citing his own essay "Politics, Passion and the 'Puritan Temper': Godwin's Critique of Enlightened Modernity," *Studies in Romanticism* 41.3 (2002): 445-70, but never addresses Maniquis's refutation of the that reading of Godwin's relationship to Sandemanianism in Maniquis, "Godwin's Calvinist Ghosts"; and Weston never addresses the fact that his thesis contradicts Godwin's statements in his other writings of that exact moment, as the writing of *St. Leon* immediately follows the publication of *The Enquirer* and Godwin's revisions of third edition of *Political Justice* (Marshall, *William Godwin*, 203).

this approach is that it addresses all of the charges of apostasy at once, instead of individually, by exposing a consistent cause behind Godwin's changes in position.

The issue is that Godwin has often been read as a rationalist due to the almost astonishing importance he puts on reason. This conception of Godwin as a rationalist seems to be the foundation of the charges of apostasy. The thinking goes: if his reason led him to a conclusion earlier, then a change of position on that same topic must be a manifestation of inconsistency. Weston goes even further by claiming that Godwin fully anti-reason and anti-modern. But no one charges an empiricist with apostasy if a new experiment or set of data changes that individual's mind on a certain topic. This is precisely how Godwin's changes in position should be viewed.

Whenever error is exposed, a new hypothesis or a new approach must be developed. In a similar way that it did for Priestley and Price, contemporary history could be seen as proof that certain philosophies, or aspects of philosophies, did or did not work in reality. The results of the French Revolution exposed an error in his earlier works that Godwin had to confront in his later works, hence the shift from revolutionary politics in 1793 to education in *The Enquirer* (1798), a shift that was not an abandoning of a prior goal, but a shift in how to achieve that goal. Similarly, Godwin's complete turn on domestic relations with his marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft (1797), where he experienced a form of domestic relationship that he had not previously thought possible, meant his views on the subject required rethinking and restatement. It is not apostasy; it is a change in position based on experience and reason. Godwin's ideas on how to achieve the betterment of society shifted throughout his life, but he remained constant to both the goals of progress and the Dissenting disposition.

Looking back at Hazlitt's portrait of Godwin in *The Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt understood the Dissenting disposition thanks to his education at Hackney New College under Priestley, Kippis, and others. This is why Hazlitt, despite some claims that the charges of apostasy against Godwin originated with Hazlitt, stood behind the consistency of Godwin in *The Spirit of the Age*. Hazlitt knew Godwin to be an experimenter, not the apostate that he perceived in Coleridge, Southey, or Wordsworth. Hazlitt wrote on Godwin,

...if it is admitted that Reason alone is not the sole and self-sufficient ground of morals, it is to Mr. Godwin that we are indebted for having settled the point. No one denied or distrusted this principle (before his time) as the absolute judge and interpreter in all questions of difficulty; and if this is no longer the case, it is because he has taken this principle, and followed it into its remotest consequences with more keenness of eye and steadiness of hand than any other expounder of ethics. His grand work is (at least) an *experimentum crucis* [crucial/critical experiment] to shew the weak sides and imperfections of human reason as the sole law of human action... This is the effect of all bold, original, and powerful thinking, that it either discovers the truth, or detects where error lies; and the only crime with which Mr. Godwin can be charged as a political and moral reasoner is, that he has displayed a more ardent spirit, and a more independent activity of thought than others...⁸⁹

Ultimately, then, Godwin was a philosophical and social experimenter, or, as Hazlitt saw him, an experimenter in ethics and the limits of reason. Once tested for error through debate and interpreted through his reason, new data demanded new conclusions. The formalized Dissenting

⁸⁹ Hazlitt, "William Godwin," 23-24.

disposition that came out of the Dissenting academies in the eighteenth century provided Godwin with a singular way of understanding social change and progress. Recognizing the Dissenting disposition as a foundation of Godwin's thought allows for a clearer picture of the underlying assumptions that produced both his most radical writings of the 1790s and his continuing revisions of the positions taken in those writings over the next few decades. Godwin was no apostate, but he was, as Hazlitt described him, "not one of those who do not grow wiser with opportunity and reflection: he changes his opinions, and changes them for the better."⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Ibid., 28.

Chapter 4

Coleridge's Year of Milton:

The Early Romantic Sonnet Revival, "The Eolian Harp," and Necessitarianism

Unlike nearly every other figure in this dissertation, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was not born into a Dissenting family, raised within a community of Dissenters, or educated at a Dissenting academy. Rather, he was educated first at Christ's Hospital and then at Jesus College, Cambridge. Coleridge's father was Reverend John Coleridge, vicar of St. Mary's Church, and his brother George, whom Coleridge once described as "father, brother, and every thing," became a clergyman in the Anglican Church.¹ Despite these familial ties to the Church of England, Coleridge became a Unitarian in 1793-94. The general consensus is that Coleridge first came into close contact with Unitarianism while at Cambridge through his friendship with William Frend, a Fellow at Jesus College. In the spring of 1793, Frend was on trial at Cambridge for his publication of a pamphlet that argued for the abolition of the Test and Corporation Acts and attacked the liturgy of the Church of England.² Coleridge was one of Frend's most conspicuous supporters during the trial.³ It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when one undergoes a religious conversion, but we know that by the end of 1794 Coleridge was declaring himself a follower of David Hartley's brand of necessitarianism. Hartley's *Observations on Man* was not

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Letter to Luke Coleridge, 12 May 1787," *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 1, 1785-1800*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 3.

² For more on Coleridge's time at Cambridge, see chapter 3 of Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (New York: Pantheon, 1989). See also Rosemary Ashton *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 33-44.

³ Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions*, 47-8.

only a standard text in Dissenting academies, but was especially popular amongst Unitarians like Joseph Priestley, who wrote, “I think myself more indebted to this one treatise, than to all the books I ever read beside; the scriptures excepted.”⁴ In becoming a necessitarian and a Unitarian, Coleridge entered an intellectual community of Dissenters where the Dissenting disposition was presumed to be the proper route to true understanding. Indeed, it seems that the freethinking ways of Dissent were part of what drew the young and rebellious Coleridge to Unitarianism. However, Coleridge’s identification with Dissent required him to consciously and deliberately overcome the inculcated and durable dispositions of his Anglican upbringing.

Coleridge’s writings during his time as a firm Unitarian, between 1794 and when he went to Germany and encountered German idealism in 1798-99, range widely from poetry to prose, lectures to periodicals, and even a few political tracts. These works reflect Coleridge’s new religious beliefs to varying degrees. As Daniel White has shown, the Bristol lectures of 1795, both the religious and the political lectures, are deeply indebted to Coleridge’s Unitarianism.⁵ Among the poetry that he wrote during this time, the poem most commonly associated with

⁴ Joseph Priestley, *An Examination of Dr. Reid’s “Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense,” Dr. Beattie’s “Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth,” and Dr. Oswald’s “Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion”* (London: J. Johnson, 1774), xix.

⁵ Daniel White, “‘Properer for a Sermon’: Coleridgean Ministries,” *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 119-51. White also looks to Bourdieu for terminology in his description of a Dissenting habitus; however, my aim is considerably different. White, in his chapter on Coleridge, is concerned with “Coleridge’s Socinian rejection of the ‘habitus’ of values, interests, manners, and beliefs that structured the Dissenting public sphere” (15). While I believe that the Dissenting disposition did to a certain extent structure how certain Dissenters approached the public sphere, as I examined in chapter two, White’s focus on the public sphere and my focus on education lead to us using Bourdieu’s terminology in divergent ways.

Coleridge's Unitarianism is "Religious Musings," written between 1794 and 1797.⁶ "Religious Musings," which is very nearly a hymn to Rational Dissent, positions Coleridge on sure footing with many Unitarian positions, including veneration of Hartley, Priestley, and Newton (lines 366-377), a belief in the slow and gradual improvement of humanity (lines 50-53), and the millenarian linking of the French Revolution as a signaling of the coming return of Christ and revelation (lines 309-322). "Religious Musings" is also of note because it is widely considered to be the most Miltonic of Coleridge's poetry—more specifically, an experiment in a Miltonic prophetic voice. "Religious Musings" not only opens with a clear reference to Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" and a quotation from Milton's *At a Solemn Music*, but Milton is also the first to be resurrected:

The SAVIOUR comes! While as the THOUSAND YEARS
Lead up there mystic dance, the DESERT shouts!
Old OCEAN claps his hands! The mighty Dead
Rise to new life, whoe'er from earlist time
With conscious zeal had urg'd Love's wondrous plan,
Coadjutors of God. To MILTON'S trump
The high Groves of the renovated Earth
Unbosom their glad echoes... (lines 359-66)

⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Religious Musings," *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Volume 16.1.1, ed. J.C.C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 171-91.

As Joseph Crawford points out, “Coleridge imagined that the French Revolution might usher in the Millennium” and “MILTON’s trump” could be interpreted either as Milton’s poetry or as Milton actually playing the trumpet that heralds the end times.⁷

Though the importance of Milton in “Religious Musings” is well known, the extent to which Milton was a major source of inspiration and influence for Coleridge during his Unitarian years is less widely acknowledged. The exception is Peter Kitson, who, relying primarily on the notebooks and the 1795 lectures, makes an argument for Milton as the “greatest single influence upon Coleridge” and continues that “Milton was important to Coleridge over and above such other influential figures as Hartley, Newton and Priestley.”⁸ In terms of poetry, Kitson makes his argument primarily through Coleridge’s “Religious Musings” and “The Destiny of Nations” by showing how Coleridge’s millenarianism resembles that of Milton’s as expressed in *Paradise Lost*, *Eikonoklastes*, and other prose tracts. Building on Kitson’s work, I will argue that Milton’s influence runs much deeper than has previously been thought and that it is not limited to a couple of poems, but rather extends to a large swath of Coleridge’s poetic output during his early years as a Unitarian. This intense period of engagement with Milton is important specifically because it coincides with Coleridge’s conversion to Unitarianism. Coleridge grappled with a new faith that questioned or overturned much of what he had been taught in his youth, while at the same time entering into a new community where the Dissenting disposition was something shared by nearly everyone else. In a very real sense, this made him an outsider within a small and tightly knit society. Coleridge attempted to find his way into the Dissenting disposition specifically, and

⁷ Joseph Crawford, *Raising Milton’s Ghost: John Milton and the Sublime of Terror in the Early Romantic Period* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 47-8.

⁸ Peter Kitson, “Coleridge, Milton and the Millennium,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 17 (1987): 63.

community more broadly, through an intense engagement with the writings of Milton. When this eventually failed, Coleridge left behind first Milton and then Unitarianism.

This chapter, then, will focus intensely on Coleridge's poetic writings during this brief Milton period and considers a set of works that have not previously been regarded as particularly important for understanding Coleridge's time as a Unitarian, namely, his sonnets and "The Eolian Harp." While the first two chapters examined large swaths of texts by numerous authors and the third chapter examined a single writer over decades, this chapter's extremely tight focus differs greatly from the previous chapters. Coleridge's relationship with the Dissenting disposition is fundamentally different than Godwin's. In contrast to Godwin's lifelong commitment to the Dissenting disposition as guiding principles for his literary, philosophical, and political writings, Coleridge engaged with the Dissenting disposition for only a decade and ultimately rejected it. The much smaller timeframe makes the tighter focus a practical matter on one level, but on another level Coleridge's primary mode of writing in the 1790s—poetry—invites the tighter level of scrutiny.

Since the literary scholar George Harper's publication of "Coleridge's Conversation Poems" in 1928, "The Eolian Harp" has been grouped with seven other poems that Coleridge wrote as few as two months or as many as twelve years later. Harper identified these poems as "Conversation poems" because they address a friend and share a common structure: "The poem begins with a quiet description of the surrounding scene and, after a superb flight of imagination, brings the mind back to the starting point, a pleasing device we may call the 'return'."⁹ M. H. Abrams built upon Harper's structural grouping by seeing in Coleridge's Conversation poems

⁹ George McLean Harper, "Coleridge's Conversation Poems," *Spirit of Delight* (London: E. Benn, 1928), 11.

the creation of the greater Romantic lyric, with “The Eolian Harp” as the first of this type.¹⁰

Other scholars have examined the philosophical, religious, and political dimensions of the Conversation poems.¹¹ Regardless of the analytic lens, “The Eolian Harp,” as the chronological first of the Conversation poems, has held a special importance for interpreting the subsequent poems and framing the series as a whole. My focus is the context of the poem’s production rather than the later Conversation poems that it is generally examined with. To that end, I will resituate “The Eolian Harp” and consider it in the company of its poetic predecessors and contemporaries instead of its heirs. While the formal and thematic groupings of the Conversation poems have led to many important insights, it has also removed some of these poems, especially “The Eolian Harp,” from the context of other poems that Coleridge was writing or had recently written and that did not follow the same address and structure as the Conversation poems. I posit that it is just as important to understand where “The Eolian Harp” came from as to understand where it was leading.

¹⁰ M. H. Abrams, “Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric,” *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, eds. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). Rpt. in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1970), 201-229.

¹¹ For example, see Frederick Burwick, “Coleridge’s Conversation Poems: Thinking the Thinker” *Romanticism* 14.2 (2008): 168-82; G. S. Morris, “Sound, Silence, and Voice in Meditation: Coleridge, Berkeley, and the Conversation Poems” *Christianity and Literature* 55.1 (2005): 51-71; Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988); Michael E. Holstein, “Poet into Priest: A Reading of Coleridge’s ‘Conversation Poems’” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 48 (1979): 200-25; Kelvin Everest, *Coleridge’s Secret Ministry: Context of the Conversation Poems* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979); Reeve Parker’s *Coleridge’s Meditative Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); Morris Dickstein, “Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the ‘Conversation Poems’” *The Centennial Review* 16.4 (1972): 367-83; Jill Rubenstein, “Sound and Silence in Coleridge’s Conversation Poems” *English: Journal of the English Association* 21.110 (1972): 54-60; and Ronald C. Wendling, “Dramatic Reconciliation in Coleridge’s Conversation Poems” *Papers on Language and Literature* 9 (1973): 145-60.

Before and during the composition of the short, blank verse “The Eolian Harp,” Coleridge was immersed in another poetic form: the sonnet. In this chapter, I argue that Coleridge’s brief but significant participation in the sonnet revival that occurred in the 1780s and 1790s provides important context for reassessing his relationship to Milton and Dissent. Prior to the publications of *Poems, on Various Subjects* in 1796, most of Coleridge’s published poetic work had been sonnets. The formal and thematic elements of the sonnet, which Coleridge was both experimenting with and reacting to, highlights aspects of “The Eolian Harp” that have been obscured by the general tendency to consider the poem in relation to other Conversation poems. This re-contextualization will require understanding the stylistic debate over sonnets from which Coleridge’s sonnets, and then “The Eolian Harp,” emerged. The sonnet legacies of Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Milton form the grounds for a debate over the rules and traditions of the sonnet by Charlotte Smith, Anna Seward, John Thelwall, Charles Lamb, Charles Lloyd, and Coleridge. This analysis will help us better understand important facets of Coleridge’s early poetic production and further clarify his participation in the sonnet revival of the late eighteenth century. What emerges from a close examination of Coleridge’s engagement with the sonnet revival is the key role that Milton played in his poetry of the mid-1790s. While Harold Bloom’s generation worked to articulate the importance of Milton to Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and Blake, Coleridge’s use of Milton is still not well understood and no work fully considers the central role of Milton in Coleridge’s early poetry.¹² As I will show, Milton’s poetry and influence are key to understanding both Coleridge’s relationship with necessitarianism—one of

¹² The importance of Milton’s influence on Coleridge’s prose during this period, though, has been well-documented by Peter Kitson in “Coleridge, Milton and the Millennium,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 17 (1987): 61-6. Kitson, however, really only strays into Coleridge’s poetry to discuss Milton’s importance to “Religious Musings” and does not discuss Coleridge’s sonnets or “The Eolian Harp.”

the central philosophies for many Unitarians—and “The Eolian Harp.” Ultimately, an analysis of “The Eolian Harp” read through Milton’s *Paradise Lost* reveals Coleridge’s speculation on the topic of creativity in the face of his shifting beliefs concerning necessitarianism and a demonic self-description of his role in his relationship with his wife, Sara Fricker—revealing a point of tension between the dispositional assumptions of Coleridge’s educational background and the Dissenting disposition of his fellow Unitarians.

Milton and the Early Romantic Sonnet Revival

SONNET. *n.s.* [*sonnet*, French; *sonnetto*, Italian.]

1. A short poem consisting of fourteen lines, of which the rhymes are adjusted by a particular rule. It is not very suitable to the English language, and has not been used by any man of eminence since *Milton*.

—Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)

This definition of the sonnet from Dr. Johnson expresses the general feeling toward the genre in England from the late seventeenth century through the 1780s when Charlotte Smith revived what was an essentially dead poetic form.¹³ While all six of the customary male-centered canon of Romantic poets wrote sonnets at some point, the Romantic sonnet as such was not given sustained critical attention until the 1980s, largely thanks to Stuart Curran’s *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986). Curran highlighted the sonnets of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats, of course, but the most long-standing critical effect of Curran’s exploration of the Romantic sonnet was to highlight the then much-ignored poetry of several women poets who have since entered the Romantic canon: Charlotte Smith, Anna Seward, and Mary Robinson

¹³ The posthumous publication of Thomas Grey’s “Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West” in 1775 also played an important role as an inspirational precursor to the revival. See Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 30.

amongst others.¹⁴ Curran's outline of the Romantic sonnet revival has since been thoroughly fleshed out.¹⁵ In this section, I provide a brief sketch of the early Romantic sonnet revival—focusing particularly on the disagreements over the proper structure of the sonnet and its increasingly politicized use, which many poets claimed was a Miltonic inheritance—in order to contextualize Coleridge's sonnet production in the 1790s.

At the core of the sonnet revival was a broad disagreement over the appropriate structure of a sonnet and an equally broad agreement about the appropriate themes of a sonnet. For most contemporary literary scholars, we tend to emphasize the thematic similarities between Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnets because both sonnet traditions focus on courtly and eroticized love. However, the late-eighteenth-century sonneteers abandoned the theme of courtly love and instead focused on the structural *differences* between Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnets. Their disagreement focused on differences in structural rhyme scheme, and their claims valued different aspects of the literary tradition. These aspects could be used to invoke different types of legitimacy—such as the length of the tradition, the national origin of the tradition, the

¹⁴ As Curran stated, the rebirth of the sonnet “coincides with the rise of a definable woman's literary movement and with the beginnings of Romanticism” (Curran 30). Curran edited the works of Charlotte Smith and helped spearhead the move to have her included in the Romantic canon, but to be clear, he did not single-handedly bring Charlotte Smith, Anna Seward, and Mary Robinson into the canon. The work of many feminist scholars gained the further inclusion of Romantic-era women poets into the canon, especially Anne Mellor's edited collection *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1988) and her monograph *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁵ For a more thorough overview of the Romantic sonnet revival, see Paula Feldman and Daniel Robinson, “Introduction” in *A Century of Sonnets: The Romantic-Era Revival, 1750-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-19. For further work on the Romantic sonnet revival, see: Daniel Robinson, “Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim” *European Romantic Review* 6.1 (1995): 98-127; Brent Raycroft, “From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom: Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet” *European Romantic Review* 9.3 (1998): 363-92; chapter eight of Paula Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005); and Mark Raymond, “The Romantic Sonnet Revival: Opening the Sonnet's Crypt” *Literature Compass* 4/3 (2007): 721-36.

most eminent practitioners of a sonnet form, and the perceived difficulty of a sonnet form—which female poets considered crucial to establishing themselves in the literary sphere.¹⁶

On the one hand, the Petrarchan, or Italian, sonnet represented the oldest sonnet tradition, having been initiated by Dante and formalized by Petrarch. It was in this structure, which consists of an octave followed by a sestet, that the sonnet first reached English shores. Traditionally, the octave presents a proposition and the sestet begins with a turn, known as the volta, which transitions from problem to resolution and ultimately confirms or overturns the proposition in the octave. The rhyme scheme is *abbaabba cdccdc*, and the lines are always end-stopped. On the other hand, the Shakespearean, or English, sonnet represented the national sonnet tradition that had developed in England. The most famous innovator of the English sonnet structure was Shakespeare, although Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, was its inventor. This sonnet structure consists of three quatrains followed by a rhyming couplet, usually *abab cdcd efef gg*. Although there was no formalized turn like the Petrarchan sonnet's volta, many English sonnets had a strong shift in tone or direction between the second and third quatrains.¹⁷

In the late eighteenth century, Milton was, as Samuel Johnson indicates, considered to be the most eminent English poet and consequently following his sonnet practices specifically also offered a potential means of legitimacy to those reviving the sonnet. However, Milton complicated the binary of the oldest sonnet tradition and the national English sonnet tradition by innovating in the Italian form. While he usually maintained the *abbaabba cdccdc* rhyme scheme, he tended to use enjambment rather than end-stopping—as became a common trait in the Romantic sonnets of Coleridge, Wordsworth, or Shelley. He also straddled the octave and the

¹⁶ Daniel Robinson's "Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim" (1995) is particularly good on the topic of legitimization.

¹⁷ Edmund Spenser created the alternate, and seldom used, rhyme scheme of *abab bcbc cdcd ee*.

sestet, using enjambment to connect them. By connecting the octave and sestet, he avoided the structural and rhetorical division that was typical of the Petrarchan sonnet by allowing the volta to often occur midway through the first line of the sestet. By claiming Milton as a poetic predecessor, some poets, like Anna Seward, attempted to connect themselves to both the oldest sonnet tradition and their own national tradition.¹⁸

To understand Coleridge's engagement with Milton and the sonnet tradition in the mid-1790s, we must understand the overall arc of the sonnet revival in order to see how his participation had both a political and literary meaning. The sonnet revival began with the publication of Charlotte Smith's 1784 collection *Elegiac Sonnets*. Smith favored a simpler, more natural language that stood in opposition to what she perceived as the highly artificial demands of the Italian sonnet structure, with its demanding rhyme scheme. Indeed, in her preface to the *Elegiac Sonnets* and in echo of Samuel Johnson's own commentary, she describes the Italian sonnet as "ill-calculated for our language." Although her avoidance of the Italian sonnet structure was not unusual, her embrace of the Shakespearean sonnet structure was unexpected because it was not generally respected and had fallen almost completely out of practice thanks to decades of major critics—including Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson—disparaging the structure as hackneyed and old fashioned.¹⁹ As her *Elegiac Sonnets* grew in popularity, so did the revival of the Shakespearean sonnet structure by poets like William Lisle Bowles, who was later claimed

¹⁸ For more on the literary tradition of the sonnet and its form, see Paula Feldman and Daniel Robinson, "Introduction" in *A Century of Sonnets: The Romantic-Era Revival, 1750-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-8. For more on Anna Seward and her use of Milton to connect her sonnets to specific literary traditions, see Claudia T. Kairoff, "Anna Seward and the Sonnet: Milton's Champion" *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830* 1.1 (2011): n. pag. Web. 20 August 2014; and Daniel Robinson, "Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim" *European Romantic Review* 6.1 (1995): 98-127.

¹⁹ An example of how out of favor Shakespeare's sonnets were in the late eighteenth century: George Stevens's 1793 edition of Shakespeare was widely praised by critics for omitting the sonnets (*A Century of Sonnets* 8).

by Coleridge as a poetic forebear and whose influence is accentuated in chapter one of the *Biographia Literaria*. Smith and Bowles emerged as and remained the most popular practitioners of the Shakespearean sonnet for the next two decades. By 1800, Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* was in its ninth edition and by 1805 Bowles' 1789 collection of Shakespearean sonnets achieved the same milestone.

Smith's work extended the sonnet revival not only through repopularizing the Shakespearean sonnet, but also in sparking a debate over the appropriate sonnet structure such that a number of poets embraced and published Italian sonnets in response to Smith and other Shakespearean sonneteers. Smith's chief opponent and the Italian sonnet structure's main proponent was Anna Seward, who had briefly been the preeminent woman poet in England and had been known as "Britannia's Muse." Some scholars have regarded Seward's antagonism toward the English sonnet structure generally and Charlotte Smith's work specifically as thinly veiled jealousy.²⁰ Claudia Thomas Kairoff's recent essay convincingly argues that Seward saw more at stake than her own literary reputation—namely, the larger issues of legitimizing women poets as members of the literary tradition and of determining the form, tone, and topics of future poetic work.²¹ Seward saw the Italian sonnet as much more difficult in its structure and rhyme scheme and, consequently, as a better means of proving a female poet's literary skill. On both sides of the disagreement over the superior sonnet structure, the arguments consistently linked

²⁰ For example, Stuart Curran writes, "...Anna Seward, who, for apparently no good reason but a sense of professional threat to her eminence, upbraided Smith for her formal lapses" (*Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 31).

²¹ Kairoff argues that beneath this formal argument was a debate over what shape the literary tradition should take moving forward. Anna Seward very much adhered to traditional poetic aesthetics, while Smith, from our later point of view, can be seen as a proto-Romantic who emphasized the solitary and melancholic aspects of poetry. See Claudia T. Kairoff, "Anna Seward and the Sonnet: Milton's Champion" *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830* 1.1 (2011): n. pag. Web. 20 August 2014.

structure and legitimacy. For example, in response to Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, Seward wrote two prefatory sonnets in 1788 for a collection of Henry Cary's sonnets. The first of these, "To Mr. Henry Cary, on the Publication of His Sonnets," addresses Smith's embrace of the Shakespearean structure instead of the Italian:

Praised be the poet, who the sonnet's claim,
Severest of the orders that belong
Distinct and separate to the Delphic Song,
Shall venerate, nor its appropriate name
Lawless assume. Peculiar is its frame,
From him derived, who shunned the city throng,
And warbled sweet they rocks and streams among,
Lonely Valclusa!—and that heir of fame,
Our greater Milton, hath, by many a lay
Formed on that arduous model, fully shown
The English verse may happily display
Those strict energetic measures, which alone
Deserve the name of sonnet, and convey
A grandeur, grace, and spirit, all their own.²²

In these lines, Seward identifies Milton's revised Petrarchan sonnet as the more fully English tradition against Shakespeare's. Milton's "alone / Deserve the name of sonnet" (lines 12-13). While this is a response to the resurgence of the Shakespearean sonnet structure begun by Smith, Seward's comment on "English verse" is a direct response to Smith's remark on the

²² Seward, *A Century of Sonnets*, 103.

inappropriateness of the English language in her preface to *Elegiac Sonnets*. Whereas Smith agreed with Johnson that the Italian sonnet was not suited to the English language, Seward averred that Milton has “fully shown / The English verse may happily display / Those strict energetic measures” (lines 10-12). Shortly after the publication of Henry Cary’s sonnet collection, including the above “To Mr. Henry Cary...”, Seward writes, in a letter to William Haley in January 1789, that her sonnet was indeed a direct response to Smith in attempting “to combat the doctrine, held out by Mrs Smith... that the legitimate sonnet is not suited to the genius of our language.”²³ For Seward, only the difficult Italian—or more specifically the Miltonic innovation on the Italian—sonnet structure was truly legitimate, whereas Smith’s Shakespearean sonnets were “hackneyed scraps of dismality” due to their simple rhyme scheme and structure of three quatrains and a couplet, as rhyme groupings of two or four lines was considered much easier than rhyme groupings of six or eight lines.²⁴

Though the Shakespearean sonnet remained the more popular structure over the following decade, opposition to it grew. In 1796, Mary Robinson published *Sappho and Phaon: In a Series of Legitimate Sonnets*, a popular sonnet sequence that attempted to advance Seward’s position concerning the proper and “legitimate” structure of the sonnet. Robinson wrote in her preface:

With this idea, I have ventured to compose the following collection; not presuming to offer them as imitations of *Petrarch*, but as specimens of that species of sonnet writing,

²³ Anna Seward, “Letter LIII: William Hayley, Esq,” *Letters of Anna Seward: Written between the Years 1784 and 1807, Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Printed by George Ramsay, 1811), 222-23.

²⁴ Seward, “Letter LXXI,” 2: 287.

so seldom attempted in the English language; though adopted by that sublime Bard,
whose Muse produced the grand epic *Paradise Lost*...²⁵

For both Robinson and Seward, the path to literary legitimacy was clear: sonnets in the style of Milton were valorized and to be imitated because Milton's structure allowed them to claim to be part of both the oldest and more difficult Italian sonnet tradition, while also positioning their works as part of an English tradition because they were following in the footsteps of the greatest English poet, Milton.²⁶ Smith, on the other hand, claimed her legitimacy through the national tradition in which Shakespeare worked.²⁷ Arguments over legitimacy and the disagreement over the proper form of the sonnet were at the heart of the sonnet revival in the 1780s and 1790s.

As sternly as the proper structure of the sonnet was argued over in the late-eighteenth-century sonnet revival, there was broad agreement on the appropriate themes for the sonnet. For centuries, both the Italian and English sonnet traditions had focused almost exclusively on the theme of eroticized and courtly love; in this respect, Shakespeare and his contemporaries had followed Petrarch's lead. For the Italian sonnet, Milton innovated not only the structure—enjambment, straddling the octave and the sestet—but also the theme: Milton's sonnets contain either deeply personal reflections (as in "On His Blindness") or political arguments. During the English Revolution and Interregnum, a period that included a tenure as the Secretary of Foreign Tongues to the Republic—he handled international correspondence, acted as censor, and

²⁵ Mary Robinson, "Preface," *Sappho and Phaon: In a Series of Legitimate Sonnets* (London: Printed by S. Gosnell, 1796), n.p.

²⁶ It is important to remember that in the 1780s, the greatest English poet and the greatest English dramatist were separate categories. This meant that Shakespeare could be considered the greatest English playwright at the same time that his poetry was often denigrated.

²⁷ Though the Shakespearean rhyme scheme was less complex, Smith created sonnet sequences instead of discrete poems, which was perceived as another type of challenge that could prove a poet's worth. Robinson's sequence *Sappho and Phaon*, then, was a sort of top trumps. Smith's sequences were difficult, but Robinson's sequence was more difficult as the sonnets were in a more complicated structure.

produced propaganda tracts—under Cromwell, Milton also “experimented with the sonnet as a poetic analogue to some of the political concerns he was addressing in prose tracts.”²⁸ For example, Milton’s “On the late Massacher in Piemont” condemned and called to justice the perpetrators of the slaughter of the Protestant Waldensians by Roman Catholic forces in April 1655: “Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones / Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;” (lines 1-2).²⁹ Milton also wrote sonnets to great men who he felt stood for liberty and against the Royalist cause: Sir Thomas Fairfax, Lord General of the Parliamentary Forces; Oliver Cromwell, eventual Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England; and Sir Henry Vane, member of the Interregnum English Council of State. Although the acceptable themes for a sonnet became expanded in both the English and the Italian forms by John Donne—who wrote religious sonnets—and Milton, it was Miltonic themes that rescued the sonnet for the eighteenth century and dominated the ensuing publications.

A sonnet in either Italian or English structure, when infused with the Miltonic themes of personal reflection and politics, resonated strongly with outsiders to the mainstream literary scene. As an abandoned form, the sonnet was open to their re-appropriation. In drawing on these Miltonic themes, poets could both invoke Milton’s authority and write on the topics most relevant to their own interests. When classifying the thematic content of early Romantic sonnets, most scholars have tended to use three categories: the love sonnet, the personal reflection, and the political poem. However, these generalized categories do not fully consider the political and

²⁸ Barbara K. Lewalski, “Contemporary History as Literary Subject: Milton’s Sonnets,” *Milton Quarterly* 47.4 (2013): 222. See also, Janel M. Mueller, “On Genesis in Genre: Milton’s Politicizing of the Sonnet in ‘Captain or Colonel’,” *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986): 213-40.

²⁹ For a particularly insightful reading of Milton’s “On the late Massacher in Piemont,” see Gordon Teskey, *The Poetry of Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 220-5.

cultural milieu in which late-eighteenth-century sonnets were produced. A sonnet on politics was obviously political in nature, but, in the era of Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft, the very act of publishing a personal reflection was a political act for a woman poet and—whether a personal reflection or love sonnet—could not be fully divorced from the political sphere. Furthermore, choosing Milton—the arch-literary Dissenter and defender of regicide—as a literary predecessor carried political associations as well, especially during a period in which the Restoration-era Test and Corporation Acts were being widely debated and the possibility of revolution in England loomed. The sonnets of Smith, Seward, and Robinson were as political as those of Thelwall, Coleridge, Southey, Lamb, and Lloyd.

Coleridge's Sonnets

As the prelude to understanding how Coleridge grappled with the Dissenting disposition in “The Eolian Harp,” we must first understand the influence of Milton, arguably an arch-Dissenter, on Coleridge’s earlier poetry. As I have shown, although the Miltonic structure—an innovation of the Italian—of the sonnet was a contested form, Miltonic thematic content was widespread across the revival. Some poets, like Anna Seward and Charlotte Smith, primarily turned to Miltonic thematic content in the form of the deeply personal reflection. Of course, this could also be construed as a political statement, as it often was for Smith whose personal reflections—either explicitly or implicitly—were commonly wrapped up in, and a critique of, the financial situation that the marriage and inheritance laws of England had placed her in as she struggled to support her children and her profligate husband through her writing. Other poets, especially those participating more explicitly in the radical politics of the time, also turned to the sonnet. For example, renowned political radical John Thelwall wrote sonnets. Thelwall’s the

most famous sonnet is “To Tyranny,” which was published in his 1795 collection *Poems Written in Close Confinement in the Tower and Newgate, under a Charge of High Treason*. While formally a mess—*abab cc dedfeggf*—the theme and style of “To Tyranny” draws inspiration from Milton’s sonnet 18, “On the late Massacre in Piedmont.”

In 1794, the same year that Coleridge converted to Unitarianism and formed the pantisocracy scheme with Robert Southey, he also took up the sonnet. However, Coleridge did more than just look to the general content of Milton’s political poems. In this section, I argue that Coleridge went through a brief “Milton period” that peaked from the fall of 1794 to the spring of 1795, then lingered through the fall of 1795 when he wrote “Effusion XXXV,” which he would later revise and retitle as “The Eolian Harp.” Although referencing Milton was common in the late-eighteenth-century, Coleridge was more actively studying, and at times even purposely imitating, Milton’s poetic oeuvre. According to the J. C. C. Mays, 16 of the 25 poems Coleridge wrote between October 1794 and October 1795 have strong connections to Milton’s poetry, including 12 sonnets that were directly inspired by Milton’s sonnets.³⁰ In general, however, scholars have followed the lead of Curran—who writes, “there is no question that Bowles inspired Coleridge’s interest in the sonnet”—in assuming that Coleridge was primarily indebted to Bowles during this period.³¹ Curran had reason to look to Bowles as Coleridge’s own words in later writings and publications expressed how Coleridge felt about the sonnet form and to whom he looked for influence. Scholarship on Coleridge’s sonnets has until now misidentified Bowles as the primary influence because Coleridge later claimed that was the case. For example, Daniel

³⁰ Other than the 25 poems of which Coleridge was sole author, Coleridge also co-authored 4 poems and did 4 partial re-writes of other work that he referred to as “adaptations.”

³¹ Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 34.

Robinson, a leading scholar of the Romantic Sonnet Revival, writes in “Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim” (1995):

Coleridge, after feeling the influence of Charlotte Smith and William Lisle Bowles, could no longer be satisfied with an artificial form, but saw in the sonnet great potential as the medium for a new kind of poetry. For this reason, he held Smith and Bowles as his models for sonnet writing over Petrarch and Milton...³²

In a later essay, Robinson states Coleridge’s relationship to Milton in even less uncertain terms: “Milton appears to have had little influence on Coleridge’s sonnet writing.”³³ Robinson follows up on this claim with a footnote: “Modiano rightly asserts that Wordsworth, not Milton, becomes ‘Coleridge’s feared competitor and rival,’ arguing that, in the *Biographia*, Coleridge uses Milton as a means for him to attach Wordsworth.”³⁴ Robinson, following Modiano, also cites the *Biographia* as a major piece of evidence for his reading of Bowles over Milton, but the *Biographia* was published two decades after Coleridge had written the majority of his sonnets. Though Bowles, and others including Smith and Shakespeare, was a poet that Coleridge did indeed look to, this study shows that Milton was, for a time, Coleridge’s primary influencer.³⁵ It was only in hindsight that Bowles came to the forefront. In arguing for Coleridge’s “Milton

³² Daniel Robinson, “Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnets Claim,” *European Romantic Review* 6.1 (1995): 98.

³³ Daniel Robinson, “‘Work Without Hope’: Anxiety and Embarrassment in Coleridge’s Sonnets,” *Studies in Romanticism* 39.1 (2000): 89-90.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁵ Even the Bowles citation at the end of “A Moral and Political Lecture” (1795)—Coleridge’s most commonly reprinted Bristol political lecture—is also a Milton reference as the final line Coleridge quotes is footnoted simply “Milton” in the original publication by Bowles, “Verses to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, on His Reflections on the Revolution in France” from *Sonnets, with Other Poems* (1794). See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “A Moral and Political Lecture,” *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 1: Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion*, eds. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 19.

period,” I show that Samuel Bowles was a secondary influence overshadowed by Milton’s towering presence, but Coleridge later worked hard to efface Milton’s impact on him, culminating in his major account of Bowles in 1817 in chapter one of the *Biographia Literaria*. Understanding the stylistic debates of the early Romantic sonnet revival helps to highlight both Coleridge’s shifting position within that debate and how his positions are tied to his relationship to Milton’s poetry.

It can be easy to forget that, before his 1796 collection *Poems* and even before he began lecturing in Bristol, Coleridge made his name as a sonneteer. Although he had had a handful of poems published prior to his “Sonnets on Eminent Characters,” these political sonnets garnered him his first real bit of national attention when they were published in December 1794 and January 1795 as a series in the *Morning Chronicle*.³⁶ These eleven sonnets, as Curran has pointed out, were directly modeled on a group of Milton’s sonnets that were written to important public figures and were intended to be political statements.³⁷ Included in Milton’s group were sonnets to political, military, intellectual, and artistic public individuals. The following table lays out Curran’s and my own analysis of the relationship between Milton’s model sonnets and Coleridge’s “Sonnets on Eminent Characters”:

³⁶ Coleridge’s published poetry prior to his “Sonnets on Eminent Characters” include a poem about the Irish lottery in the *Morning Chronicle* on November 7, 1793; a couple poems in the *Cambridge Intelligencer* in June 1794; and a few more poems published in Cambridge in September 1794.

³⁷ Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 35.

Coleridge's "Sonnets on Eminent Characters"	Milton's Model Sonnet or Sonnets ³⁸	Publication Date of Coleridge's Sonnet
To the Hon Mr Erskine	To Cromwell and To Sir Henry Vane	Dec. 1, 1794
To Burke	Methought I saw my late espoused Saint	Dec. 9, 1794
To Priestley	Methought I saw my late espoused Saint	Dec. 11, 1794
To Fayette	To Lord General Fairfax	Dec. 15, 1794
To Kosciusko	To Lord General Fairfax	Dec. 16, 1794
To Pitt	On the Forcers of Conscience	Dec. 23, 1794
To Bowles	To Mr. H. Lawes	Dec. 26, 1794
To Mrs Siddons	To Mr. H. Lawes	Dec. 29, 1794
To William Godwin	To Mr. H. Lawes	Jan. 10, 1795
To Robert Southey	To Mr. H. Lawes	Jan. 14, 1795
To Sheridan	To Cromwell and To Sir Henry Vane	Jan. 29, 1795
To Lord Stanhope	To Sir Henry Vane	Not Published in the <i>Morning Chronicle</i>

Figure 4.1: Coleridge's "Sonnets on Eminent Characters" and the Milton sonnets on which they are modeled. "To Lord Stanhope" was the only one not published in the *Morning Chronicle*, though it was later included in *Poems* (1796). "To Godwin" and "To Southey" are the only two of these eleven to not be published in *Poems*, where "To Pitt" is retitled as "To Mercy."

While a Shakespearean rhyme structure dominated Coleridge's "Sonnets on Eminent Characters," the imagery and themes of these sonnets was overwhelmingly Miltonic.³⁹ For example, J. C. C. Mays writes on Coleridge's sonnet "To Burke,"

The image used in the first four lines is based directly on Milton's sonnet "Methought I saw my late espoused Saint," and Milton's whole argument provides a counterpoint to C's, which describes Burke's opposition to the revolution in France as a thwarting of Freedom's yearning to embrace her son.⁴⁰

³⁸ Most of the model identifications in this column are from Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 35. The identifications for "To Godwin" and "To Stanhope" are my own.

³⁹ Of the twelve "Sonnets on Eminent Characters," three used a Miltonic rhyme scheme and nine used a Shakespearean rhyme scheme. However, as the table shows, all twelve were clearly inspired by Milton's political and personal sonnets.

⁴⁰ Mays, *CW*, 16.1:156.

Coleridge's "To Priestley," as a counterpoint to the sonnet addressed to Burke, also shows signs of similarity with "Methought I saw my late espoused Saint." Moreover, "To Sheridan" and "To Lord Stanhope" directly reference *Paradise Lost*.⁴¹ However, the most interesting allusion to Milton's non-sonnet poetry occurs in the sonnet "To Bowles." A thorough analysis of "To Bowles" in its original version printed in the *Morning Chronicle* not only shows a strong Miltonic influence, but also helps to trace how the poem changes both in content and context between 1794 and 1797, reflecting how Coleridge rewrote his past as his primary model shifted from Milton to Bowles.⁴²

Scholars have long identified Bowles as Coleridge's primary poetic influence in the 1790s because Coleridge did his work well. Coleridge worked hard to paper over Milton's centrality to his early poetry, displacing Milton with Bowles beginning in *Poems on Various Subjects* in 1796 all the way through to chapter one of *Biographia Literaria* in 1817. Central to this claim is Coleridge's sonnet "To Rev. W. L. Bowles," originally part of his "Sonnets on Eminent Characters" series. "To Bowles" has a Shakespearean rhyme structure, but the content of the sonnet is far closer to Milton's "To Mr. H. Lawes" than to any Shakespearean or contemporary English sonnet. Most scholarship on Coleridge's sonnet has cited this sonnet as part of the evidence for the role that Bowles played in shaping a young Coleridge's poetry. However, that claim is not based on the sonnet that appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1794, but on the 1796 and 1797 versions in the first two editions of *Poems*. In both of these editions of

⁴¹ Mays, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetical Works* 16.1:169, 192.

⁴² A further sign of Coleridge's rapidly changing feelings towards those he once considered important during this period is his shift in mood toward Godwin. In 1795, Coleridge admired Godwin thanks to *Political Justice* and he published "To Godwin," originally published as part of the "Sonnets on Eminent Characters" series in the *Morning Chronicle*. However, by the time it came to put together *Poems* (1796), Coleridge's enthusiasm for the writer had cooled; "To Godwin" was left out of the volume and never republished in Coleridge's lifetime.

Poems, Coleridge has moved “To Bowles” to make it the first sonnet in its grouping. In the 1796 *Poems*, “To Bowles” is the first sonnet in the Effusions; in 1797, it is the first poem in a section titled “Sonnet, Attempted in the Manner of the Rev. W. L. Bowles.” In addition, Coleridge describes his indebtedness to Bowles both in his brief essay that prefaces *Sonnets from Various Authors* (1796) and in chapter one of *Biographia Literaria* (1817). With this in mind, it is easy to see why scholars tend to look to Bowles as Coleridge’s primary sonneteer antecedent. For example, Brent Raycroft singles out the final couplet of “To Bowles” for emphasis because it compares Bowles’s poetic creation to God’s initial Creation: “The closing couplet recalls nothing less than the Creation, as Bowles’s soothing influence on Coleridge is likened to ‘that great Spirit, who with plastic sweep / Mov’d on the darkness of the unformed deep’.”⁴³ What Raycroft and most other scholars have missed is that the end of “To Bowles” is a very detailed reference to *Paradise Lost*. The exception is Susan J. Wolfson, who provides a reading of “To Bowles” that also focuses on the relationship to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in her book *Formal Changes: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (1997). However, in her chapter titled “The Formings of Similie: Coleridge’s ‘Comparing Power,’” Wolfson is interested in how Coleridge uses the Miltonic simile and not in considering the topic of poetic influence or—as I will later—Coleridge’s necessitarian philosophy.⁴⁴ While it can be said that Milton’s *Paradise Lost* likely influenced everything written about Creation in the eighteenth century in some way, the references to it in “To Bowles” are specific and complex.

In “To Bowles,” Coleridge’s description of how Creation works is a highly specific allusion to *Paradise Lost* in both the relationship of the Creator to Creation and linguistically

⁴³ “From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom: Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet.” *European Romantic Review* 9.3 (1998): 367.

⁴⁴ Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Changes: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 81-2.

through specific word choices. I begin by examining the sonnet's conceptual link to *Paradise Lost*. In both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the orthodox Christian view of Creation was that God created *ex nihilo*—i.e., from nothing. While not nearly as well-known as Milton's Arminianism or his Arianism, Milton's rather Gnostic belief in matter pre-existing creation (*creatio ex materia*) is one of the other heretical Christian positions that *Paradise Lost* espouses.⁴⁵ In *Paradise Lost*, Chaos and Night are the realms of unformed chaotic matter and God's act of Creation lies in organizing this matter and giving it form (*creatio ex materia*). In "To Bowles," the relationship between Creator and Creation is the same—i.e., Bowles's creation (his poetry) is compared to "that great Spirit, who with plastic sweep / mov'd on the darkness of the formless Deep!" (lines 13-14). In this configuration, Bowles, like the "great Spirit," creates from preexisting matter and gives this matter form—specifically, sonnet form. The *creatio ex materia* view of Creation in the late eighteenth century, even for a Unitarian, was still exceptionally unorthodox as the vast majority of Christian churches had subscribed to *creatio ex nihilo* for the previous millennium.

⁴⁵ Milton's Arminianism shows as his belief in free will and against Calvinist predestination. Milton's Arianism is demonstrated by his anti-trinitarian stance that Christ is not eternal and is in the actual son of God (created by God).

<p>“To the Rev. W. L. Bowles” as originally published in the <i>Morning Chronicle</i> on 26 Dec. 1794.</p> <p>My heart has thank’d thee, BOWLES! for those soft strains, That, on the still air floating, tremblingly Wak’d in my Fancy, Love, and Sympathy! For hence, not callous to a Brother’s pains, [4]</p> <p>Thro’ Youth’s gay prime and thornless paths I went; And, when the <i>darker</i> day of life began, And I did roam; a thought-bewilder’d man! Thy kindred Lays an healing solace lent, [8]</p> <p>Each lonely pang, with dreamy joys combin’d, And stole from vain REGRET her scorpion stings; While shadowy PLEASURE, with mysterious wings(1), Brooded(2) the wavy(3) and tumultuous(4) mind, [12]</p> <p>Like that great Spirit, who with plastic sweep Mov’d on the darkness(4) of the formless(5) Deep(6)! [14]</p>	<p><i>Paradise Lost</i>, Book 1, lines 17-22.</p> <p>And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer Before all Temples th’ upright heart and pure, Instruct me, for Thou know’st; Thou from the first Wast present, and with mighty wings(1) outspread[20] Dove-like satst brooding(2) on the vast Abyss (4) And mad’st it pregnant...</p> <p><i>Paradise Lost</i>, Book 7, lines 216-42:</p> <p>Silence, ye troubl’d waves(3), and thou Deep(6), peace, Said then th’ Omnific Word, your discord end:</p> <p>Nor staid, but on the Wings of Cherubim Uplifted, in Paternal Glorie rode Farr into Chaos(4), and the World unborn; [220] For Chaos(4) heard his voice: him all his Train Follow’d in bright procession to behold Creation, and the wonders of his might. Then staid the fervid Wheelles, and in his hand He took the golden Compasses, prepar’d [225] In Gods Eternal store, to circumscribe This Universe, and all created things: One foot he center’d, and the other turn’d Round through the vast profunditie obscure, And said, thus farr extend, thus farr thy bounds, [230] This be thy just Circumference, O World. Thus God the Heav’n created, thus the Earth, Matter unform’d(5) and void: Darkness(4) profound Cover’d th’ Abyss(4): but on the wat’rie calme His brooding(2) wings(1) the Spirit of God outspred, [235] And vital vertue infus’d, and vital warmth Throughout the fluid Mass...</p>
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Figure 4.2: Coleridge’s sonnet “To the Rev. W. L. Bowles” and excerpts from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Please note the bolded numbers next to the greyed text from each poem to see the corresponding linguistic choices.

Not only are there linguistic similarities between *Paradise Lost* and “To Bowles,” but also these likenesses invoke specific passages from *Paradise Lost* that focus on the relationship between the Creator and Creation. (See Figure 4.2.) There are three portions of *Paradise Lost* that are evoked in “To Bowles,” all of which deal with God’s Creation from pre-existing matter. First is the Dove-as-Creator metaphor from the beginning of Book 1. In the opening invocation of *Paradise Lost*, Milton compares God’s act of Creation to that of a bird nesting and creating

life: “Thou from the first / Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread / Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss / and mad’st it pregnant...” (1.19-22). As Figure 4.2 helps to highlight, Coleridge in “To Bowles” repeats this avian-creator metaphor. In the third quatrain, “shadowy PLEASURE” reads as the official subject that “with mysterious wings / Brooded the wavy and tumultuous mind,” but Bowles himself, or his imagination, is the implied subject as well. This double-subject acts, or broods, upon the “wavy and tumultuous mind” in Coleridge’s sonnet. In *Paradise Lost*, “tumultuous” is a term often used in association with pre-existing matter; in Book 1 this is the “vast Abyss,” but in Book 2 uncreated matter is dark Chaos and associated with “tumultuous” and its root “tumult” (2.936, 2.966, 2.1040).⁴⁶ While Book 2 gives the most thorough description of Chaos, Book 7 provides the most detailed description of Creation. In *Paradise Lost*, Chaos is instructed to “Silence, ye troubl’d waves, and thou Deep” (line 216) thus further connecting the “wavy and tumultuous mind” of Coleridge’s sonnet to Milton’s conception of pre-existing matter. God the Son then uses his famous “golden Compasses” to circumscribe our Universe, creating Earth from “Matter uniform’d and void: Darkness profound” (line 233), after which the Spirit of God as the image of a brooding bird is repeated. Coleridge duplicates this description of Creation by having his “great Spirit” move “on the darkness and the formless Deep!” (13-14). In both *Paradise Lost* and “To Bowles,” the uniform’d/formless matter of tumultuous and dark Chaos/Deep/Abyss is acted upon/organized/mov’d by the great creating Spirit. For Coleridge in 1794, his highest praise for Bowles the poet-creator could only be expressed through a positive comparison to Milton’s

⁴⁶ Also occurring in Book 2, Satan confronts his children Sin and Death. While in Coleridge’s sonnet, Bowles steals “from vain REGRET her scorpion stings,” in *Paradise Lost* it is Death, rather than Regret, who carries “a whip of scorpions” (II.701)

representation of God the Creator and through linking the act of writing poetry to Milton's description of God's act of Creation.

Although the sonnet dominated Coleridge's poetic output over the brief Milton period that I am proposing between October 1794 and October 1795, it was not the only form of poetry that he was experimenting with. Before beginning the "Sonnets on Eminent Characters," Coleridge wrote "Lines on a Friend, Who Died of a Frenzy Fever, Induced by Calumnious Reports," which is a standard series of couplets with a clear reference to Ithuriel and his spear of truth from *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁷ After Coleridge had published his eleven "Eminent" sonnets, he began the poem on which he would claim to hang his entire reputation as a poet.⁴⁸ In *Religious Musings*, Coleridge also experimented with the Miltonic prophetic voice and blank verse, as well as an opening to the poem with links to Milton's "on the Morning of Christ's Nativity."⁴⁹ Around the same time that Coleridge wrote his initial version of "The Eolian Harp," he also wrote "The Nightingale," which quotes directly from Milton's *Il Penseroso* (line 17). Overall, a staggering two-thirds of the 25 solo-written poems that Coleridge wrote between October 1794 and October 1795 were indisputably influenced by Milton.

Although Coleridge had written most of the sonnets he would ever write by October 1795, most scholars look to Coleridge's own words in later writings and publications to determine how Coleridge felt about the sonnet form and to whom he looked for influence.

⁴⁷ Line 4 of "Lines on a Friend, Who Died of a Frenzy Fever, Induced by Calumnious Reports" references Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, lines 810-822.

⁴⁸ Coleridge made this claim via letters to Benjamin Flower, Thomas Poole, and John Thelwall: *CW: Poems*, 16.1.173.

⁴⁹ For more on the links between *Religious Musings* and Milton, see: Peter Kitson, "Coleridge, Milton and the Millennium," *The Wordsworth Circle* 17 (1987): 61-6; H. W. Piper, *The Singing of Mount Abora: Coleridge's Use of Biblical Imagery and Natural Symbolism in Poetry and Philosophy* (London: Associated University Press, 1987); Ian Wylie, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Paul Magnuson's *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Scholarship on Coleridge's sonnets has until now misidentified Bowles as the primary influence because Coleridge later claimed that was the case. But it did not take Coleridge until the *Biographia* to begin revising his sonnet writing history. A brief examination of Coleridge's publications of 1796 and 1797 will show how the influence of Milton was diminished in favor of Bowles.

The sonnet "To the Rev. W. L. Bowles" originally appeared seventh in the "Sonnets on Eminent Characters" series, though Coleridge moved him to the first position in the Effusions of the 1796 *Poems*, right after an epigraph containing a quotation from Bowles. As "Effusion XXXV" is the most famous of Coleridge's Effusions—later becoming "The Eolian Harp"—it can be easy to gloss over the fact that the majority of the Effusions were sonnets.⁵⁰ Coleridge chose to re-title his "Sonnets on Eminent Characters" as Effusions because "the title 'Sonnet' might have reminded my reader of the Poems of Rev. W. L. Bowles—a comparison with whom would have sunk me below that mediocrity, on the surface of which I am at present enabled to float."⁵¹ Perhaps it goes without saying that if Coleridge was uncomfortable with having his sonnets compared to those of Bowles, he certainly would not have wanted to invite a comparison to Milton, who was widely accepted to have been the greatest English sonneteer. Nonetheless, I believe that much more is going on than merely an "anxiety of influence."⁵² The Effusions epigraph from Bowles helps to signal a shift in how Coleridge was thinking about his sonnets

⁵⁰ *Poems* (1796) included 36 poems titled Effusions. The first 20 are strict sonnets, while two more can be seen as experiments originating with the sonnet form: "Effusion 21" is a sonnet with an extra couplet tacked on at the end and "Effusion 24: In the Manner of Spenser"—though much longer than a sonnet—is formally based on Spenser's complicated sonnet rhyme scheme.

⁵¹ Coleridge, *Poems* (1796), x.

⁵² This is, of course, a reference to Harold Bloom who examined the power of poetic influence working on Coleridge first in "Coleridge: The Anxiety of Influence," *Diacritics* 2.1 (1972): 36-41; and then in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973). Although I do see Coleridge struggling with the influence of other poets, I do not agree with Bloom that it was a process of misprision.

and poetry in general. When part of a series of “Sonnets on Eminent Characters,” Coleridge’s sonnets had an overtly Miltonic feel to them. In the 1796 *Poems*, these sonnets are recast as Effusions and are prefaced by the following Bowles epigraph:

Content, as random Fancies might inspire,
If his weak harp at times or lonely lyre
He struck with desultory hand, and drew
Some soften’d tones to Nature not untrue.

Bowles. (n.p.)

The link this epigraph is encouraging is fairly obviously to “Effusion XXXV,” which Coleridge would re-title “The Eolian Harp” in 1797. Where as Bowles’s “weak harp” or “lonely lyre” is “struck with desultory hand, Coleridge’s “simplest Lute” is “caress’d” by a “desultory breeze.” Instead of a focus on the political sonnets, the Effusions are framed from the beginning as an encounter with Bowles and his harp. I will return to this epigraph later in the chapter while examining “The Eolian Harp.”⁵³

⁵³ There is also another poem at play here, as J. Douglas Kneale has argued: Milton’s “Lycidas.” Kneale argues that Milton’s “Lycidas” is intertextually present in “Effusion XXXV,” specifically in the same passage that links the poem to the Bowles epigraph. On the similarities between “Effusion XXXV” and Milton’s “Lycidas,” Kneale writes:

The similarities in diction and phrasing between these lines and those from ‘The Eolian Harp’ are unmistakable. Milton’s command to the muses to ‘begin and somewhat loudly sweep the string’ of the poetic harp becomes a fiat accompli in Coleridge: ‘its strings / Boldlier swept,’ Coleridge’s lute yields up its music. And in both poems this yielding up by a harp that is more loudly or more boldly played transforms a coyness already asserted in the texts: Milton’s ‘coy excuse,’ or affected modesty, for sweeping the harp so timidly, and Coleridge’s ‘coy maid,’ who is usually read as a trope for the timidly played lute itself. (138-9)

As with his 1794 sonnet “To Bowles” and its careful relationship with *Paradise Lost*, Coleridge’s act of poetic creativity and his appreciation of Bowles’s poetry is inescapably tied up with the poetry of Milton. What at first pass appears to be an act of eliding Milton’s influence on his “Sonnets on Eminent Characters” in favor of Bowles’s influence on his Effusions, actually reveals Coleridge’s extent to which Milton was present when he wrote “Effusion XXXV.”

While *Poems* (1796) worked diligently to highlight the importance of Bowles, Coleridge's next publication went even further to place Bowles as central to Coleridge's poetic output of the time. In the fall of 1796, Coleridge produced what has traditionally been described as a small pamphlet, but was more accurately a short anthology, titled *Sonnets from Various Authors*. Only about forty copies of this short anthology were produced and they were given to friends and acquaintances. Coleridge was very clear on the purpose of this anthology: "I have selected the following sonnets from various authors for the purpose of binding them up with the sonnets of the reverend W. L. Bowles."⁵⁴ Coleridge sought to have his short anthology bound into a single book with an upcoming collection of new poetry from Bowles. Coleridge compiled and edited this collection, which included poems by himself, Lamb, Lloyd, Southey, Smith, Seward, Bowles, and others. The anthology begins with a brief essay by Coleridge on the sonnet form in which he singles out Charlotte Smith and Bowles for praise, as "they are who first made the Sonnet popular among the present English."⁵⁵ This signal to the importance of Bowles is, along with chapter one of the *Biographia*, a major part of the evidence used to support identifying Bowles as young Coleridge's prime influence, especially in the realm of the sonnet, despite the fact that this is written after Coleridge has already written most of the sonnets he would ever write.

In 1797, Coleridge published a second edition of *Poems* with significant alterations. No longer titled *Effusions*, the epigraph to Bowles is now replaced with the title "Sonnets, Attempted in the Manner of the Rev. W. L. Bowles." This new title is followed by the brief essay "Introduction to the Sonnets," and then "To Bowles" is once again placed first and titled "Sonnet

⁵⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Sonnets from Various Authors* (1796), in *Coleridge's "Sonnets from Various Authors,"* ed. Paul M. Zall (Glendale, CA: La Siesta Press, 1968), 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

I.” It seems clear Coleridge was re-writing his sonnet past in order to bring Bowles to the forefront and obscure the influence that Milton had earlier in his career. Coleridge even went so far as to re-write portions of “To Bowles” to obscure the allusions to *Paradise Lost*. Small changes were made throughout the poem, but the final couplet that contains the most obvious and direct allusions to Creation in *Paradise Lost* is completely replaced. The original final couplet “Like that great Spirit, who with plastic sweep / Mov’d on the darkness of the formless Deep!” was replaced with: “As made the soul enamor’d of her woe: / No common praise, dear Bard! to thee I owe!” With this alteration, Coleridge significantly diminished the role that Milton played in Coleridge’s early poetry in favor of Bowles, the reason for which I will analyze later in this chapter.

As happens often, scholars have tended to believe what Coleridge has written *about* his poetry, often decades later, instead of closely reading the poetry itself. For example, in a brief essay on the sonnet written in the fall of 1796, Coleridge wrote, “It is confined to fourteen lines... it may as well be fourteen as any other number... Custom is a sufficient reason for it... Rhymes, many or few, or no rhymes at all—whatever the chastity of [the writer’s] ear may prefer.”⁵⁶ David Erdman uses this quote to justify the claim that “From the beginning Coleridge had no respect for the special prosodic structure of the sonnet.”⁵⁷ Though Coleridge does experiment with a variety of sonnet structures and rhyme schemes, even varying from the fourteen-line rule a couple times, his “Sonnets on Eminent Characters” and the other sonnets published as Effusions in *Poems* (1796) all showed careful respect for “the special prosodic structure of the sonnet.” By the time that Coleridge wrote this statement about the sonnet in the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁷ David V. Erdman, “Coleridge as Nehemiah Higginbottom,” *Modern Language Notes* 73 (1958): 571.

fall of 1796, he had already written the majority of the sonnets he would write over his entire career and had begun to move away from both the sonnet form and his primary influence during that period, Milton. Curran and Robinson have also continued the trend of citing Coleridge's later writings as evidence to support claims about his early sonnets. Yet Coleridge was an untrustworthy narrator of his own biography, a claim well-supported in Nicholas Roe's "Coleridge and John Thelwall: The Road to Nether Stowey."⁵⁸ By 1796, Coleridge was re-writing his poetic history to excise Milton and highlight Bowles, a process that would continue all the way into the *Biographia Literaria* in 1817. However, before he would turn away from Milton, Coleridge would begin his experiment in the blank verse, meditative, and loco-descriptive poem, or, as Abrams termed it, the greater Romantic lyric.

Jerome McGann, in his *Poetics of Sensibility*, writes that, in the earlier drafts, Coleridge sought to represent the experience of sensibility in "The Eolian Harp" and that "his purpose is clearly defined in the work's initial textual condition, when the poem was cast in a generic form that had not yet evolved into a conversation poem proper."⁵⁹ Though McGann does not examine Coleridge's sonnets and their link to "The Eolian Harp," a link can easily be found. If "The Eolian Harp" originated, as McGann claims, as poem about the experience of sensibility, it makes sense that it shares the label Effusion with a great many sonnets. The early Romantic sonnet revival, which Coleridge had been participating in, was dominated by poets that we would now call poets of sensibility: Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams, Mary Robinson, William Lisle Bowles, and others. As "The Eolian Harp" evolved into the Conversation poem we now

⁵⁸ Nicholas Roe, "Coleridge and John Thelwall: The Road to Nether Stowey," *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, eds. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 60-80.

⁵⁹ Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 19-20.

know, McGann argues that it also “evolved a critique of its initial enactment: a critique of the ideas of sensibility and, more crucially, of the poetic practice (the effusion) licensed by those ideas.”⁶⁰ While I agree with this claim, it is also only part of the story. Coleridge’s participation in the sonnet revival tells the story of how he came to write the Effusions of 1796 and links his early sonnets to “Effusion XXXV,” the earliest published version of “The Eolian Harp.” Another key part of the story missing from McGann’s account is the central role that the poetry of John Milton plays in Coleridge’s evolving critique, including *Paradise Lost* and Milton’s sonnets.

“The Eolian Harp,” *Paradise Lost*, and Poetic Creativity

I began this chapter by claiming that “The Eolian Harp” should be read not only in the context of the Conversation poems that followed it, but also in the context of the poems that preceded it and were written around the same time. My analysis of Coleridge’s poetry before and up to his writing of “The Eolian Harp” has revealed a brief commitment to the sonnet and an ongoing engagement with the poetry of Milton. “The Eolian Harp” is a continuation of this engagement. In this section, I begin by considering the intertwined importance of the influence of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, evolving notions of creativity, and the significance of necessitarianism, a central philosophy for many Unitarians, for Coleridge. I argue that reading “The Eolian Harp” with *Paradise Lost* as a key point of reference highlights an aspect of Coleridge’s engagement with the literary tradition that has previously been overlooked. The single reference to *Paradise Lost* that has long been recognized near the beginning of the poem, concerning jasmine and myrtle, is not a chance encounter with the poet considered throughout the eighteenth century to be England’s greatest. Rather, this encounter with *Paradise Lost*

⁶⁰ McGann, *Poetics of Sensibility*, 20.

continues Coleridge's year-long preoccupation with the poetry of Milton. As I have already shown, Milton provided a model for political sonnet writing during this period. In this section, I focus on two specific ways that this preoccupation with Milton's poetry is essential to understanding the "The Eolian Harp." The meditative flight is a contemplation on creativity, and the conversation with Sara enacted in the poem is a commentary on how Coleridge viewed their relationship; both of these are expressed through an engagement with *Paradise Lost*.

As I will show in this section, Milton was a role model, both in his content and in his eminence as a poet, for Coleridge as the latter struggled to find and articulate a conception of how poetic creativity works—a concept that he would wrestle with throughout his literary career and that would culminate in his theory of imagination and fancy in the *Biographia Literaria*. In these early works—while still a firm Unitarian and necessitarian, and before his encounter with German idealism⁶¹—it is Milton's *Paradise Lost* that Coleridge used as a key reference point for working out a theory of creativity. I am using the term "creativity" in part because I do not want to confuse this early thought on the subject with his later work on "imagination" and "fancy," but also because Creation is central to how Coleridge thinks through the issue in these poems. Because Coleridge was a strong devotee of philosophical necessity in 1794, his struggles with conceptualizing creativity came from a standpoint where free will was complex, contested, and arguably limited. If free will is limited, how could there be creativity? I trace this struggle in his Miltonic period through "To Bowles" and the earliest versions of "The Eolian Harp," which are

⁶¹ The best resource for determining Coleridge's religious affiliations is still H. W. Piper's "Coleridge and the Unitarian Consensus" from *The Coleridge Connection* (1990). Coleridge was a firm Unitarian from at least 1794, perhaps even into 1793, until 1799. From 1800 through 1805 Coleridge was, as he put it, a "negative Unitarian" or a sort of Unitarian by default as he disagreed with much of Unitarianism's doctrines but it was still the closest to what he believed. In 1805, while in Malta, Coleridge fully gives up on Unitarianism and returns to the Church of England.

the two poems from this period most focused on the process of poetic creation. At the beginning of this period, Coleridge was closely aligned with Creation as described in *Paradise Lost*, as I have shown in the previous section. By the end of this period, when he wrote and revised “The Eolian Harp,” Coleridge had gone back to “To Bowles” and revised the relationship between creator and created as he wrestled with the issue of creativity in a world of inescapable, necessary determination.

Understanding Coleridge’s exploration of creativity in the mid-1790s requires also understanding his relationship to the then-popular Dissenting philosophy of necessity. Coleridge’s Unitarianism and his relationship with necessitarianism were inextricably intertwined, as though they were two sides of a coin. In other words, Coleridge’s acceptance, and eventual disavowal, of philosophical necessitarianism mirrors his acceptance and disavowal of Unitarianism. Ultimately, I believe that understanding the conflict between Coleridge’s consciously chosen Dissenting disposition and the disposition of his Anglican upbringing can contribute to the scholarship on Coleridge’s poetry and biography.

In a letter to Southey dated December 11, 1794—written shortly after “To Bowles”—Coleridge writes, “I am a compleat Necessitarian—and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself.”⁶² A month later Coleridge published a sonnet to Godwin in the *Morning Chronicle*. For this reason, and because Godwin is likely the most well-known necessitarian for literary scholars, some have read Coleridge’s necessitarianism through the lens of Godwin and *Political Justice*. The influential necessitarians for Coleridge were originally Godwin, Priestley, and Hartley, each with a different view of the specifics of necessitarianism. While initially attracted to Godwin and his writings, Coleridge quickly became disenchanted with Godwin, to

⁶² Coleridge, *Letters*, 1: 137.

the point that the sonnet “To Godwin” was never reprinted in Coleridge’s lifetime after its initial publication in the *Morning Chronicle*. In the specific realm of necessitarianism, Godwin’s writings were not based firmly in Christianity the way that Priestley’s and Hartley’s writings were, even going so far as to attack popular Dissenting beliefs such as Arminianism, the position that stood against predestination in favor of free will.⁶³

Priestley’s views on necessity were far more influential for Coleridge than Godwin. Priestley’s version of necessity included a focus on what many have described as optimism, including Coleridge. When Coleridge wrote to John Thelwall in 1794 that as “A Necessitarian, I cannot possibly disesteem a man for his religious or anti-religious Opinions—and as an Optimist, I feel diminished concern,” Coleridge was identifying his allegiance to Priestleyan optimism, as well as showing that he had not yet turned against Godwin for his “anti-religious Opinions.”⁶⁴ By optimism, Priestley meant that everything would necessarily end in good thanks to God: “To him, and in his works, all seeming *discord* is real *harmony* and all apparent evil, ultimate *good*.”⁶⁵ H.W. Piper reads “Religious Musings” as an inherently Priestleyan poem due to its beginning, while Seamus Perry reads the poem as Priestleyan poem due to the optimism of its apocalyptic ending.⁶⁶ In 1795, Coleridge drew heavily on Priestley for his lectures on politics and religion, but by 1796 Coleridge was wondering how it is that Priestley is not an atheist and

⁶³ For an analysis of the different positions concerning necessitarianism for Godwin, Hartley, and Priestley, see Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice*, 89-95. See also William A. Ulmer, “Virtue of Necessity: Coleridge’s Unitarian Moral Theory,” *Modern Philology* 102.3 (2005): 372-404; and Thomas McFarland, “Coleridge: Prescience, Tenacity and the Origin of Sociology,” *Romanticism* 4.1 (1998): 54-5.

⁶⁴ Coleridge, *Letters*, I: 205.

⁶⁵ Joseph Priestley, *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1778), viii.

⁶⁶ H. W. Piper, “Coleridge and the Unitarian Consensus,” *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, eds. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 273-90. Seamus Perry, “Coleridge’s Millennial Embarrassments,” *Essays in Criticism* 10.1 (2000): 6.

by 1799 Coleridge wrote, “I confess that the more I think, the more I am discontented with the doctrines of Priestly [sic].”⁶⁷ Though Coleridge had left behind Godwin and began to seriously doubt Priestley on the subject of necessity by 1796, the philosophy of David Hartley was more firmly rooted and was eventually only overturned by Coleridge’s encounter with Kant.

Hartleyan necessitarianism lasted the longest and remained fairly consistent for Coleridge throughout the period that I am examining.⁶⁸ Hartley’s necessitarianism is a form of materialist philosophy in which God is the first cause and everything necessarily follows in a causal chain from that first cause. Moreover, the world for Hartley is “necessarily” the way that it is and there could be no other alternative. For Hartley, as for Priestley, God is the cause at the original moment of Creation; the world and all of time has necessarily occurred, as he knew it would at the moment of Creation. Hartley’s version of necessitarianism was not only grounded in direct links to God’s will, but it was also a revision of the Lockean theory of where ideas come from based in new theories of association and behavior. These theories held great explanatory power for Coleridge for a time, but he seems to have struggled the most during this period with the inherent passivity and the ambiguous nature of free will in Hartley’s necessitarianism.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Coleridge, *Letters*, I: 482.

⁶⁸ Coleridge writes very explicitly against necessitarianism in a letter to Poole dated January 15, 1804, but even prior to that Coleridge had recanted his belief in necessitarianism in a footnote added in 1797 to the poem, “To a Friend, together with an Unfinished Poem” (*CW: Poems* I.1.170). Through 1796—at the very least—though, Coleridge remained a firm Hartleyan necessitarian.

⁶⁹ In a simplistic manner, free will does not exist for Hartley: one of “the consequences flowing from the Doctrine of Association” was “that of the Mechanism or Necessity of Human Actions, in Opposition to what is generally termed Free-Will” (*Observations on Man*, I, 500). However, the phrase “generally termed” helps to indicate that this statement is more complicated than it may at first appear. In the conclusion to *Observations on Man*, Hartley writes,

Thus, if free-will be defined as the power of doing what a person desires or wills to do, of deliberating, suspending, choosing, etc. or of resisting the motives of sensuality, ambition, resentment, etc. Free-will, under certain limitations, is not

Certain aspects of the original version of “To Bowles” fit with the philosophy of necessity quite nicely. The concept of creation that Coleridge is borrowing from *Paradise Lost* in “To Bowles” also positions God as a creative first cause. In “To Bowles,” which was written at the height of Coleridge’s necessitarianism, both Creation and artistic creation involve the organizing of preexisting elements such that God and poet alike create form. In the same way that the poet’s creative act was limited by predetermined causation, so was the poet’s creation (in this case, a sonnet) predetermined according to its form. In December 1794, when Coleridge had just written “To Bowles” and was writing his claim to Southey about being a “complete Necessitarian,” the issue did not seem to be a negative concern; “To Bowles” even seems to celebrate that view of Creation and poetic creation.

However, over the next several months, Coleridge’s acceptance of necessitarianism began to waver—as I previously showed by his move away from Godwin during this time—particularly as he considered the link between free will and poetic creativity. Though Creation in *Paradise Lost* can be read to fit well with a theory of hard determinism, the bulk of the poem argues against that very notion. Furthermore, Milton’s great question concerning free will would have just as much bearing on necessitarianism as it would on Milton’s Arminianism, and in some ways the two views are directly opposed.⁷⁰ Though Hartley saw necessitarianism as having solved the issue of free will, since the desires that one acts upon are formed by the mechanical association of ideas, necessitarian determination still comes awfully close to predestination in the

only consistent with the doctrine of mechanism [and necessity], but even flows from it. (I, 515)

Coleridge, for a time, was able to accept these limitations.

⁷⁰ Arminianism stood against Calvinism on the issue of free will in that it supported a belief that the individual was free to choose and not pre-destined to make a specific choice. In *Paradise Lost*, this doctrine is most clear in Milton’s stance that Satan was “Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.99). Satan, nor Adam and Eve, were predestined to fall. For Milton, even though God knew they would fall, they were all still free to choose.

realm of free will and therefore impinges on Arminian claims—a topic dear to Milton’s heart and the heart of *Paradise Lost*. For Milton, the question was: how could God’s creations, whom he created already knowing every action they would make in the future, have free will? Milton felt he needed to “justifie the wayes of God to men” (1: 26). For Coleridge, the question could be reformulated: how can a poet be creative from a necessitarian standpoint, when everything is already necessarily determined? Or, to bring it more in line with Milton’s question: how can poetic creativity exist without free will? Approximately eight to ten months after writing “To Bowles” and his letter to Southey, Coleridge’s earliest known drafts of “The Eolian Harp” engaged these very questions.

The earliest known draft of “The Eolian Harp” is from Folio 26 of the Rugby Manuscripts, known as “Rugby MS Draft 1” and titled “Effusion 35, Clevedon, August 20th, 1795.” Though only seventeen lines long, the concept for the poem as it was first published in 1796 is clearly present. This earliest draft focuses less on creativity than the following drafts, but it is also the most necessitarian of the group. As I will show, the drafts begin from a primarily necessitarian standpoint and successively becomes less necessitarian and, in becoming more pantheistic, the poem also becomes less philosophically certain. Or, as Richard Berkeley phrases it in *Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason*, “the poem itself does not try to articulate a specific pantheism, rather it allows for a wide range of pantheism and similar patterns of thought, and comprehends them through the governing question ‘what if?’. That is to say, ‘what are the consequences?’.”⁷¹ Even more specifically, what are the consequences if there is no personal, anthropomorphic God whose will is necessarily determining our actions? In asking ‘what if?’, the poem also attempts to carve out space for free will and materialist creativity.

⁷¹ Richard Berkeley, *Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 18.

Though short, “Rugby MS Draft 1” is important for this analysis in three ways. First, it shows the centrality of Milton to the overall tone of the poem. As Paul Cheshire writes:

Miltonic allusions abound: the cot with its myrtle and jasmine mirrors Adam and Eve’s wedding bower, and ‘the coy maid half-willing to be woo’d’, who arouses male desire through resistance, echoes Eve’s ‘sweet reluctant amorous delay’ (IV 310-11) which so delighted Adam. We are being reminded of Milton’s celebration and vigorous defence of the sexual expressions of unfallen married love in *Paradise Lost*.⁷²

The lines that Cheshire is referring to do undergo slight changes in later drafts; however, the turn to *Paradise Lost* both for the expression of unfallen love and for line construction remains consistent. Second, “Rugby MS Draft 1” is important for its link back to the sonnet “To Bowles,” the most necessitarian of Coleridge’s sonnets. In addition to the Miltonic references mentioned previously, I am also particularly interested in the following lines 13 through 17. Here is the poem in its entirety as reprinted by Cheshire:

Effusion 35

Clevedon, August 20th, 1795.

My pensive SARA! thy soft Cheek reclin’d

Thus on my arm, how soothing sweet it is

Beside our Cot to sit, our Cot o’ergrown

⁷² Paul Cheshire, “The Eolian Harp,” *The Coleridge Bulletin* 17 (2001): 6. This analysis, especially of the two Rugby MS drafts, owes a great deal to Cheshire’s work in this essay where he lays out every draft of “The Eolian Harp” side-by-side, from Rugby MS Draft 1 through the version published in *The Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge* (1834), the last edition prepared for print in Coleridge’s lifetime.

With white-flowr'd Jasmine and the blossom'd Myrtle
 (Meet emblems they of Innocence & Love!) 5
 And watch the Clouds, that late were rich with light,
 Slow-sad'ning round, and mark the Star of eve
 Serenely brilliant, like thy polish'd Sense,
 Shine opposite. What snatches of perfume
 The noiseless Gale from yonder bean-field wafts! 10
 The stilly murmur of the far-off Sea
 Tells us of silence! And behold, my love!
 In the half-closed window we will place *the Harp*,
Which by the desultory Breeze caress'd,
Like some coy maid half willing to be woo'd, 15
 Utters such sweet Upbraidings, as perforce
 Tempt to repeat the wrong! (emphasis mine)

Here, in the last five lines, we find the overall concept of the poem. Though wind-harps were popular in the late eighteenth century, Coleridge's choice of the "desultory Breeze" seems a clear reference to Bowles's "Monody, written at Matlock, October, 1791," which was published both on its own in 1791 and again in 1794 when it was included in the third edition of Bowles's *Sonnets*. In fact, these key lines from Bowles's "Monody" were included by Coleridge in his 1796 *Poems* as an epigraph to the Effusions, which I discussed in the previous section:

Content, as random Fancies might inspire,
 If his weak harp at times or lonely lyre
He struck with desultory hand, and drew

Some soften'd tones to Nature not untrue.

Bowles. (n.p.; emphasis mine)

In this Bowles poem, it is a “desultory hand” that strikes the Harp and creates its tune. Like in Coleridge’s “To Bowles,” artistic creation, whether musical or poetical, is the result of an agent playing or creating on an already existing instrument or formless matter. God the Creator is the agent that Creates existence, but in necessitarianism he is also the agent behind a poet’s creative act, as the poet was necessarily determined to create that poem by God. In this formulation, the poet is an instrument who is played by God, and this formulation matches that of “To Bowles” from when Coleridge was a self-avowed full necessitarian. However, in this earliest known draft of “The Eolian Harp,” the poet-as-harp is only half-willing to be played. If the poet-harp has a choice whether to be woo’d/played, then the poet has some level of free will and there is at least a partial questioning of how much creative agency the poet has in a supposedly determined existence.

Finally, “Rugby MS Draft 1” is important because the move toward pantheism that “The Eolian Harp” is famous for is completely missing from this earliest known draft, as is Sara’s reproof against Coleridge’s flight of imagination, meaning that this earliest draft does not contain a main feature of a Conversation poem. At the beginning of this chapter I stated that Coleridge’s brief but significant participation in the revival of the sonnet provides important context for reassessing “The Eolian Harp” and that Milton’s poetry and influence are central to this reassessment. The lack of the pantheist flight and Sara’s reproof mean that in its original form, “The Eolian Harp” shares much more in common with the sonnet “To Bowles” and the works of Milton than any of the Conversation poems that “The Eolian Harp” is generally analyzed alongside.

Both the pantheistic elements and Sara's reproof enter the poem in its second known draft. Known as "Rugby MS Draft 2" from Folios 27 and 28, and this time merely titled "Effusion." While this version does take a number of steps toward becoming "The Eolian Harp" that we are accustomed to, this draft is still an earlier stage of the poem than most scholars address.⁷³ "Rugby MS Draft 2" is not only approximately the same length as the first published version, but also includes a number of elements that were not part of the much shorter earlier draft. The "desultory Breeze" still caresses the wind-harp, but Draft 2 introduces the flight of imagination that we recognize as a central part of "The Eolian Harp" and of the Conversation poems as a group. "Rugby MS Draft 2" continues Coleridge's confrontation with Creation and necessitarianism, but also introduces a pantheistic aspect that was not part of earlier draft. In turning toward pantheism, Coleridge begins to carve out a space for creativity in an apparently deterministic world. The specific part of the poem that I want to focus on is lines 40-46 of the meditative flight, which did not find their way into the published version of the poem. In this early draft, following "One infinite and intellectual Breeze," Coleridge writes:

And all in different Heights so aptly hung,
That Murmurs indistinct and Bursts sublime,
Shrill Discords and most soothing Melodies,
Harmonious *form Creation's vast concént?*
Thus GOD would be the universal Soul;
Mechaniz'd matter as th'organic harps,
And each one's Tunes be that, which each calls I.

⁷³ For example, in *The Poetics of Sensibility*, McGann begins his analysis with the third known draft from *Poems* (1796).

(Draft 2, lines 40-46, italics mine)⁷⁴

In this second draft, the meditative flight takes Coleridge to Milton's poem *At a Solemn Music*, as Cheshire as points out, via the rarely used word "concént," but also links back to Coleridge's earlier concern with Creation.⁷⁵ The lines following these Miltonic references continue the musical theme, but present a different description of God the Creator and his relationship to the poet-as-instrument. The necessitarianism that the first draft seems to be questioning, with the uncertain move toward a world where free will exists, is now coupled with an equally uncertain flirtation with pantheism. The line "Thus GOD would be the universal SOUL" has a particularly pantheistic ring to it, which is immediately followed by a description of the individual as an organic harp comprised of "Mechaniz'd matter." This representation continues to identify the individual, or the poet, as the instrument rather than the player, but the description of a pantheistic God potentially signals a turn to Spinoza whose *Ethics* contains a complicated version of determination that allows for a greater degree of free will than Hartley's necessitarianism.⁷⁶ Though Spinoza is no longer read as a pantheist, this position was commonplace in eighteenth-century philosophy. In any event, this draft also introduces Sara's reproof and Coleridge's agreement to her chastising after his imaginative revelry. Whether this meditative flight is more pantheistic or necessitarian, the flight itself—the asking of "what if?"—is ultimately condemned as unchristian by the end of the poem. This move by Coleridge is one of

⁷⁴ The "Rugby MS Draft 2" version of "The Eolian Harp" that I am using is drawn from aforementioned Paul Cheshire's "The Eolian Harp."

⁷⁵ Cheshire writes, "The unusual word 'concént' is of interest. It is not a spelling variation on 'consent' but a musical term... The same word occurs in Milton's *At a Solemn Music*, a poem about world harmony (*musica mundana*) as a link with the divine" (8-9).

⁷⁶ For a brief, but clear, explanation of Spinoza's position on free will, see Berkeley, *Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason*, 34-5.

the most intriguing parts of the poem when seen through the lens of *Paradise Lost*, as I will show in my analysis of the first published version of “The Eolian Harp.”

In the summer of 1796, Coleridge published the first edition of *Poems on Various Subjects*. The poem that would later be titled “The Eolian Harp” was here titled “Effusion XXXV, Composed August 20th, 1795, at Clevedon, Somersetshire.” The section of *Poems* labeled Effusions began with the Bowles epigraph that I already discussed. Of the early drafts addressed in this chapter, this 1796 version is the closest to the much-anthologized 1817 version. For the purpose of this study, I go no later into the revisions of the poem than the 1796 version. Though it is difficult to precisely date when this version was finished, it could have been completed anytime between October 1795 and the spring of 1796. Whenever it was finished, the writing of this poem comes at the very end of what I am calling Coleridge’s Milton period. As I have already shown, Milton’s poetry has played a central role in Coleridge’s thinking through the complexities of free will, creativity, and necessitarianism, and it continued to do so in this first published version of “The Eolian Harp” from 1796.

In “Effusion xxxv” from 1796’s *Poems*, necessitarianism seems to have taken more of an ambiguous backseat in the meditative flight and in its place is a more pantheist relationship between determinism and free will, and therefore a more positive place for creativity. Though “Creation’s vast concént” and “Mechaniz’d matter” have been removed, “th’organic harps,” of course, remain:

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversly fram’d
That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps,
Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze,

At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (lines 36-40)

The “intellectual Breeze” that is “At once the Soul of each, and God all” at first glance implies that this imaginative flight has become solely concerned with pantheism, but a closer look with the analysis of the sonnet “To Bowles” and *Paradise Lost* from the previous section in mind will help clarify how this pantheistic turn is a revision of a previous necessitarian view of Creation. Coleridge’s sonnet “To Bowles” ends with a clear and complex reference to Creation from *Paradise Lost*:

with mysterious wings,
Brooded the wavy and tumultuous mind,
Like that great *Spirit, who with plastic sweep*
Mov’d on the darkness of the formless Deep! (lines 11-14, emphasis mine)

The Miltonic formulation of Creation from the necessitarian sonnet “To Bowles” has the Spirit of Creation move upon the “formless Deep” with a “plastic sweep.” Coleridge is revisiting his earlier poem in “The Eolian Harp” when he describes the action of the “one intellectual Breeze” as a sweep over the “organic Harps,” “Plastic and vast.” The act of Creation is no longer that of a God giving form to formlessness, nor does Creation involve mechanized creations—“Mechaniz’d matter”—following the determination of a causal chain. The relationship between the Creator and the poet-harp has been made considerably more ambiguous, much more so than any of the previous drafts of “The Eolian Harp” or “To Bowles.” The poet-harp’s reaction to the “intellectual Breeze” as it sweeps over him is now a “tremble.” The relationship maintains a materialistic causality, but the precise level of determinism is far less clear. Is the “tremble” indicative of Hartleyan vibrations that necessitate a thought? Or is the “tremble” a pantheistic moment of inspiration from the “intellectual Breeze” that is “At once the Soul of each, and God

all”? This “intellectual Breeze” now feels much more in line with a Spinozistic conception of God as the only substance and with all thought an attribute of God.⁷⁷ This conception of God and thought allows for an “intellectual Breeze” to be both individual and God at the same time. A shift from necessitarianism to Spinozistic pantheism also allows for a much greater sense of free will and therefore individual creative agency. The actual breeze that Coleridge early describes as “the random gales / That swell or flutter on this subject Lute” may be the inspiration for this meditative flight, but the imagining of the “one intellectual Breeze” is Coleridge’s own. The moment of poetic creation is no longer necessarily predetermined, but rather it arises like the “desultory breeze.” Exactly what happens in that moment of contact between the divine breeze and the poet’s act of poetic creation is left uncertain, an uncertainty that stands at odds with the clear image of *ex materia* Creation and poetic creation that the necessitarian Coleridge had described in the original publication of “To Bowles.” This portion of the poem is left asking Berkeley’s question, what if?—even if that very questioning is eventually condemned.

Thanks to previous scholarship, it is clear that the older Coleridge had purposely eliminated the influence of Charlotte Smith from his early poetry.⁷⁸ The analysis in this section also shows how Coleridge’s rewriting of his own poetic history in the *Biographia Literaria* also elided the massive influence of Milton. With Smith, the elimination clearly has to do with the importance the elder Coleridge put on the “manly,” masculine elements of poetry, but with Milton the reason for the eradication of influence is less straightforward. I believe that Coleridge initial enthusiasm for Milton, and the eventual papering over of that enthusiasm, is linked to

⁷⁷ “P1: Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing. Dem.: Singular thoughts, or this or that thought, are modes which express God’s nature in a certain and determinate way...”; Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Iip1, in *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 117.

⁷⁸ See Brent Raycroft, “From Charlotte Smith to Nehemiah Higginbottom: Revising the Genealogy of the Early Romantic Sonnet,” *European Romantic Review* 9.3 (1998): 363-92.

Coleridge's relationship with Dissent. When Coleridge first began his time as a Unitarian, the arch-Dissenter-poet Milton offered a clear predecessor to the young poet and new Dissenter Coleridge. However, by the *Biographia Literaria*, the now conservative and Anglican Coleridge would clearly not want to be in the company of Milton, defender of regicide and Dissent. It is no coincidence, then, that in the same chapter of the *Biographia* where Coleridge praises Bowles as his poetic precursor, Coleridge also attacks the Dissenting academies and the Dissenting disposition. In chapter one of the *Biographia*, Coleridge sneers at the "modes of teaching" that have been popular in certain institutions that compete with "our great public schools, and universities."⁷⁹ This coded language is clearly meant to refer to the Dissenting academies.⁸⁰ Coleridge then attacks the Dissenting disposition: "*these* nurselings of improved pedagogy are taught to dispute and decide; to suspect all, but their own lecturer's wisdom; and to hold nothing sacred from their contempt, but their own contemptible arrogance."⁸¹ Coleridge, in 1816, disapproves of the centrality of free inquiry through debate and reason in the Dissenting disposition because of his personal belief in the importance of authority and the Anglican Church. The younger, still Unitarian Coleridge may not have been the apologist for orthodox religion that he would become, but he nonetheless did not understand the Dissenting disposition, as the next section explores.

⁷⁹ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 12.

⁸⁰ My analysis here on the attack on Dissenting education in the *Biographia Literaria* is indebted to William Christie, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Literary Life* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 24-7.

⁸¹ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 13.

A (Not So) “mild reproof” and the Dissenting Disposition

Up to this point I have focused on the relationship between “The Eolian Harp,” *Paradise Lost*, and necessitarian creativity, however, I now want to consider how the poem also turns to Milton’s great epic to comment on Coleridge’s personal life, specifically the relationship with his fiancé Sara.⁸² In doing so, I will return to the issue of Coleridge’s relationship with the Dissenting disposition.

The 1796 “Eolian Harp” opens with Coleridge-the-narrator and his fiancé Sara at their cottage in Clevedon:

My pensive SARA! thy soft cheek reclin’d
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our cot, our cot o’er grown
With white-flower’d Jasmin, and the broad-leav’d Myrtle,
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!) (lines 1-5)

As has been pointed out previously, jasmine and myrtle are two of the plants that Milton locates at Adam and Eve’s unfallen “blissful Bower” in *Paradise Lost* (lines 689-705). However, this allusion also begins the association of Sara with a pre-lapsarian state in the poem, an association that comes back when Sara re-enters the poem after Coleridge’s meditative flight.

Before I explain the importance of the unfallen portrayal of Sara, it is worth first looking at how Coleridge describes his entry into his passive meditation because it is relevant to the return of Sara and her admonition near the end of the poem. Coleridge describes his entrance into the meditative flight:

⁸² It is uncertain between which drafts Coleridge and Sara were married. The earliest draft was certainly written prior to their marriage and the 1796 published version was very likely finished after the marriage.

And thus, my Love! *as on the midway slope*
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon
 Whilst thro' my half-clos'd eyelids I behold
 The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
 And tranquil muse upon tranquility;
 Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
 And many idle flitting phantasies,
 Traverse my indolent and passive brain
 As wild and various, as the random gales
 That swell or flutter on this *subject Lute!* (lines 26-35, emphasis mine)

Coleridge lies upon the hill and relaxes, becoming the passive “subject Lute” on which the “one intellectual Breeze” plays. The identification of “all of animated nature” as “organic Harps” and an “intellectual Breeze” that is “At once the Soul of each, and God of all” is the pantheistic, potentially Spinozistic, philosophizing that earns him the non-verbal chastisement from Sara:

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
Darts, O beloved Woman! nor such thoughts
 Dim and unhallow'd dost thou not reject,
 And biddest me walk humbly with my God. (lines 41-44, emphasis mine)

This reproof and its response has been one of the less read aspects of the poem as it seems so straightforward. For example, Jerome McGann writes, “the pensive Sara disapproves the pantheist and Socinian⁸³ bent that Coleridge’s ideas have taken. Not only are the ideas dangerous

⁸³ McGann is using the term “Socinian” here in rather vague way, as he is not examining a specific vein of anti-trinitarianism. Instead, McGann seems to be using “Socinian” in a way that

in themselves, in particular to orthodox religion, they suggest an intellectual pride needing modest correction. All this is explicit in the poem.”⁸⁴ However, this scolding is not as simple as has been assumed. With the return to Sara comes a return to *Paradise Lost*, an aspect of “The Eolian Harp” that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been identified before.

While McGann is correct that the pantheist ideas that Coleridge’s flight of imagination has produced would be considered dangerous from the viewpoint of orthodox Christianity, the issue is more complex than it first appears due to a complicated reference to *Paradise Lost*. Coleridge-the-narrator responds to the look of “mild reproof” he receives from his fiancé by agreeing that it was well deserved:

Meek Daughter in the Family of Christ,
Well has though said and holily disprais’d
These shapings of the unregenerate mind,
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
On vain Philosophy’s aye-babbling spring. (lines 45-49, emphasis mine)

However, Coleridge’s *self*-reproof is far more severe than any darted look Sara could give. Coleridge clearly references a scene in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost* where a group of fallen angels sit upon a hillside discussing the very topics that pantheism, or perhaps Spinozism, would raise:

Others apart sat on a Hill retir’d,
In thoughts more elevate, *and reason’d high*
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
Fixt Fate, free will, foreknowledg absolute,

was common in the eighteenth-century, which was as a broad term for radical Christians of all stripes, including Unitarians.

⁸⁴ McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility*, 21.

And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.

Of good and evil much they argu'd then,

Of happiness and final misery,

Passion and Apathie, and glory and shame,

Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie: (lines 557-565, emphasis mine)

Coleridge has presented himself in “The Eolian Harp” as also sitting upon a hillside and has let his mind drift into a revelry of pantheistic philosophizing. His “unregenerate mind” is synonymous with Milton’s unrepentant fallen angels. The content of the fallen angels’ debates also links to Coleridge’s meditative flight as he also reasons “high / Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate, Fixt Fate, / free will, foreknowledge absolute.” While the angels’ arguing is “Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie,” for Coleridge his bubbling and pantheistic imagination is a “vain Philosophy’s aye-babbling spring.” Thus, Coleridge portrays himself as a fallen angel lost in vain philosophy. So while Paul Magnuson wrote, “Coleridge’s faith at the end is the faith of an admonished Adam,” a more thorough understanding of the poem’s relationship to *Paradise Lost* reveals that the frame at the beginning and end of the poem contrasts the unfallen state of Sara in the bower with Coleridge’s own fallenness, a state directly linked to, if not fully caused by, his philosophizing.⁸⁵ Coleridge is not an admonished Adam, but a fallen angel, guilty of Stygian philosophizing and living in sin with his unfallen Eve.

Coleridge’s self-identification as fallen in “The Eolian Harp” reveals a point of tension between Coleridge and the Dissenting disposition. The poem shows that no matter how deep into the writings of Hartley and Priestley he was, Coleridge had not been raised as a Dissenter. The chastisement from Sara and the comparing of himself to a fallen angel that he writes into “The

⁸⁵ Paul Magnuson, “‘The Eolian Harp’ in Context,” *Studies in Romanticism* 24.1 (1985): 9.

Eolian Harp” is an example of Coleridge thinking it was wrong, even unchristian, for him to be considering philosophies and points of views outside the realm of Christian theology. Chapter One of this dissertation showed how the concept of examining both sides of an issue was central to Dissenting education. Only through the experience of learning what both positions had to offer could a student come to an understanding of the debate and judge by reason which position was the correct position. In considering a pantheistic or Spinozistic philosophy, Coleridge was committing himself to the logics of free inquiry that grounded Dissenting education. But even in 1796, when he was at his most Unitarian, Coleridge turns away from that moment of free inquiry, dismissing it as “vain Philosophy” and the product of an “unregenerate mind.” In the 1740s, Doddridge had even been teaching Spinoza to his students so that they could see another side of the issue, yet in the 1790s the Cambridge educated Coleridge could not help but feel guilt over his Spinozistic flights of theological fancy. While Doddridge may have taught Spinoza as an opposing stance to Christian orthodoxy, the importance of considering all possibilities was so important to Doddridge and other Dissenting educators that teaching Spinoza was ultimately worthy of inclusion in their curriculum. However, instead of celebrating his acceptance of Christianity after his meditative flight, as the logics of the Dissenting disposition would suggest, Coleridge presents the entire episode as worthy of reproof.

Without a thorough understanding of the sonnets that Coleridge had been writing in the year previous to his writing “The Eolian Harp,” the full extent of Milton’s influence over this seminal poem would remain obscured. Milton’s great epic was a primary source for Coleridge’s attempts to think through creativity as he struggled with the implication of necessitarianism on free will. *Paradise Lost* also provided Coleridge with the poetic reference point for reflecting on his relationship with his fiancé and then wife, Sara Fricker. In terms of the evolution of “The

Eolian Harp,” the earliest draft did include the comparison of Coleridge and Sara’s cottage to Adam and Eve’s pre-lapsarian bower, but it was only as the poem was expanded in subsequent drafts that the poem gained the qualities that scholarship has long associated with his famous Conversation poems. Both the meditative flight and the return to Sara at the end of the poem made this early effusion into a Conversation poem, and both parts increased the poem’s overall engagement with *Paradise Lost*.

The question remains: why Milton? There is an obvious answer: Milton was widely considered the greatest English poet and was an obvious choice of an exemplar for the young Coleridge. But I think the relationship that Coleridge envisioned with Milton was far more intimate than this simple answer. I do not think it is a coincidence that Coleridge’s year of Milton roughly coincides with his conversion to Unitarianism and necessitarianism. Having abandoned the Anglicanism of his youth, the newly converted Dissenter Coleridge turned to the arch-literary Dissenter and his writings. This chapter has primarily examined the relationship between Coleridge’s poetry and the works of Milton, but if we step outside of his poetry, we can see the extent to which Coleridge was thinking with, and through, Milton.

Outside of poetry, Coleridge’s other forms of cultural production during the timeframe I am calling his Milton period included primarily lectures and the occasional pamphlet, all of which lean heavily on Milton. In the pamphlet, *The Plot Discovered* (1795), Coleridge writes,

Sages and patriots that being dead do yet speak to us, spirits of Milton, Locke, Sidney and Harrington that still wander through your native country, giving wisdom and inspiring zeal! The cauldron of persecution is bubbling against you—

the spells of despotism are being muttered. Blest spirits! assist us, lest hell
exorcise earth of all that is heavenly!⁸⁶

The spirit of Milton did seem to yet speak to Coleridge as *The Plot Discovered*, as Peter Kitson has shown, owes a great deal to Milton's pamphlet *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), as well as referencing or echoing Milton's *Eikonoklastes* (1649), *Defence of the People of England* (1651), and *Animadversions* (1641).⁸⁷ Both Coleridge's *A Moral and Political Lecture* (1795) and his *Lectures on Revealed Religion* (1795) are littered with quotes and references to *Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes*, and other of Milton's writings. A prospectus exists for series of six lectures that may or may not have actually taken place in the summer of 1795, the second of which would have (or did) feature Milton heavily.⁸⁸ I believe that the writings of Milton were just as central to Coleridge's early Unitarian period as the writings of Hartley or Priestley. But, in the end, his the durable Anglican disposition of Coleridge's youth that draws a firm line between proper and improper thought reared its head—as can be seen in Coleridge's self reproof in "The Eolian Harp"—and provided a clear path back to Anglicanism. The path back to Anglicanism seems to have begun as early 1796 and finished nearly a decade later during his conversion experience in Malta in 1805.

⁸⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Plot Discovered (1795)," *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 1: Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion*, eds. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 290-1.

⁸⁷ Peter Kitson, "The Electric Fluid of Truth: The Ideology of the Commonwealthmen in Coleridge's *The Plot Discovered*," *Coleridge and the Armoury of the Human Mind*, eds. Peter Kitson and Thomsas N. Corns (London: Routledge, 1991), 36-62.

⁸⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "A Comparative View of the English Rebellion under Charles the First, and the French Revolution," *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 1: Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion*, eds. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 253-6.

Epilogue:

Whither the Dissenting Disposition?

This dissertation began with the consequences of the Civil Wars of the seventeenth century and the exclusionary laws aimed at any who would not conform to the Church of England, in order to illuminate the formalization and institutionalization of a characteristic way of knowing that was developed at Dissenting academies in the mid-eighteenth century. It has then focused on how the Dissenting disposition appeared in the works of Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, the committee to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Godwin. I have paid special attention to the 1790s because it was the decade in which the Dissenting disposition became the most publicly visible. By 1790, Warrington Academy was arguably the highest quality institution of higher learning in England, Joseph Priestley and Richard Price were highly visible both through their preaching and publishing, and many Dissenters were hopeful for what the burgeoning French Revolution could mean for a separation of church and state in England.

By 1800, however, Warrington and the other most prestigious Dissenting academies were closed, Priestley and Price were dead, and Britain had been at war with France since 1793. Within twenty years, only a handful of Dissenting academies were still operating. Godwin's radicalism and public influence had dwindled to nearly nothing, though he remained a moderate humanist and was still clearly influenced by the Dissenting disposition, as I explored in Chapter Three. Though no longer a major public figure, Godwin continued to write and publish for the rest of his life, including novels such as *Fleetwood* (1805), *Mandeville* (1817), and *Cloudesley*

(1830), as well as non-fiction such as the four-volume *History of the Commonwealth of England* (1824-28) and *Thoughts on Man* (1831).

By 1820 in his personal life, Coleridge had wholeheartedly returned to Anglicanism—and had also become a Tory and an idealist. His struggles with opium addiction were well known. His most recent publications, *Sybilline Leaves* and the *Biographia Literaria* in 1817 and a reorganized and revised *Friend* in 1818, had not been met with a kind critical reaction. For many reviewers, like Hazlitt, the negative critical reaction was linked to Coleridge's shift from religious Dissenter and political radical to Anglican apologist and Tory mouthpiece. However, it wasn't just the religious and political turn that reviewers jumped on, but also that Coleridge's skills as a writer had seemed to also shift with his religious and political allegiance. Though still known as a poet, he had produced almost no well-received poetry since his conversion to Anglicanism in 1805, the one exception being the last of the Conversation poems, "To William Wordsworth" (1807). Coleridge was still active, and gaining admirers, through his lectures and prose writing, but he seemed to have left his poetic talent and bounding imagination in the 1790s with his Dissenting beliefs. Hazlitt, looking back over Coleridge's career, wrote on how Coleridge the poet was regarded by 1825:

All that he has done of moment, he had done twenty years ago: since then, he may be said to have lived on the sound of his own voice.¹

Of all Mr. Coleridge's productions, the *Ancient Mariner* is the only one that we could with confidence put into any person's hands, on whom we wished to impress a favourable idea of his extraordinary powers.²

¹ William Hazlitt, "Mr. Coleridge [1825]," *The Spirit of the Age* in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, Volume 11*, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, LTD., 1932), 30.

Thanks to his Shakespeare lectures, Coleridge could still be seen as an intellect to be reckoned with, but his poetic genius had seemingly died with his Dissenting beliefs.

By 1836, both Coleridge and Godwin were dead, the majority of the Test and Corporation Acts had been repealed because it was decided that religious toleration would more effectively protect the Anglican Church than exclusion, and Methodism—the most prominent denomination of the evangelical New Dissent—was the most rapidly growing religion in England. These changes would seem to indicate that the power of the denominations of Old Dissent—Quakers, Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Unitarians—and therefore of the Dissenting disposition, would eventually vanish in the nineteenth century. In this epilogue, I take a brief, speculative look into the fate of the Dissenting disposition in the nineteenth century in terms of two areas for potential research—one English, one transatlantic.

An alternate story can be told about the fate of the denominations of Old Dissent within England in the nineteenth century, focusing specifically on changes in religious membership and the fate of the Dissenting academies. Religious membership changed significantly in the nineteenth century, which can be described as the century of the decline of Anglicanism. As Figure 5.1 illustrates, not only did the percentage of the English and Welsh who identified as Anglican significantly decrease in the first forty years of the nineteenth century, but also the denominations of Old Dissent reached a percentage not seen since the Civil Wars and Interregnum period.

² Ibid., 34.

	1680	1720	1760	1800	1840
Nominal Anglicans	94.4	92	93.6	88.2	76.9
Old Dissenters	4.2	6.2	3.2	5.3	8.4
Arminian Methodists	-	-	0.7	3.2	10.0
Other Nonconformists	0.2	0.4	1.3	1.3	1.5
Roman Catholics	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.4	2.7
Jews		0.1	0.3	0.3	0.2
No Religion	-	-	-	0.1	0.3

Figure 5.1. Estimates of religious communities in England and Wales, 1680-1840, expressed as a percentage of the population. Table recreated from Clive D. Field, "Counting Religion in England and Wales: The Long Eighteenth Century, c. 1680–c. 1840," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64.4 (2012): 711.

The decrease in Anglican membership continued throughout the century. By mid-century, according to the *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales*, only 52% of churchgoing adults were attending Anglican services. By the end of the century, non-Anglicans outnumbered Anglicans. Meanwhile, some branches of Old Dissent did see their membership shrink. Arguably the most vocal branches of Old Dissent in the 1780s and 1790s, the Presbyterians and Unitarians, did decrease between 1800 and 1840, while at the same time Methodism grew by approximately 434%. This amazing growth is why Methodism has received so much scholarly attention of late, but it is also important to note that the number of practicing Congregationalists and Baptists also grew by roughly 325% over the same time period.³ The marked increase of these branches of Old Dissent conflicts with the traditional narrative that the fallout in England from the French Revolution led to a significant shrinking of Old Dissent's numbers and significance in the public sphere. As the above percentages show, this narrative is

³ Denomination percentages drawn from Clive D. Field, "Counting Religion in England and Wales: The Long Eighteenth Century, c. 1680–c. 1840," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64.4 (2012): 710.

only partially correct: the denominations of Old Dissent's decreased presence in the public sphere after the 1790s, combined with being overshadowed by the more rapid growth of Methodism, only made it *appear* that their numbers were decreasing.

The fate of the Dissenting disposition—a process of free inquiry through debate that allows one to develop conviction—is more difficult to trace than the membership numbers of religious groups, but I believe the Dissenting disposition in the nineteenth century was as closely tied to institutions of higher learning as it had been to the older Dissenting academies in the eighteenth century. Specifically, it was closely tied to the founding of *new* institutions. Most of the Dissenting academies had closed by the nineteenth century, including all of the academies of renown, such as Warrington Academy, New College at Hackney, and Hoxton Academy. Even though the Test and Corporation Acts had been largely repealed by 1832 and Dissenters could hold civil positions, Oxford and Cambridge continued to grant bachelor's degrees only to members of the Church of England until 1866 and followed the same practice for master's degrees until 1871.⁴ The need for institutions of higher learning beyond Oxford and Cambridge, which had motivated the birth of the Dissenting academies in the late seventeenth century, was still a pressing need for much of the nineteenth century. Dissent played an important role in the founding of a number of the earliest English universities that were not related to Oxford or Cambridge and, indeed, that still exist today: London University in 1826, New College London in 1850, and the school that is today called Harris Manchester College. I do not claim that the Dissenting disposition as a core pedagogical process was carried over directly from the Dissenting academies to the burgeoning university system of the nineteenth century. However,

⁴ Universities Tests Act 1871 (1871 Chapter 26 34 and 35 Vict).

the links between the Dissenting academies and the birth of the English university system may be strong enough to trace some level of transmission, and a potential area for future research.

The University of London, arguably the third most important English university after Oxford and Cambridge, was founded in 1826.⁵ The founding of the University of London is best known for the leadership of Henry Brougham—well known Utilitarian and heterodox “rational theist”⁶—who wanted the university to be organized along the lines of the German and Scottish universities. Though Brougham was clearly a key figure for the university’s founding, the unique roles played by Dissenters and Dissenting academies deserves to be recognized as well. The council of founders for the university cited two reasons for the need of such an institution. First, Oxford and Cambridge, whose educational systems were still rooted in medieval scholastic practices, were not meeting the needs of the nineteenth century. Second, as the number of non-Anglicans continued to grow and grow in the nineteenth century, the need for universities founded on the ideals of religious toleration only grew. For this second reason, the council of founders was a religiously diverse group with about a quarter of the founders coming from Dissent, included George Birkbeck, a Quaker; Henry Crabb Robinson, a Unitarian; Francis (F. A.) Fox, a Baptist minister who attended Bristol Baptist Academy; and perhaps most importantly, Thomas Wilson, a Congregationalist who had been the Treasurer at Hoxton Academy— succeeding his father who held the same position—and, when the academy closed

⁵ Originally the school was named London University, though it soon changed its name to University College London. The title of University of London came with the University of London Act in 1898.

⁶ For more on Brougham’s unique religious views, see Colin D. Pearce, “Lord Brougham’s Neo-Paganism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55.4 (1994): 651-70. In this article, Pearce argues that Brougham “is the kind of liberal thinker who rejected the Christian moral teaching while refraining from a frontal assault on Christian Revelation, and who opted instead for a rational theism, derived from the modern ‘Lockean’ tradition, but also in some sense inspired by the philosophers of pagan antiquity” (652).

and moved to Highbury, he continued as Treasurer. Though known for its Scottish and German university roots, London University was nonetheless created for the same reasons as the Dissenting academies and with a significant number of its founders having been raised and educated within Dissent.

One thing that can be confusing is that, very often, when a Dissenting academy closed, it didn't simply disappear into the ether. Instead, the academy might be moved to a new location to accommodate a new headmaster, or it might move to a new city because a new building was offered to house the school, or the academy might even go dormant for a while before being started back up. Sometimes tutors moved with the school, sometimes just the library remained as the only connection between the old academy and the new. There was no set way for how an academy might continue on after one iteration of it ended. New College London is a particularly important, but potentially confusing example of how Dissenting academies could shift or merge over time.

New College London has even deeper ties to Dissent and the Dissenting academies. When New College London was founded in 1850 as a Congregationalist college, it was actually a merger of three former Dissenting academies. First, the academy began by Philip Doddridge, which moved many times but is often referred to as either Daventry or Northampton Academy, became the foundation of New College London. Daventry's excellent library became the foundation of NCL's library in 1850. Second, when Hoxton Academy closed, it eventually reopened as Highbury College and then became part of NCL. And third, Homerton Academy became Homerton College in 1823 and then merged with Daventry and Hoxton/Highbury in 1850 to become New College London.

Finally, there is Harris Manchester College, which is today part of Oxford. However, Harris Manchester began as Warrington Academy in 1757. When Warrington closed in 1782, the academy laid dormant for a time before being refounded in Manchester Academy in 1786, where it stayed until 1803. The school moved a number of times, merging at one point with Harris College and eventually becoming part of the Oxford system. Yet, the school still considers its founding moment as the founding of Warrington Academy.⁷

To what extent did the Dissenting disposition survive in these new universities? How did Old Dissent, in its various forms, influence these early English universities? Were curriculums shared? What textbooks were used? Did these schools' opposition to Oxford and Cambridge also come with an opposition to the Church of England? What type of students first attended these burgeoning universities? I believe that an understanding of the Dissenting academies of the eighteenth century could be a foundation for thinking about the foundation of a number of nineteenth century universities.

Another future avenue of study emerging from this project is considering how the Dissenting academies may have impacted early American universities. For example, Charles Morton, who founded an early Dissenting academy at Newington Green (where Daniel Defoe was a student), later became Harvard University's first Vice President. Morton founded his academy at Newington Green around 1667, only five years after the Act of Uniformity.⁸ However, at the time, running an academy not licensed by the state—and therefore associated with the Church of England—was still illegal. Due to the legal troubles caused by running his

⁷ See Harris Manchester College's website: <http://www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/discover/our-history/>.

⁸ Irene Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 58.

Dissenting academy, Morton immigrated to the New England Colonies in the mid-1680s. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Morton became the first vice president of Harvard University, where he wrote two textbooks on logic and physics that were used at the university for years; indeed, Morton's *Compendium Physicae* was used at Harvard from 1687 to 1728.⁹ How did Morton's time running a Dissenting academy influence his time at Harvard? How did the early curricular changes taking place in Dissenting academies in England influence the curriculum at Harvard?

Another interesting case of possible transatlantic influence from an English Dissenting academy occurred at the founding of Princeton University. Formed in 1747, originally as the College of New Jersey, Princeton University was founded by four Dissenting ministers and three laymen who felt that the Middle Colonies needed a university. One of these founders, Aaron Burr Sr., became the second president of the university after the untimely death of the original president to smallpox less than five months after the opening of the university. Tasked with running a fledgling university, Burr Sr. turned "to [Philip] Doddridge... for guidance and assistance, and, in April 1748, Burr opened a regular correspondence which continued until Doddridge's death in 1751."¹⁰ Burr Sr. wrote of the College of New Jersey facing the same problems that most Dissenting academies faced in the eighteenth century: "We labour under difficulties at present, both for want of a fund to support the charge... and also for want of books."¹¹ The lack of funding was one of the primary causes behind the closings of Dissenting academies, while the difficulty in building a sufficient library is one of the reasons why a

⁹ David A. Reid, "Science for Polite Society: British Dissent and the Teaching of Natural Philosophy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *History of Universities: Volume XXI/2*, ed. Mordechai Feingold (New York: Oxford UP USA, 2006), 129.

¹⁰ For the full, but brief, article, see Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, "We Labour Under Difficulties..." *The Princeton Alumni Weekly* (Oct. 8, 1954): 8. Ebenezer Pemberton, one of the other founders, also wrote to Doddridge.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

Dissenting academy often reopened or merged with another academy. What other issues did early American universities share with Dissenting academies? Did other educators from other universities correspond with Doddridge or other tutors from other Dissenting academies? How did the Dissenting disposition of Doddridge translate to a new, transatlantic setting?

Thus, in future research, we should continue to ask: whither the Dissenting disposition?

We should also ask: whither the Dissenting disposition today? What is the state of giving all sides of an issue serious consideration followed by thorough debate and reasoning? What role can careful and considered debate play in a society that may be falling into a “post-truth” era? For that matter, what value does “truth” have in a country where the “alternative facts” are held as true by large portions of the populace? Can higher education attempt to battle “alternative facts” in a country that seems to grow more anti-intellectual every year? How can “true facts”—a redundancy of language now required by the growth of alternative facts—be expected to sway a populace that does not judge arguments by their relationship to truth, but to a predetermined concept of how they want the world to be... regardless of how it is? Though the Dissenting disposition originally developed out of a specific historical moment, I believe it still has value as a model for reflective, ethical thought. Especially in our current cultural milieu, a pedagogic model based on a demand to understand all sides of an issue followed by calm, reasoned debate is all the more important.

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