

"THE GOD OF THE AGE": RELIGION AND
SERVITUDE IN THE WORKS OF
AUGUSTA JANE EVANS

by

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Abstract

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Despite her widespread popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, Augusta Jane Evans and her novels went largely unnoticed for most of the twentieth century. It was not until Nina Baym included a chapter on Evans in her 1978 book *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* that scholars began to turn their attention to the once-popular novelist. Evans's presentation of intellectual, ambitious women who forsook their careers for marriage became controversial among scholars who argued whether Evans could, in the words of Diane Roberts, “be recovered for feminism” (xvi). Scholars Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Sara S. Frear, and, most recently, Brenda Ayres, however, turned from this question and began examining the role that Evans's deep Christian faith played in her novels. However, none of these scholars took an in-depth look at how Evans used her novels to present her theological arguments about issues that her readers face.

This dissertation examines how Evans's novels serve as the author's arguments on Catholicism, agnostic philosophy, the women's movement, slavery, and wealth inequality. Through the use of Socratic dialogues and practical plot points, Evans provides her readers with faith-based messages on each of the above issues.

Furthermore, Evans's arguments, although rooted in her religious beliefs, are supported through intellectual study, critical observation, and logical reasoning, indicating that Evans's faith—and, therefore, her claims—extended beyond a blind acceptance of traditional tenets and, instead, was grounded in the critical thought that was often used to challenge her faith and her positions. As such, Evans was able, through her novels, to provide well-reasoned discourse couched within the framework of the sentimental novels that were popular at the time.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation first and foremost to my wife Jessica; without her support, this dissertation never would have come to fruition. I dedicate it to my children, who have heard “Daddy’s working” enough to last a lifetime; to my parents, who have always supported me in my decision to transition from Exercise Science to English; to a long list of professors and colleagues too numerous to mention, all of whom offered support and advice along my academic journey; to the prayer warriors at First Baptist Las Colinas, whose prayers strengthened me in moments of doubt. I thank God for the mind to accomplish this analysis and the strength and perseverance to complete it. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to Brenda Ayres, Sara Frear, and the late Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, all of whom laid the groundwork upon which this project was built.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

At the peak of her career in the 1860s, Augusta Jane Evans was one of the bestselling novelists of the era. Despite a lack of official sales records of the time, it is widely believed that sales of Evans's fourth and most popular novel *St. Elmo* (1866) were eclipsed only by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur* (Fidler 129). Even once her production declined following her 1868 marriage, Evans, then writing under her married name Augusta Evans Wilson, maintained her popular support. Throughout a fifty-seven-year career that produced nine novels, Evans was every bit as well-known as nineteenth-century authors who have spent little time outside either the popular or the critical realm. Yet, twentieth-century critical attention to Evans was virtually non-existent until Nina Baym included a chapter on Evans in her 1978 book *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*, which began a slow but steady resurgence of criticism on Evans's novels, most recently seen in Brenda Ayres's book *The Life and Works of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson, 1835-1909*, published in July 2012. Of this scholarship, the vast majority has focused on Evans's portrayal of women and gender roles. Given that Evans's novels could rightly be classified as "domestic novels," this focus on gender certainly is warranted. However, in addition to telling stories about gender relations, Evans's novels also focused heavily on Christian themes, so much so that David S. Reynolds, in his book *Faith in Fiction*, refers to them as "religious novels" (206). However, the critical attention on Evans has not reflected the preponderance of Christian themes in her novels; only a few scholars have addressed Christianity in Evans's novels to any degree.

Considering that Evans herself held deep Christian convictions and that her books themselves are overtly Christian, with Evans attempting "to provide spiritual

answers to her readers” (Ayres 60), a full study of the role Christian theology plays in Evans’s novels is warranted but has not yet been conducted. Ayres’s book begins to look at Evans’s novels from a religious standpoint, but Ayres’s primary focus is Evans’s critical biography. Previously, historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, in her introduction to the 1992 edition of Evans’s *Beulah* (1859) discusses extensively the Christian elements of that novel. However, even though Fox-Genovese writes about Evans in some of her work on the history of the American South and an unfinished manuscript offering a Christian rebuttal to the prevailing feminist critics of Evans was published posthumously, she passed away before completing an extended discussion of the Christian influence on Evans or the theological content of Evans’s other works. To date, perhaps the most extensive look at Christian faith in Evans’s novels is Sara S. Frear’s 2007 dissertation “*A Fine View of the Delectable Mountains*”: *The Religious Vision of Mary Virginia Terhune (Marion Harland) and Augusta Jane Evans Wilson*. Through her discussion of Evans and Terhune, Frear argues that domestic novelists in general sought to use their novels to edify their readers; however, she does not focus on specific areas in which this edification occurs. Ayres, Fox-Genovese, and Frear combine to establish a foundation of Christian scholarship on Evans, but none make a Christian examination of Evans’s entire body of work her primary purpose, thus opening the door to a more extensive look at the Christian theology of Evans’s novels.

An exhaustive discussion of Evans’s application of Christian values to every single aspect of her novels, would, naturally, go far beyond the scope of a single dissertation; throughout her body of work Evans discusses numerous social issues ranging from slavery to women’s education to labor unrest to capital punishment. Because Evans uses her novels to address various issues of the time, scholars have often looked at them from a historical perspective. For many years, Evans’s novels have

been presented as historical examples of Southern attitudes regarding religion, gender, class, and race during and following the Civil War, and when her three most popular novels—*Beulah*, *Macaria*, and *St. Elmo*—were republished in 1992, two of the three featured introductions written by historians. In her 2000 book *Fire & Fiction: Augusta Jane Evans in Context*, Anne Sophie Riepma attempts “to reconstruct the historical, social, and political context from which [Evans’s] work arose” (4). Even though the religious climate of the American South has been a natural part of the historical discussion of Evans, scholars have yet to discuss the deeper theological elements of Evans’s novels. Rather than simply repeating the prevailing dogma, Evans’s novels show a strong intellectual foundation to her faith, one that was cultivated through her own years of study; therefore, a discussion of Evans’s theology and the presentation thereof is a necessary part of the critical conversation on Evans and her work.

As I will discuss below, the nineteenth century was a period of theological change, in regards to both theological doctrine (such as eschatology, election, etc.) and practical theology (most notably related to women’s rights and slavery). The intellectually-minded Evans did not shy away from these debates; rather, she used her novels as vehicles for espousing her own in-depth theological arguments on various issues, targeting the audience for sentimental fiction as opposed to the audience for complex theological treatises. In describing Evans’s first novel, *Inez, A Tale of the Alamo*, Brenda Ayres writes that the novel “engages in an intellectual theological and philosophical debate that raged in the 1800s and has currency yet today” (33). As will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter, Evans used *Inez* as a forum for debating the theological differences between Protestantism and Catholicism, addressing many questions (such as the doctrines of purgatory and intercession) that are as much a part of

the twenty-first century debate between Protestantism and Catholicism as they were the nineteenth-century debate.

Given the enduring nature of theological debate—a conversation in which Tacitus, Augustine, Calvin, and Luther, among many others, still have dominant voices—Evans presents several arguments, such as the aforementioned Protestantism-Catholicism debate, that resonate beyond the era in which she wrote. Conversations about how Christians should respond to various social issues, including those pertaining to gender roles and economic welfare programs continue to abound. However, many of Evans's theological arguments deal not with age-old doctrinal disputes but with debates surrounding social issues of the nineteenth century. Therefore, this dissertation will examine Evans's role as a lay-theologian who presented her own rigorous study and reasoning in her novels in order to enter the theological debate of the period and to make in-depth theological arguments concerning four major theological and social issues of the nineteenth century: the theological shift brought about by European philosophy; the women's rights movement; the slavery debate; and issues pertaining to poverty, labor, and the rise of Marxism. Although Evans frames her approach to these issues as her response to issues of the day, thus rendering an historical quality to her discussion, some of her work—namely her responses to the conflict between philosophy and Christianity and to issues related to poverty and wealth—deals with issues that have endured even into the twenty-first century. For instance, as will be discussed in the fifth chapter, Evans's critique of a Christian approach to poverty foreshadows many contemporary arguments about the same issue, thus creating a more enduring quality to Evans's novels than that with which she has been credited.

Augusta Jane Evans, Her Theology, and Her Works

Augusta Jane Evans was born in 1835 to an affluent family, but her father Matthew went bankrupt due to his exorbitant spending, beginning with a costly house and 143 acres of land and culminating in “the purchase of \$50,000 worth of dry goods, which had to be sold at far less than cost” (Fidler 19). Hoping that geographical change would lead to financial success, Matthew Evans moved his family to San Antonio in 1845 and to Mobile in 1849, where the family stayed. Despite spending only four years in San Antonio, Evans used the city’s history and Catholic culture as inspiration for her first novel, *Inez, a Tale of the Alamo*, which she wrote in secret as a gift for her father in 1850, when she was only fifteen. During her teenage years, Evans served as a volunteer nurse during a yellow fever outbreak in Mobile, service that inspired similar actions from many of her heroines (39). In a similar case of Evans’s art imitating her life, Evans based her second novel *Beulah* on her own experiences grappling with her faith. Following her in-depth arguments against Catholicism in *Inez*, Evans began “a frenzied and honest examination of her own beliefs” that led to an “ordeal of skepticism,” after which “she was...ready to reject the atheistic metaphysicians who wrangle on concerning the question of proof of religion” (Fidler 48, 50). In short, Evans’s presentation of Christianity does not stem from a rote recitation of traditional societal values—as Nancy Alder suggests (79)—but from her own spiritual, philosophical, and intellectual quest, a quest that inspired that of the fictional Beulah.

Certainly, every belief system has its share of proponents who never critically examine their respective belief systems, and Christianity is no exception. However, Evans does not fit into this category. Christian theologians J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig write that “faith involves placing trust in what you have reason to believe is true. Faith is not a blind, irrational leap into the dark” (18). As seen in the depth of

research and reason that she uses to formulate her arguments, Evans shows that her faith is rooted in what she has reason to believe is true and is neither blind nor uncritical. In fact, the changing theological climate of the nineteenth century made an unreflective Christian faith rooted only in tradition much more difficult. Although one could argue that this reliance on tradition as a foundation for Christian belief largely persisted until the end of the twentieth century, the shift away from Christianity merely as a matter of tradition began to become more prominent during Evans's lifetime. The year of Evans's birth, David Friedrich Strauss released his controversial *Das Leben Jesu* (*The Life of Jesus*), which questioned the authority of the Gospels and was translated into English in 1846 by George Eliot. Additionally, Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1838 address to the Harvard Divinity School caused great uproar by building upon the already controversial ideas of Unitarianism (which denied the divinity of Christ) by merging Christianity and his own interpretation of Eastern religions through his suggestion of the divinity of humankind (Welch 179-80).

Beyond such controversial figures as Strauss and Emerson, Claude Welch points out that the 1830s saw a "new concern for the social interpretation of Christianity...and its relevance to modern society" as well as a "call for 'reasonableness' in religion" (6-7; 30). As such, Christians began to examine the application of Scripture to various social issues. Mark A. Noll points out that evangelical Christians of the time maintained certain core tenets, such as the divinity of Christ and that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk 19:10; 171).¹ However, Noll also points out that by the middle of the nineteenth century, these same

¹ All Biblical references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted. Noll asserts that the King James Version "was the Bible of choice for almost all Americans" in the mid-nineteenth century (18). As such, this dissertation will follow Noll's lead in making use of the KJV. In the event that the language of the KJV lacks the clarity of a modern translation, I will use the NKJV

evangelicals fought each other over a host of *Streitpunkte*—over how to interpret Scriptures; over the definition of many Christian doctrines, including human free will, the atonement, eschatology, the meaning of the sacraments and the nature of the church; over slavery and other social issues; over the ecclesiastical roles of women and laymen; over whether to sing hymns or psalms only; over whether churches should use creeds; over principles and practices of the market economy; and over every imaginable kind of personality conflict. (170)

Much of this disagreement stemmed from the democratic *sola scriptura* method of interpreting Scripture that was employed by various evangelical denominations (Miller 43-44). This method of interpretation, used by the American evangelical community—which constituted more than 85% of the churchgoing public (Noll 170)—held that, because nothing was added to Scripture by the church, individuals could read and reach an accurate literal interpretation of the Bible on their own. As Noll puts it, this literal hermeneutic meant that “what Scripture really meant was exactly what it said” (381). However, given the magnitude of interpreting a text of nearly one million words, disagreements on Scripture are inevitable, logically speaking, even among those exercising the same hermeneutic, and many theological issues of the nineteenth century, most especially the slavery debate, stemmed from such disagreements. Although Evans does not directly address hermeneutical differences beyond her analysis of Catholic doctrine, she does briefly state a reason for such differences in interpretation, doctrine and denomination. In *Macaria*, heroine Irene Huntingdon asks of her spiritual mentor Amy Aubrey why so many denominations and creeds exist. Amy responds with what appears to be Evans’s own response: “Because poor human nature is so full of foibles” (53). Throughout her work, Evans depicts many social ills, especially among professed Christians, as stemming from the “foibles” of human nature, using her novels to present

because it maintains the King James tradition while using more contemporary language when doing so would not distort the meaning of the KJV translation. I also will use the NIV (1984) if more modern parlance helps elucidate the text. Biblical references contained within other sources are the translation used by the secondary source.

her argument regarding the avoidance of such issues through her critical, nuanced interpretation of Scripture.

With the increased application of the Bible to social issues, however, disagreements among evangelicals on various issues led to increased disagreements over “the meaning, use, and interpretation of Scripture” (Noll 368). Thus, each side believed that its literal interpretation was the “correct” interpretation. Although these disagreements had previously led to splits in denominations or congregations, no issue was more divisive than slavery, so much so that “short of warfare, no means seemed to exist for adjudicating these self-evident, but conflicting, interpretations of Scripture” (Noll 17). The slavery debate was so contentious that it called into question the prevailing hermeneutic and led those who maintained that the literal hermeneutic sanctioned slavery to argue that “any attack on a literalist construction of biblical slavery was an attack on the Bible itself” (399). The slavery debate is but one example, though one which led to great bloodshed, but other debates concerning women’s rights, labor and poverty, and the rising influence of philosophy also created an environment in which the teenaged Evans was driven to a critical examination of her previously held beliefs.

Raised as a Methodist, it is likely that the young Evans did, indeed, follow the Wesleyan doctrine as a matter of routine. According to Noll, early Methodists emphasized salvation and redemption over “the formulation of thought for politics, society, literature, or civilization” (330). Evans certainly emphasizes salvation and redemption throughout her novels, most notably in the radical changes that take place within the title characters of *Beulah* and *St. Elmo*. However, after her period of doubt brought about by the theological environment of the era along with her research into Catholicism, Evans then eschews the practice of faith as routine and writes much more about social issues while not forsaking the major theological issues of salvation and redemption, which she was

then able to address from a more intellectual position rather than from a position of recitation of church doctrine. As Ayres puts it,

Evans, like many in this country, abandoned the faith of her forefathers, subscribed to rationalism, pantheism, or any 'ism' as long as it was not Christian, and then finally returned to Christianity but with a fervent belief in a merciful God, a literal understanding of the Bible, and the gospel message of salvation for all but only possible through accepting Jesus Christ as one's personal savior. (55)

Following her period of skepticism, Evans used her rejuvenated faith to propel her literary career, earning fame for her fictionalized documentation of her own struggle and an audience for her theological arguments. Ayres notes that "the main reason Evans wrote *Beulah* was to help readers through the same spiritual journey that she herself traversed" (47), and Evans took this same approach to each of her novels, using her fiction as a forum for her theological ideas.

Building upon the success of *Beulah*, Evans parlayed her newfound fame into political influence, which she continued to build through communication with U.S. and then Confederate Representative J. L. M. Curry as well as Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard. Evans's correspondence with Beauregard about details of the Battle of Manassas, combined with her own experience as a battlefield nurse, helped give authenticity to her Civil War novel *Macaria*, the latter third of which takes place during the war. Following the war, Evans wrote *St. Elmo*, which became one of the best-selling novels of the nineteenth century. Fidler contends that despite the lack of "reliable records and indexes of sales before the year 1895...it is safe to say that...*St. Elmo* ran a close third to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Ben-Hur*" in terms of sales (Fidler 129). Following her marriage to the much older Colonel Lorenzo Wilson in 1868, Evans, now writing under her married name Augusta Evans Wilson, published *Vashti* in 1869 and then virtually ceased literary production. From 1859 to 1869, she wrote four novels but subsequently wrote only that same number the remainder of her life. Apparently content to be Colonel

Wilson's wife and stepmother to his children and to attend social functions, Evans's later books would sometimes appear more than a decade apart. Evans published her final book, *Devota*, in 1907, two years before her death.

Although her novels are commonly included with other novels labeled "domestic fiction," Evans's brand of domestic fiction was unconventional in the sense that, although her novels usually followed many of the same tropes as typical domestic fiction, they also featured conflicts that were more metaphysical than worldly. Beginning with her first novel, *Inez*, Evans puts more emphasis on making a doctrinal argument than on producing a plot. Set against the backdrop of the Texas Revolution, the novel includes scenes of the Battle of the Alamo, the Goliad Massacre, espionage, danger-defying heroism, unrequited love, romantic reunions, and love unrevealed until death. Essentially, the background plot of *Inez* would have made for a perfect 1950s Hollywood western. However, the true tension of *Inez* lies not in any of its potentially exciting subplots but in the lead character's conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism and subsequent reconversion to Protestantism. In a similar manner, Evans uses dramatic narrative elements throughout her body of work to drive her greater theme: her characters' relationships with God.

This theme is most prominent in Evans's first best-seller, *Beulah* (1859). Using *Beulah* as an example, the typical domestic novel would have made the central conflict the budding relationship between Beulah and her guardian Guy Hartwell. In Evans's novel, however, although this relationship is a major part of the narrative, the central conflict is Beulah's own crisis of faith as she undertakes an in-depth study of philosophy and weighs philosophical ideas against Christian theology. When the novel begins, the pious Beulah Benton lives at an orphanage with her younger sister Lilly and their good friend Claudia. Beulah is soon sent to work as a nanny after a wealthy family adopts the

two younger girls but rejects Beulah because she is not as attractive as the others. After cursing the family for forbidding her from seeing her sister, Beulah learns that her sister died in a scarlet fever outbreak. Then stricken with both grief and her own bout with a less contagious and less assuredly fatal illness, Beulah is taken into the home of Dr. Guy Hartwell, who becomes her *de facto* guardian. Beulah accepts Hartwell's offer of guardianship only on the condition that it lasts until she has received an education but no further. The condition that Beulah places on Hartwell's guardianship eventually leads to alienation between the two as Beulah prefers to accept a teaching position rather than the life of affluence that Hartwell offers.

During her time as Hartwell's ward, Beulah, in addition to her public school education, engages in a plan of self-education through extensive reading in Hartwell's library, despite the warning from her agnostic guardian that doing so might compromise her faith. Against Hartwell's advice, Beulah begins with the dark, psychological fiction of Edgar Allan Poe and then traverses her way through the works of Emerson, Ruskin, Plato, and Victor Cousin, among many others. Through a combination of study and the tragedies that have struck her life, Beulah's faith erodes from piety to agnosticism. Along the way, Beulah develops two close friendships that reflect her changing philosophy, each representing separate ends of the faith spectrum. Clara, a fellow schoolteacher, has an unquestioning, childlike faith that does not satisfy Beulah's intellectual hunger. Conversely, Cornelia Graham, the adopted sister of Beulah's childhood friend Eugene, shares Beulah's intellectual curiosity and skepticism; however, her refusal to acknowledge the possible existence of God, even on her deathbed, troubles Beulah. During Cornelia's illness and following her death, Beulah becomes friends with Reginald Lindsay, a cousin of Cornelia and attempted suitor of Beulah. Reginald shares Clara's unwavering faith but also Beulah's intellectual craving. Through her conversations with

Reginald, Beulah begins to question her unbelief as much as she had previously questioned her belief, ultimately returning to the faith of her youth, now with the intellectual soundness brought about by extensive philosophical and theological study.

Although Beulah develops a fondness for Reginald, she refuses his marriage proposals. In keeping with the tradition of sentimental literature, she refuses to marry for any reason other than unyielding love, which she has only for her estranged guardian, Guy Hartwell. By novel's end, Beulah is a successful teacher and author. Yet, she forsakes her career when Hartwell returns from a lengthy trip abroad and asks the now-adult Beulah to be his wife rather than his adopted child. As I will discuss in more detail, Beulah's choice of marriage over her career fits with her personal emphasis on fulfilling what she sees as her Christian duty but has been viewed controversially among critics over the last thirty years.

As the first of Evans's three most widely-discussed novels (*Macaria* and *St. Elmo* being the other two), *Beulah* stands as a solid example of Evans's work. Although her novels vary somewhat in the specifics of plot, they all deal with similar themes of theology and applied faith. With the possible exception of *Macaria*, the main purpose of which was to gain support for the Confederate army—even though the novel still places great emphasis on theological issues—each of Evans's plots serves to drive her various theological arguments. However, Evans does not limit her theological approach only to issues related to faith or doctrine. Although *Inez* and *Beulah* both feature theological debates about doctrine or agnosticism, Evans departs from a mindset that separates theology from social issues and also uses her novels to provide theological arguments for the various hotly debated social issues of the time, addressing gender, racial, and economic issues with arguments that derive from her faith. Despite the attention that

Evans gave to faith-based arguments, however, little critical attention has been paid to the Christian aspect of Evans's work.

The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of Augusta Jane Evans

In the mid-1860s, Evans's novel *St. Elmo* sold a purported one million copies and lent its name to everything from cigars to children. During the silent film era, *St. Elmo* was twice adapted for the screen, with one of these adaptations starring John Gilbert, whose popularity as a leading man at the time was second only to that of Rudolph Valentino. David S. Reynolds reports that the sale of her novels earned Evans \$100,000 in an eight-year span (*Faith* 206); in twenty-first century dollars, this would make Evans a millionaire several times over. In other words, Evans was immensely popular during her lifetime and in the few years following her death. Evans's popularity was so widespread that her biographer, William Perry Fidler, reports that readers of the time thought that her "influence...was so great that her place in literary history was assured" (3). However, Evans's popularity did not last as long as her contemporary supporters believed it would.

Today, first editions of Evans's novels can be purchased for less than twenty dollars and are available to check out of libraries. Most library copies of her nine novels, as well as the most recent printings of some of her books, were published in Evans's lifetime. All film versions of Evans's novels are considered "lost" (meaning that if prints are still in existence, which in itself is unlikely, no one knows where). Along with the disappearance of her popularity, critical evaluations of Evans's work also vanished. In 1951, William Perry Fidler published *Augusta Evans Wilson, 1835-1909: A Biography*, after which no critical attention of any kind was paid to Evans for over twenty-five years; no other book-length exploration of Evans appeared until 2000. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, a few volumes of feminist criticism devoted chapters to Evans, but

just as noteworthy as the books that included Evans were those that did not. In her 1977 book *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann C. Douglas focuses on American women writers of the nineteenth century and their response to religion. Despite being an American female religious writer of the nineteenth century, Evans receives no mention in Douglas's book. Later, in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, which deals with American novelists and literature of the mid-nineteenth century that no longer receive the critical response of contemporaries such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, or Walt Whitman, David S. Reynolds also makes no mention of Evans. Reynolds, who previously discussed Evans in *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America*, primarily dealt with the years just before Evans began writing, so this omission can be excused. The only reasonable explanation for Evans's exclusion from Douglas's book, however, is that Evans by that time had fallen so far out of the critical eye that her inclusion was neither warranted nor missed.

On top of these noteworthy omissions, Evans is also the subject of a rather curious inclusion, receiving an entry—which devotes more space to allegations of pedantry in Evans's work than it does to the content of her novels—in the 1985 volume *American Writers for Children Before 1900*. What makes Evans's inclusion so unusual is that she could hardly be considered a children's writer. As mentioned above, the central conflict in *Beulah* is the eponymous heroine's internal struggle with theology and philosophy. As such, the novel features lengthy dialogues on philosophers such as Victor Cousin and Jean Paul Richter, hardly material that would attract a younger audience despite Evans's desire to expose her readers to intellectual content. The most reasonable explanation for Evans's inclusion in this particular volume is that her heroines are almost always juveniles when each novel begins.

However, less perplexing than the critical surveys that include or exclude Evans is the scholarship that views Evans as an historical artifact rather than as an author whose work deserves criticism in the twenty-first century. As previously stated, Evans's novels frequently have been used to show Southern attitudes on various elements of nineteenth-century society. Much of the valuing of Evans's novels as historical artifacts rather than as works of literature originates with Fidler's 1951 biography, which gave the forgotten author a place in the changed critical landscape. Written during the peak of New Criticism, Fidler assesses Evans's novels from a formalist perspective. For instance, in analyzing *St. Elmo*, Fidler explicitly states that Evans's most successful novel "is a period piece" that "should not be read as a work of art, but rather as a social document from our past" (131, 142). However, Fidler's critique seems to be motivated by hubris as much as it does by a formalist approach. Fidler claims that one reason to study Evans is that it is "flattering to see proof of our own superior tastes, to know that we, unlike our forefathers, never mistake an inferior novel for a great one and never allow the pressures of faulty taste around us to confuse our exquisite judgments" (8). Throughout his biography, Fidler repeatedly—and without a trace of irony—states that the reason for the success of Evans and other similar novelists was the lack of sophistication of the nineteenth-century reading public compared to that of the 1950s, and he never misses an opportunity to refer to Evans's work as "inferior" to male writers who were less financially successful in the nineteenth century but who achieved great critical success in the twentieth century, going so far as to often chastise nineteenth-century readers apropos of no other conversation and to applaud his contemporaries for favoring authors such as Melville or Thoreau to Evans and others of Hawthorne's famed "mob of scribbling women."

Many critics have taken Fidler to task over his hubris; most notably, Brenda Ayres' criticism of Fidler is as harsh as his criticism on Evans, stating that his "work reflects a severely limited understanding of who the woman really was and what her works effected" (5). Although Fidler is accurate concerning the undisputed facts of Evans's life, Ayres still disparages his biography—primarily for its unapologetic pro-male bias—and its widespread use in Evans's scholarship, referring to the book as "a disservice to scholars of nineteenth-century American gender issues and literature and history in general" (6). Turning the tables on Fidler's elevation of the critical tastes of the 1950s, Ayres asserts that "today's readers are savvy enough to know that there is a plethora of truth and treasure to be found in works that failed to be canonized in the earlier decades" (3). In other words, it could be said that Fidler is as much a product of his time as Evans is of hers. However, to dismiss either for following the conventions of her or his era is equally fallacious. Although many of Fidler's ideas are, indeed, dated (a point that many would also argue about Evans), his biography offers the first solid account of Evans's life and career, and it still gives scholars a good picture of Evans's background—material that Ayres herself uses—despite taking a critical approach that has long since fallen out of favor.

As critical thought moved away from the formalistic approach taken by Fidler, scholars like Jane Tompkins acknowledged the value of Evans and her contemporaries, pointing out that they wrote "for edification's sake and not for the sake of art, as we understand it" (149), indicating that such novels contain value beyond what formalists considered a lack of artistry. It is a sign of the steady shift away from Fidler's approach that the increased critical attention to Evans coincides with the advent of the cultural criticism promoted by Tompkins and other scholars in the 1980s and '90s. However, a cultural approach can still isolate a work as a product of its time depending on the

modern-day response to the values put forth in said novel. Although many of her critics look at Evans's novels as promoting values common in the nineteenth century but which are obsolete today, Ayres argues that Evans "is not just a historical artifact, and her novels are not just instruments of recorded history. Her life and works do resonate with contemporary readers, not just in helping them gain immediacy with the nineteenth century but also in furthering their understanding of struggles that continue to plague modern readers today" (xi). I concur with Ayres that, although specific situations are far different today, many of the arguments that Evans presents in her novels can still be valid for twenty-first century readers. As stated previously, the enduring nature of theological debate allows centuries-old texts to continue playing a role in theological discussions, and it is not uncommon for scholars to refer to theologians both ancient and contemporary. And Evans was no different. Throughout her novels, she refers not only to philosophers *en vogue* at the time but also to those of antiquity.

In fact, Evans's wealth of classical references is one of the greatest complaints critics have with her work. To be sure, Evans's novels are very pedantic with their references, some of which are so obscure that a scholar would have difficulty deducing each one even with the near-infinite resources of the Internet. Even during the height of her popularity, critics lambasted Evans for her arcane references, and satirist Charles Webb wrote a parody of *St. Elmo* entitled *St. Twel'mo; or, the Cuneiform Cyclopedist of Chattanooga*, in which heroine Etna Early (a play on *St. Elmo's* Edna Earl) acquires a dictionary, which produces in her "a fatal fondness for polysyllables, a trick of speaking them trippingly, and a contempt for common English, from which she never recovered" (11). Ayres is generous with her criticism of Evans's "ponderous prose" (199), as is fellow Evans-supporter Sara S. Frear, who states that Evans's novels have "a strained, wooden quality" (*Fine View* 90). But most critics, including several of Evans's contemporaries, are

more in agreement with Susan K. Harris, who refers to *St. Elmo* as “grossly, even ludicrously overwritten” (60). Given the novel’s main characters’ penchant for spouting obscure quotations at length and speaking freely in multiple languages, critics and readers easily can be left with the impression that Evans is showing off her own knowledge in an exhibition of pedantry as much as she is establishing herself as an intellect on par with her male contemporaries while also showing her audience of female readers that they can acquire such knowledge despite the male dominance of the intellectual realm. To give but one example from *St. Elmo*, in one of his many debates with Edna, St. Elmo Murray retorts that she should “go back to your Tacitus, and study there the dismal picture of that lonely Teutoburgium, where Varus and his legions went down in the red burial of battle,” a reference which he follows by quoting lines from Tennyson’s “Morte D’Arthur” (101). Such references are so pervasive in the novel that the above quotation was chosen not through careful selection of the perfect example of Evans’s obscure references but through the admittedly non-scholarly method of opening the book at random and using the reference that appeared on the first page encountered. To be sure, such erudition is not simply a quality that Evans embeds in *St. Elmo* to give examples of traits of the main characters of that novel. All of Evans’s novels use the same verbose, quote-dropping, classical text-referencing, and foreign-language heavy voice of *St. Elmo*, and most of her novels include lengthy expositions on social or religious issues that would be better suited to an essay than to a work of fiction. In sum, those who negatively critique Evans based solely on the question of pedantry have a valid point: Evans’s penchant for peppering her dialogues with long quotations from classical works, obscure references, and multiple languages makes them almost comically difficult to read or to fathom how a character would talk in such a way. However, focusing on these aspects as a means of disparaging Evans’s work not only

ignores any potential reasons the author might have for including them, it also discounts the larger themes Evans addresses. Furthermore, given that male modernist authors such as T. S. Eliot or James Joyce are often lauded for their use of archaic references and multiple languages, to disparage Evans for using similar references works to support the possibility that Evans included them to show that women, contrary to expectation, could be equally learned.

Between Evans's cumbersome style and the fact that domestic fiction had long fallen out of favor among critics, Evans and her work were virtually ignored for much of the twentieth century despite a six-decade writing career that spawned nine novels that dealt with "the most serious intellectual issues of her day" (Fox-Genovese, "Between" 22). However, Evans has received a steadily increasing critical resurgence over the last thirty years. For the better part of three decades, Fidler's far-from-definitive 1951 biography stood as the most current source for scholarship on Evans. It was not until 1978, when Nina Baym included a chapter on Evans in *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* that critics slowly began to turn their attention to the forgotten author. Baym asserts that Evans's protagonists differ from those in other sentimental novels in that she "endows her heroines with Byronic qualities usually reserved for the lady villains of melodrama and romance: alienation, tempestuousness, pride, vengefulness. Yet at the same time her heroines are moral, virtuous, and pious" (279). Baym states that by creating female protagonists with a wide range of emotions and character traits Evans creates the "most accomplished in the long line of women's heroines" (278). In other words, Evans differed from her contemporaries in that her heroines deviated from the typical model of domestic characters. Baym's attention to Evans and her protagonists sparked a debate among feminist critics

regarding the complex nature of Evans's heroines, who seemed to be simultaneously subversive and submissive.

Throughout her novels, Evans presents women who strive for and achieve the independence afforded to them by successful careers. Yet, at the end of her novels, most notably in *Beulah* and *St. Elmo*, Evans's female protagonists forsake their independence and their careers to enter into marriages that will not allow for either. Most of the critical work on Evans focuses on the ending of these two novels, with many critics arguing that these are examples of capitulation to a patriarchal society while others, such as Ayres and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, argue that such traditional feminist arguments are incomplete if not erroneous because they do not take into account Evans's Christian beliefs or the religious context of her novels.

For example, Anne Goodwyn Jones, Mary Kelley, Amy McCandless, and Susan K. Harris each argue that, although Evans created protagonists that differed from the mold of those in standard domestic fiction, she still relied on the "conventional formula" for ending her novels (Jones 57). Jones considers Evans's heroines' abdication of their careers to be acts of "capitulation" (91), and Kelley goes even further, stating that "as much as Wilson sought to counter her society's prevailing stereotype of woman, she reinforced it" (103). Each of these four critics furthers the position that Evans robs her protagonists of their independence and forces them into marriages they would not otherwise choose, simply because that is the "expected happy ending" (Jones 353). McCandless asserts that Evans's message is for "women ... to look to their husbands for physical and emotional succor" (11), and Harris claims that Edna Earl "truncate[es] her career and subordinat[es] her life – and mind – to St. Elmo's" (69). Although these readings hold up under secular reasoning, within the religious context that is so prevalent in Evans's novels, these so-called forced endings are not representative of "capitulation"

to a husband but are presented as acts of subordination to God, a point that Elizabeth Fox-Genovese emphasizes in her introduction to the 1992 edition of *Beulah*.

Much of Fox-Genovese's introduction to *Beulah* serves as a direct rebuttal to Jones's claims and, thus, as an indirect rebuttal to those of Kelley, McCandless, and Harris. Fox-Genovese asserts that "Jones's argument depends upon the assumption that in consigning Beulah to the role of devoted wife, Evans is consigning her to defeat" ("Introduction" xxxiii). The other three critics take a similar tack; each argues not only that Evans's protagonists are defeated when they choose marriage over independent success but that Evans revels in this defeat. In making her argument, Fox-Genovese indicates that the quartet misunderstand the religious component in Evans's personal philosophy as well as that of her novels. Fox-Genovese states that Evans viewed "conversion and faith [as] the highest human accomplishment" and is, therefore, "celebrating Beulah's subordination to God" rather than her subordination to her husband or her capitulation to patriarchal society (xxxiii, xxxiv). Fox-Genovese specifically discusses the relationship of religious belief to independence and gender roles within marriage as exhibited in *Beulah*, but her argument applies to Evans's other novels as well given that in each novel Evans depicts faith, not independence, as the highest ideal that anyone, woman or man, can achieve.

Although Fox-Genovese's opponents in this debate would argue that woman's submission to God and to her husband are one and the same, Fox-Genovese, who built her own academic reputation in the field of feminist criticism before her conversion to Catholicism, later argues that "feminist literary critics have generally embraced the prevailing hostility of contemporary critics to religion, dismissing formal religion as inherently repressive, especially of women." She asserts that, through its lack of understanding of the sacrificial love at the root of Christianity, this approach to the

religious aspect of novels such as those by Evans creates a misreading of the text, one that reads the text as promoting a woman's subservience to a man rather than her obedience to God ("Religion" 16). Fox-Genovese, as well as Evans, shows an evangelical understanding that Paul's exhortation for wives to submit to their husbands as the church does to Christ carries with it the caveat that "so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself" (Eph 5:22-24; 28). As William MacDonald writes, "Submission never implies inferiority. The Lord Jesus is submissive to God the Father, but in no way is He inferior to Him. Neither is the woman inferior to the man. In many ways she may be superior. ... In submitting to the authority of her husband, a wife is submitting to the Lord" (1947). MacDonald goes on to point out that this submission of a wife to her husband extends only insofar as doing so does not "compromise her loyalty to the Lord Jesus" (1948). In other words, both a woman and her husband are to submit to God, and a woman's submission to her husband ends when it comes in conflict with her submission to God. In her novels Evans presents this very scenario concerning her protagonists: her heroines are typically superior to their male counterparts in terms of intellect, morality, civility, and professional success, yet they still voluntarily submit to their husbands, not in following a traditional social pattern but in subordinating their lives to the will of God. In turn, by subordinating themselves to God rather than to men, Evans's heroines are not placed in states of oppression at the conclusions of her novels. Rather, Evans indicates that their position is the highest calling they could achieve: responsibility for another's salvation.

Following this debate, Diane Roberts examines the points on each side and raises the salient question: "Can Evans be recovered for feminism?" (xvi). Unlike Fox-Genovese, Roberts agrees with her predecessors that Evans's female protagonists are "debilitated in some way," referring to the heroines' loss of independence (xii). However,

unlike the earlier critics, Roberts also recognizes that the novels display the “rights, privileges, duties, [and] power” given to women, particularly in the realm of religion and morality, where women were expected to be the leaders of the family (xi). Roberts acknowledges that this paradox means that “Evans’s narrative can be read as contradictory and troubled,” especially by readers of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries (xiii). Following Roberts’ lead, many scholars began seeking to reconcile the contradictions that Roberts points out. Karen Day refers to Evans as both a “culture-preserver” and a “culture-threat” (60), arguing that, despite the endings to the novels (which cause Evans to be a “culture-preserver”), Evans created subversive characters that served as “nineteenth-century precursors of twentieth-century feminism” (56). Drew Gilpin Faust expands on this idea and points out that, although Evans “celebrates personal autonomy,” she also “denounces ... unchecked individualism” (*Mothers* 171). Faust argues that Evans uses religion as a means of creating a balance in her protagonists, allowing them to be independent while remaining selfless (174). Putting this religious perspective in its historical context, Anne Sophie Riepma argues that women of the period, especially those in the South, eschewed what would today be considered gender equality because they feared that it would rob them of their “moral authority and ... influence” over men (135).

In other words, Day, Faust, and Riepma respond to Roberts’ question by attempting to explain the seeming paradox of Evans’s worldview. However, without a fuller discussion of Evans’s Christian worldview and the evangelical principles upon which it is rooted, Evans’s apparent contradictions remain paradoxical and difficult to reconcile. After all, how could someone favor both the *status quo* and radical change? The answer to this conundrum lies in the Christian principles promoted by Evans: the radical change occurs in an individual’s motives; actions, if necessary, change as a

result. Rather than being motivated by blindly following social tradition or patriarchal views, Evans's heroines are motivated by their adherence to Scripture. Sara Frear argues that what some have perceived as the "demeaning" submission of a woman to her husband is, in both Evans's novels and in her own view, a "liberating" act because it is rooted in submission to Christ (*Fine View* 161). Through this argument, Frear shows an understanding of the evangelical Christian worldview adhered to by Evans: that submission to Christ frees an individual from the confines of the world. In other words, Evans presents heroines who, by following Christ, rise above such worldly ideas as patriarchy or oppression; in other words, Evans depicts heroines who believe that for Christ to "increase" they each "must decrease" (John 3:30). Contrary to Nancy Alder's assertion that Evans's depiction of such faith is simply her way of "rotely reminding" female readers to know their place in patriarchal society (79), Frear points out that Evans's depiction of Christianity is not based on sentiment but on intellectual reasoning combined with humility rather than hubris (*Fine View* 144). Given her career and intellectual study despite social detractors, Evans's own biography more than supports the claim that she valued intellectual endeavor and independence above the worldly values of a patriarchal society. Additionally, her biography and novels also show that Evans valued following Christ above all else.

It is her belief in the superiority and sovereignty of Christ that forms the basis of the arguments that Evans puts forth in her novels. With each of the various issues she presents, Evans's solution is clear: defer to Christ and to Scripture. Through the combination of her heavy emphasis on Christianity, the didactic nature of her novels, and her intellectual approach to theological and social issues, Evans engaged in theological debates of the nineteenth century and brought her views on said debates to her widespread audience. However, as discussed above, very little Evans scholarship

focuses on Evans's presentation of Christian views. Fox-Genovese, Frear, and Ayres each discuss the importance of faith in Evans's work, but none, however, take an extended, in-depth look at the theological arguments presented in Evans's novels.

In her article "The Practices of Faith: Worship and Writing," Karen Dieleman argues that "producing historicized and culturally astute analyses of literary works requires acknowledging more spheres of meaning than those related to race, class, gender, or economics" (260). Considering Evans's overtly religious novels—all of which also include discussions of race, class, gender, and economics—with this point in mind, it seems that, for all of their value, critics who view Evans's work only through the issues mentioned by Dieleman offer an incomplete look at the author and her novels. Many scholars, from Ann C. Douglas and Jane Tompkins in the 1970s and 80s to the more recent work of Sara S. Frear, have pointed out that the entire genre of domestic fiction is based on the promotion of a religious ideal. Likewise, Evans used her fiction "to influence her readers" and promote an evangelical, rather than worldly or socio-religious, ideal (Riepma 11). Christian ideas are so prevalent in Evans's novels that Brenda Ayres refers to her as a "Christian warrior" as well as novelist (252). This is not to say, however, that Evans simply offered Christianity as a means of consolation during a stressful period in the South or as a means of promoting a patriarchal society. Rather, Evans wrote with the intention that her "novels would instill Christian conviction" (Frear, *Fine View* v). While this goal was commonplace among writers of domestic fiction, David S. Reynolds points out that Evans dealt with religious issues differently than her contemporaries in that Evans, unlike other religious authors of the time, approached the conflict between religion and philosophy or secular views in an "intellectual fashion" (*Faith* 214). This intellectual approach to Christianity, which forms the primary conflict of *Beulah*, can be seen throughout Evans's body of work. Ken Donelson, in the aforementioned questionable

entry on Evans in *American Writers for Children Before 1900*, concedes that part of Evans's popularity could have arisen "because she asked questions that other women were asking, particularly about religion" (394). In other words, rather than taking evangelical Christian theology as a given, Evans set it in debate with philosophical ideas of the time and, in so doing, challenged various doctrinal issues. Therefore, this dissertation will build primarily upon the work of those who discuss Evans's faith and will examine how Evans used her novels as her voice in the theological conversations of her time.

Through the course of this study, I will evaluate Evans's works against the existing scholarship on her novels, juxtaposing Christian theory and the other appropriate cultural theories, Biblical exegesis, and the work of various theologians, particularly those of Evans's time or those whose influence continued into the nineteenth century. In the following chapters, I will examine the theological basis of Evans's positions on faith and philosophy, gender roles and women's rights, slavery, and poverty and wealth as well as how she fit in to the theological debate of the period. Chapter 2 will discuss how Evans presents theology in and of itself, apart from other cultural issues. Although she depicts various cultural issues such as gender roles and class distinctions, Evans primarily deals with theological ideas, which then shape her view on the social issues she covers. Sometimes Evans remains wholly within the sphere of Christianity, such as debating ideas of judgment in *St. Elmo* or the doctrinal disputes of *Inez* (Protestant-Catholicism) and *A Speckled Bird* (Methodism-Episcopalianism). At other times Evans branches out and shows the conflict between Christianity and other major philosophical ideas of the mid-nineteenth century as she does in *Beulah*. This chapter will include in-depth analyses of Evans's treatment of Catholicism in *Inez* and of differing Protestant denominations in *A Speckled Bird*, Beulah's theological and philosophical quest in *Beulah*, and Evans's

arguments pertaining to Biblical judgment and redemption. As part of this chapter, Evans's theological ideas will be compared to Scripture as well as to the ideas of various theologians who influenced nineteenth-century theological debate or who were directly cited by Evans. Finally, in keeping with Ayres' assertion that Evans's theological ideas "resonate with contemporary readers" (xi), I will examine how Evans's views fit in with current theological debate by comparing Evans to those who have remained major voices in theological conversation.

Next, Chapter 3 will cover the most oft-discussed aspect of Evans's novels: her treatment of women and gender roles. Given that Evans frequently juxtaposes independent women with a paternalistic society, this chapter will look at how Evans's presentation of independent female protagonists who then opt for submission to their husbands fits in with her overall theological argument. Considering that the bulk of Evans criticism deals with these issues, I will detail the existing conversation as to whether Evans can be considered a feminist author, building upon the responses of critics who began to look at these questions in light of Evans's Christian beliefs. This chapter will first discuss how Evans presents a feminist view of women through the creation of strong, independent heroines who subvert the societal ideas of patriarchy and marriage. I will then discuss examples of how Evans decries the women's rights movement and seemingly promotes the restoration of patriarchy. From there I will argue how the apparent contradiction in Evans's approach to women's rights issue can be reconciled through examination of her Christian beliefs. Additionally, this section will show also how Evans applied these beliefs not just to women's rights but gender roles as a whole, at times denouncing practices, such as dueling, that had become commonplace and were widely regarded, especially in the south, as honorable practices for men.

The fourth chapter will deal with the most troubling aspect of Evans's writing: race and slavery. Evans was pro-slavery and personally owned slaves, and the African-American characters in her novels are either slaves or, in novels taking place after the Civil War, former slaves. As discussed previously, the theological aspect of the slavery debate was so contentious and so rooted in the prevailing literal hermeneutic of interpreting Scripture that the debate threatened not only the validity of a literal hermeneutic but of Scripture itself, with both abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates using the Bible to advance their respective positions. In Evans's mind, as well as in the minds of many Southerners of the period, slaveholders held a great responsibility regarding the care of their slaves. Like many Confederate women, Evans maintained a pro-slavery stance, even after the institution was barred. However, unlike other pro-Confederacy or pro-slavery novelists, such as Caroline Lee Hentz in *The Planter's Northern Bride*, Evans eschewed lengthy discussions of slavery and other issues that led to secession in favor of occasional brief mentions of slavery and, more often, subtle depictions of slavery, often not even referring to slaves as anything other than servants. Unlike *The Planter's Northern Bride* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Evans devotes none of her novels to the slavery debate and often seems to take slavery for granted; her slave characters are portrayed simply as servants, no more, no less. The discussion of slavery in this chapter will show how Evans's view on slavery and how her brief mentions of the so-called "peculiar institution" fit into the national discussion on the issue taking place at the time. In this chapter, in addition to analyzing Evans's depiction of slavery, I will look at the national debate—which itself was a theological debate as much as, if not more than, a political one—as well as the aforementioned novels that also made up part of the debate: Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Hentz's direct rebuttal to Stowe, *The Planter's Northern Bride*. Because Evans presents glimpses of slavery and her view of it rather

than making a lengthy argument about it, I argue that these glimpses offer considerable insight into the slavery debate and that, unlike Hentz's staunchly pro-slavery novel, they concede various abolitionist points even while upholding a pro-slavery position.

Chapter 5 will focus on an important element of Evans's novels that has gained little to no sustained critical attention: her treatment of issues related to labor, poverty, and class distinctions. Throughout her novels, Evans thrusts impoverished orphans into upper class settings, wherein the orphans and the members of the upper class mutually reject one another, indicating the tension between these two echelons of society. This rejection of the upper class not only exhibits the independent nature of Evans's heroines but also provides a commentary on class distinctions. Most notably in *Macaria*, Evans uses her novels to make the argument that the best use of wealth is to help those in need whether through direct provision or through establishing a means for others to become self-sufficient. Additionally, Evans devotes part of her 1902 novel *A Speckled Bird* to responding to the rise of big business and labor unions, each of which she presents as equally failing lower class workers. As with other issues, Evans approaches labor and class from the perspective of her Christian beliefs. In his book *Towards a Christian Literary Theory*, Luke Ferretter argues that, because of the "common ground between Biblical and Marxist ethics," there is a particularly strong connection between Christian theory and Marxist theory (71). Similarly, Slavoj Žižek, Terry Eagleton, and Alain Badiou each have explored what Žižek refers to as "direct lineage from Christianity to Marxism" (2). In this chapter, I will examine how Evans presents a seemingly contradictory opposition to both free-market capitalism and to Marxism which works to make her novels examples of the apparent connection between Marxism and Christianity that Ferretter and Žižek mention.

As noted earlier, theological debate is an enduring conversation in which authors continue to have a voice long after their deaths. The final chapter, consisting primarily of concluding remarks, will discuss how Evans's novels fit into the enduring discussion of Christian thought. Although her style and many of her specific arguments are products of their time, Evans's theological approach allows her to have a voice beyond her time. This chapter, in part, will briefly examine how Evans's novels can resonate with contemporary readers. Additionally, this chapter will discuss other recurring themes of Evans's novels that have received scant attention, such as the absence of fathers and marriages between young girls and father figures.

Evans scholarship presents many complications, mainly because her didactic approach raises questions about what, exactly, she taught her audience. She stressed the importance of both a strong faith and strong reasoning; she presented independent, intellectually astute women who gave up intellectual careers for other pursuits, often in marriage; she emphasized the necessity of following God but sided with the dwindling number of Christians who advocated for slavery; she wrote extensively on the importance of using wealth to help those in poverty but opposed Marxism and unionized labor. However, once these apparent contradictions are examined in light of Evans's Christian beliefs and interpretation, they are not as paradoxical as they seem at first glance. Furthermore, because Evans approaches each of these issues in the complex way that she does, Evans's novels are not just vehicles for promoting widely accepted societal values but become a voice for intricate and nuanced theological debate on important issues of the day.

Chapter 2

“Lest My Faith Be Shaken”: Faith in the Fiction of Augusta Jane Evans

Despite criticism that the endings of her novels seem to maintain the *status quo* of gender relations—a topic that I will cover more fully in the next chapter—Augusta Jane Evans used her novels to address and to challenge various social ideas. Feminism, abolitionism, Marxism, labor unions, corporate greed, dueling, and the justice system all become targets for Evans at various points throughout her body of work. Furthermore, she squarely sets novels within the context of the Texas Revolution, the American Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Gilded Age, directly integrating her stories into these major historical periods through characters’ participation in the various events of the era. However, Evans shapes and surrounds her treatment of each of these movements, institutions, and events with her focus on Christian faith. Evans’s emphasis on Christianity is so prominent that in her discussion of Evans’s first novel, *Inez*—subtitled *A Tale of the Alamo*—Nina Baym asserts that Evans’s use of the siege of Alamo serves not as primary plot point but as a backdrop to and vehicle for her criticism of Catholic doctrine, writing that “only Evans would have made such a scholarly dispute the climax of an exciting novel” (282). Similarly, in Evans’s Civil War novel *Macaria*, through depictions of Southerners putting aside deeply-held, longstanding animosity to fight together for the Confederacy, the author uses the war as a means to present her central themes of sacrifice and forgiveness. Each novel features battles and espionage; in *Inez* Evans describes the Goliad Massacre and the titular heroine alerts the other protagonists to Santa Anna’s advancement, and in *Macaria* she describes the first Battle of Manassas and portrays protagonist Electra Grey as using her artwork to smuggle military dispatches. Yet despite elements that, if expanded upon, could make these war or adventure novels, Evans maintains a faith-based focus in her work. Whether dealing with

a basic plotline that centers on military conflict as in *Inez* and *Macaria*, multiple viral epidemics (*Beulah*), courtroom drama (*At the Mercy of Tiberius*), labor unrest and political scandal (*A Speckled Bird*), capital punishment (*Devota*), or conniving relationship triangles (*St. Elmo*, *Vashti*, *Infelice*), Evans still makes the conveyance of faith-based arguments the primary purpose of her novels.

This is not to say, however, that Evans turned her critical eye only toward various social issues while blindly espousing prevailing Christian viewpoints. Rather, Evans's novels challenge widely-held doctrinal, theological, and philosophical ideas. In *St. Elmo*, publisher Douglas Manning correctly sums up heroine Edna Earl's "extraordinary belief that all works of fiction should be eminently didactic, and inculcate not only sound morality, but scientific theories" (237). A strong believer that "the purpose of literature...was to provide moral instruction" (Faust, "Introduction" xvi), Evans uses her fictional author to present her own argument to critics of her novels; putting her words into Edna's mouth, Evans reveals her belief that novels, rather than merely entertaining their readers, should educate those who would not otherwise seek out such lessons (*St. Elmo* 237). Along with lessons ranging from astronomy to mythology to foreign languages, Evans also presents critical arguments pertaining to theological disputes, philosophical inquiry, and the practice of Christianity. Although Christian themes and moral instruction were not uncommon in novels of the period, Evans's novels go above and beyond simply highlighting Christian virtues and ways that a reader can live out his or her faith. Through her critical arguments, Evans challenged various beliefs, whether emerging or *status quo*, and only returned to the *status quo* following careful investigation and often with modification. Specifically, Evans challenges the teachings of Catholicism (the predominant religion of San Antonio, where Evans lived for four years shortly before writing *Inez*) and, in later novels, anti-Catholic propaganda such as her own in *Inez*, the

ideas of growing philosophical schools such as Transcendentalism and German philosophy, and nominal Christianity or denominational rifts that emphasized social status over following Christ. However, it is important to remember that, when making arguments critical of theological ideas or even the practices of professed Christians, Evans always does so from the standpoint of a Christian using Scriptural support for her positions.

Foundational Faith

From the outset of her career, Evans showed a strong intellectual bent in her presentation of the issues that she covered. Although Evans's emphasis on Christian faith was common among nineteenth century domestic novelists, her intellectual approach gave her a theological foundation for her ideas. When writing *Inez*—a novel that Diane Roberts calls “less a piece of fiction than anti-Catholic propaganda” (viii)—at the age of fifteen, Evans used lengthy theological discussions to present her view on the debate between Protestantism and Catholicism. To be sure, Evans uses these dialogues to provide the “intellectual confirmation to support ... paranoia toward Catholics” that many readers sought (Ayres 29). Beyond the theological discourse of the novel, however, *Inez* also serves as a polemic against Catholicism and its adherents. Rather than setting a Scriptural debate over the tenets of Catholicism within the context of a domestic novel—as she does when addressing various issues in later novels—Evans creates in *Inez* a scenario, similar to that of other anti-Catholic novels, in which the Catholic Church is portrayed as a greater villain than Santa Anna's invading forces. Despite the presence of Santa Anna in the novel—as well as a graphic depiction of the Goliad Massacre, where the male protagonist Dr. Frank Bryant is killed—the true antagonist of the novel is the Jesuit priest Father Mazzolin, who is often shown as a demonic figure cut from the cloth of gothic fiction and whom Inez de Garcia refers to as “the devil” (114). Additionally,

on Mr. Hamilton's deathbed, the narrator describes Mazzolin as "a dark form [that] glided to the bedside," almost-supernaturally positioning himself between Hamilton and his Protestant daughter and niece (84). Beyond this demonic, ghoulish portrayal, Evans also presents the priest as a spy for Santa Anna who has Inez's brother killed due to a land dispute.

The true extent of Mazzolin's villainy, however, is shown in his conversion of Mr. Hamilton and his attempted conversion of Inez, Florence, and Mary. One would expect for a Christian novelist to present a religious conversion in a positive light; however, Evans uses these conversions—or attempts thereof—to further her anti-Catholic argument in that they are acts of vengeance rather than acts of evangelism. Mazzolin reveals that he is Florence Hamilton's half-brother, the illegitimate son that Mr. Hamilton conceived while visiting the Italian city that serves as Florence's namesake. After Mr. Hamilton deserts his lover and the son he does not know exists, Mazzolin's mother swears vengeance upon Hamilton and requires the same of her son (148). It is through his quest for vengeance that Father Mazzolin converts Mr. Hamilton on his deathbed and threatens Florence with her father's eternal damnation should she refuse to be converted as well, thus using his position in the Church not to spread God's word but to use God to exact his own personal vendettas (149). The very fact that Evans would treat the conversion to Catholicism as a mode of vengeance indicates her view of the "Romish faith," as she frequently refers to it, and adds an emotional appeal to the theological argument that she intellectualizes elsewhere in the novel.

Additionally, when compared to Evans's other ministers, particularly Reverend Hammond in *St. Elmo* and Reverend Hargrove in *Infelice*, Mazzolin represents the priesthood as setting itself up on the level of God, if not superseding God, instead of acting as humble servants like Hammond or Hargrove. For example, when a rancher

brings him news of Santa Anna's advancement, Mazzolin gives the man the "blessing of the Church" because he "faithfully served [his] Padre" (30); not because the man served God or even the Catholic Church, but because he served Mazzolin. Rather than concerning himself with whether the rancher serves the Kingdom of God, Mazzolin's interests lie only in the extent to which the rancher can serve him. The most notable of Mazzolin's un-Christian acts, however, occur in his interactions with Inez. On more than one occasion, Inez attributes her apostasy to Mazzolin's own heresy, directly telling him that his hypocrisy has destroyed her faith and driven her away not only from the Catholic Church but from God (264, 312). Mazzolin's anti-Christian interaction with Inez culminates with his steadfast refusal to hear her confession on her deathbed, should she wish to offer it. When taken in conjunction with the Catholic tenet that one must express his or her sins to a member of the priesthood in order to receive salvation, Mazzolin's refusal to hear Inez's confession is akin to him purposefully forcing her toward damnation rather than extending God's grace to her, which he would be required to do for any repentant sinner. Through this portrayal of Father Mazzolin as a sinister agent who elevates his own vengeance and schemes above the will of God, Evans presents Catholicism more as a dark, clandestine institution than as a religious body that follows Christ. In doing so, Evans follows a Protestant tradition of viewing Catholicism as heretical, echoing Martin Luther's assertion that "papists [are]...but destroyers of the Kingdom of Christ, and builders up of the kingdom of the devil and sin" (80). Although much of Evans's challenge of Catholicism takes the form doctrinal disputes based upon interpretation of Scripture or early church traditions, such as purgatory or intercession of the saints, she does also follow the path of Reformation leaders and presents Catholicism, namely through Mazzolin as an allegedly representative voice of the Church, as an evil entity designed to lead followers away from Christ.

This is not to suggest, of course, that Evans is alone among nineteenth-century novelists in her condemnation of Catholicism; anti-Catholic novels were a staple of the period, and authors such as Charles Dickens (*Barnaby Rudge*) and Frances Trollope (*Father Eustace*) were among the ranks of authors of anti-Catholic fiction (Ayres 29n). Unlike other anti-Catholic novels, which often focused on Gothic elements more sensational than those in *Inez*,² Evans uses those elements as a starting point for a lengthier, more intellectual doctrinal debate. In *Inez*, Evans uses lengthy Socratic dialogues, which become a trademark in her books and work more to advance Evans's arguments than to further the plots of the novels, to present her anti-Catholic argument in an intellectual fashion. However, even in presenting the doctrinal debate of Catholicism vs. Protestantism, Evans presents Catholicism as preying on and attracting those who lack strength of mind, spirit, and will. Throughout the novel, Mary, who never strays from her Protestant faith, is shown to be level-headed and "intellectually astute" (Ayres 31). Inez, who rejects Father Mazzolin's attempted conversion and who warns others of his plans and dealings with Santa Anna, is portrayed as strong and independent. Conversely, Florence, whom Mazzolin converts, is shown as perpetually wavering and unsure in her faith. Moreover, Evans's narrator describes Florry's life as a Catholic as "[m]ore like somnambulism than waking reality" (105). Only when the more intellectual Mary explains what she sees as the heresy in Catholicism does Florence return to Protestantism. In other words, the intellectually and spiritually weak Florence is easily entranced by Mazzolin's duplicitous words and is easily indoctrinated into his faith. Unlike her stronger counterparts, Florry is "susceptible to the likes of Father Mazzolin" (Ayres 31), which forms the basis of Evans's argument that anyone without an intellectual

² For example, Ayres describes Ralph Adams Cram's 1895 novella "Sister Maddelina," in which "nuns bury alive a novice for her sin of falling in love with a man" (29n).

understanding of his or her faith will be equally as susceptible to arguments that, in the Protestant view, do not hold up to scrutiny when analyzed against Scripture.

In addition to her depiction of Protestant and Catholic characters, Evans also uses *Inez* to provide lengthy Socratic dialogues that serve as a Protestant rebuttal to areas of Catholic doctrine that Protestant theologians frequently argue violate the fundamental tenets of Christianity. As William Perry Fidler puts it, Evans's dialogues examine "the foundations of Catholicism...The form of confession is analyzed and condemned. Catholic reverence for their saints, particularly the belief that the saints can intercede for the sinner and aid in the absolution of sins, is exposed as an injury to the mediative position of Christ" (43). To give but one example, when Florence asks Mary about purgatory, Mary expounds at length on her assertion that "there is less foundation for that doctrine than any advanced by [the Catholic] Church" (150):

In the book of Maccabees is a very remarkable passage authorizing prayers for the dead, and on this passage they build their theory and sanction their practice. Yet you know full well it is one of the Apocryphal books rejected by the Jews, because not originally written in their language. It was never quoted by our Savior, nor even received as inspired by your own Church till the Council of Trent, when it was admitted to substantiate the doctrine of purgatory and sanction prayers for the dead. I admit that on this point St. Augustine's practice was in favor of it, though it was only near the close of his long life that he speaks of the soul of his mother. Yet already history informs us that the practice of praying for the dead was gaining ground in the Church, along with image worship. St. Cyprian, who lived long before him, and during a purer state of the Church, leaves no doubt on our minds as to his sentiments on that subject. His words are these: 'When ye depart hence, there will be no room for repentance—no method of being reconciled to God. Here eternal life is either lost or won. Here, by the worship of God, and the fruit of the faith, provision is made for eternal salvation. And let no man be retarded, either by his sins or years, from coming to obtain it. No repentance is too late while a man remains in this world.' Our Savior nowhere gives any encouragement of such a doctrine. On the contrary, He said to the dying thief: 'This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.' (151-52)

In this one passage, Evans via Mary uses Scripture, theological writings, church history, and logical reasoning to make her argument against the Catholic teaching of purgatory.

First, Mary points out the error of treating Apocrypha as Scripture in that the book in question is never referred to in the New Testament and that it was added to the Bible in the mid-sixteenth century so that the doctrine of purgatory might receive Scriptural support that it otherwise lacked. She then quotes Cyprian, a leader of the third-century Catholic Church, on the possibility of salvation ending at a person's death. And, finally, she provides Biblical support for Cyprian's statement that "no repentance is too late while a man remains in this world" by quoting Jesus' words to the dying thief (Lk 23:43).

Additionally, Evans/Mary also offers Biblical and theological support for her arguments against the Catholic practices of praying to the saints or to the Virgin Mary for intercession, Mariolatry, and the selling of indulgences. In maintaining the Protestant tradition that only Jesus acts as Intercessor between humans and God (John 14:6), Evans provides a contrast to seeing Christ as the only Intercessor through Hamilton's deathbed confession to Mazzolin, wherein Hamilton asks intercession of all but Christ:

I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary, ever Virgin, to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and to all the saints that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed through my most grievous fault. Therefore I beseech the blessed Mary, ever Virgin, the blessed Michael the Archangel, the blessed John the Baptist, the holy apostles Peter and Paul and all the saints to pray to the Lord our God for me. (*Inez* 61-62)

Through this carefully-worded confession that omits Christ and pleads with others for mediation, Evans once again blends theology and fiction in order to make her argument against Catholic doctrine.

Although her novel uses scenes like Hamilton's confession and maintains several Gothic literary tropes common in anti-Catholic fiction to present the priesthood, passages like Mary's statement on purgatory bear much more of a similarity to classic Protestant theology than they do to fiction. For instance, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), John Calvin presents a similar argument about purgatory, only with much harsher

criticism: "Now, since the whole Law and Gospel do not contain one syllable which countenances the right of praying for the dead, it is a profanation of prayer to go one step farther than God enjoins" (443). Calvin even goes so far as to refer to purgatory as "a deadly device of Satan; that it makes void the cross of Christ; that it offers intolerable insult to the divine mercy; that it undermines and overthrows our faith" (438). Evans's direct argument against purgatory lacks the austerity of Calvin's, but her depiction of Mazzolin as a demonic figure echoes Calvin's stark assessment of Catholicism. However, by working in the medium of sentimental fiction rather than theological treatise, Evans is able to couch harsh arguments similar to Calvin's within the framework of an emotional setting that might attract readers repulsed by Calvin's blunt verbiage. In short, from the outset of her career, Evans relied as much on theological discourse to make her arguments as she did on literary devices such as plot or character. It is this combination of theological discourse and the basic elements of fiction that enhance Evans's ability to make her arguments by making complex debates more approachable for her audience and showing concrete examples of characters who grapple with such challenges to their Protestant beliefs.

One could easily argue that Evans's argument and presentation in *Inez* breaks no new ground in the debate between Protestantism and Catholicism and that she simply reiterates the Protestant position rather than critically analyzing it; most certainly, in *Inez* her critical eye is turned only toward Catholicism. When viewing the novel beyond the context in which Evans wrote *Inez*, one would be hard-pressed to argue that Evans challenges prevailing beliefs or that she approaches the topic any differently than any other Protestant. However, aside from the fact that Evans was fifteen when she wrote *Inez* and still shows an intricate grasp of the doctrinal debate despite her young age, given the historical context of the novel, Evans seems to be more critical of the *status*

quo than she first appears. Firstly, just prior to writing *Inez* in 1850, Evans lived in Galveston and then San Antonio for a total of four years. At that time, Catholicism was the predominant religion of the region. Even though, as Ayres reports, many people in the area “were Catholics in name only” (29), the overall religious climate would have been one wherein acknowledgment of the tenets unique to Catholicism overshadowed the Protestantism that, socially speaking, was more widespread in other parts of the United States. In other words, although Evans’s family attended a Protestant church and she does not deviate from Protestant teaching in her novels, Evans likely would have faced challenges to those beliefs because the *status quo* concerning religious belief in the area of the country in which Evans spent her early adolescence leaned toward the Catholic beliefs that Evans challenges in *Inez*.

Secondly, Evans shows in *Inez* the foundations of the intellectual approach that she uses when examining various issues, be they theological or social, throughout her body of work. In presenting a cogent, albeit long-standing, argument opposing Catholic doctrine, Evans displays the intellectual bent that forms the basis of her second novel, *Beulah*. Furthermore, as she matured, Evans herself later realized that *Inez* was less a didactic novel and more of a propaganda piece that went beyond critically analyzing doctrinal differences through its paranoid portrayal of Catholicism, especially the characterization of Father Mazzolin as a satanic villain (Frear, *Fine View* 150). As Riepma points out, none of Evans’s other novels show “evidence of any overt anti-Catholic feelings” (22). Additionally, although Evans continued to present Protestant views in her novels and never left the Methodist denomination, as an adult she was close friends with leaders of various faiths, including Catholicism and Judaism (Fidler 185). Also, in her later novels Evans presents Catholics in a positive light. For instance, in *Infelice* (1875), the young protagonist Regina Orme spends the first ten years of her life

in a convent, where she is raised by nuns while her mother engages in a stage career. Similarly, in *At the Mercy of Tiberius* (1889), heroine Beryl Brentano resides with an order of nuns following her exoneration from the murder of her grandfather. By placing her protagonists under the care of Catholic nuns, Evans refutes the idea that Catholicism is inherently evil. Unlike the satanic Father Mazzolin or the nuns in Mary's accounting to Florence of a situation wherein a Protestant man was refused treatment at a Catholic hospital (*Inez* 158), Evans's later depiction of Catholic clergy presents them as willing to help those in need regardless of faith. This is not to say that Evans necessarily changed her stance on Catholic doctrine—there is no indication that she ever did—but only that as she matured she turned her critical eye to anti-Catholic paranoia and understood the fallacy of ascribing as evil those who simply have a difference of belief. In short, even though Evans herself recognized her first novel as flawed, it still serves Evans well as a tool to help her develop her rhetorical technique of argumentation and allows readers and scholars to look at how Evans progressed as a novelist over the course of her life.

Wrestling with Philosophy

Following the intellectual inquest and intense Scriptural research and debate she undertook in writing *Inez*, Evans endured a lengthy period of skepticism, likely brought about, Sara Frear suggests, by the in-depth research she conducted in formulating her first novel's argument against Catholicism (*Fine View* 100). Continuing to use her own life as inspiration, just as Evans's first novel serves as a platform to present a Protestant argument inspired by her family living in the Catholic-centric San Antonio, Evans's second novel, *Beulah*, provides a fictionalized account of her own intellectually-based skepticism and her restoration to a faith more devout than before her skeptical inquiry. In so doing, Evans presents her own faith-based yet rationalist argument against the

challenges that philosophy of the nineteenth century posed to her readers, offering them an intellectual, theological rebuttal to the various non-Christian ideas of the day.

In his 1804 book *Philosophy and Religion*, German philosopher Friedrich Schelling wrote that “[e]ach of us is compelled by nature to seek an Absolute...but if we want to fix one’s thoughts on it, it eludes us” (9). This is the dilemma faced by Beulah Benton in the novel that bears her name. The highly rational and intellectual Beulah could not maintain a childlike faith in the midst of a period of history referred to by Drew Gilpin Faust as one “beset by spiritual crisis” because of “the emphasis on man’s ability to discern religious truth” (*Sacred* 61). As Roy Melvin Anker points out, during this time “Darwinism, the higher criticism [which emphasized agnostic or atheistic philosophies], and comparative religion...constituted an unparalleled assault on the traditional sources and rationales for Christian belief” (392). Faced with such challenges to her faith, Evans herself went through a period of skepticism due to “her extensive reading of the philosophers, poets, historians, and scientists who were considered the most prominent intellects of her day” as well as her deep interest in mythology and world religions (Frear, *Letters* 112). Evans had a “personal hunger for intellectual comprehension and certainty” and, therefore, could not accept “faith that transcended rationality” (Frear, *Fine View* 143). However, like many others who have returned to the Christian faith following a period of rational skepticism, Evans was more devout and more solidified in her faith than she was previously.

In an 1859 letter to her friend Rachel Lyons, Evans states that the purpose of *Beulah* is “to prove the fallacy of all human philosophical systems, the limited nature of human faculties, the total insufficiency of our reason, to grapple with the vital questions, which are propounded by every earnest mind and the absolute necessity of trusting in the revelations of Jehovah” (*Correspondence* 2). Using her second novel as a vehicle to

address crises of faith produced by the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century, Evans advances this discussion by creating an autobiographical heroine in Beulah Benton. Paul Tillich asserts that “[n]o theologian should be taken seriously as a theologian, even if he is a great Christian and a great scholar, if his work shows that he does not take philosophy seriously” (*Biblical* 7-8). In this vein, Evans, though not a theologian by trade, fits Tillich’s definition of a serious theologian: her examination of Christianity is not limited to blind faith but, instead, grapples with major philosophical ideas and challenges to Christianity and approaches Christianity as critically as she does philosophical systems. In *Beulah* Evans goes beyond simply integrating a religious discussion into her plot; the novel revolves around Beulah’s loss and rejuvenation of her faith following an extensive reading of nineteenth-century philosophy. As David S. Reynolds puts it, Evans uses her novel to wage “open warfare against a multitude of European and American thinkers” (*Faith* 215). Throughout the novel, Evans presents discussions—some lengthy, some brief—on thinkers ranging from Europeans Ludwig Feuerbach and Jean Paul Richter to Americans Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker. Through her depictions of Beulah’s intense internal grappling and her lengthy Socratic dialogues debating various philosophers, Evans provides a detailed intellectual argument favoring Christianity over secular or atheistic philosophies.

At the beginning of the novel, Beulah has a devout, unwavering faith similar to that seen later in Clara, Beulah’s friend and fellow teacher whose childlike, unquestioning, and emotional faith provides a foil for Beulah’s intellectual skepticism. Beulah’s early life is filled with great hardships such as her orphanhood and her separation from and the subsequent death of her sister Lilly, and she frequently cries out to God in anguish as a result. Despite the early adversity she faces, Beulah remains strong in her Christian faith. However, her faith slowly erodes once she comes to live with

Guy Hartwell. Although Hartwell never directly makes claims against Beulah's faith, the seeds of her skepticism are sown when Beulah realizes that Mrs. Grayson, the woman who separated Beulah from her sister and forbade their contact, is a professing Christian who regularly attends church services whereas her agnostic guardian took her in when she was near death and extended to her the kindness that the rest of society withheld.

Beulah's own agnosticism is then cultivated when, despite Hartwell's warnings that doing so would jeopardize her faith, her intellectual curiosity makes use of Hartwell's extensive library, which previously had fostered his agnosticism. Marking a sharp contrast with her earlier meditations on Longfellow's religious poem "A Psalm of Life," Beulah delves into Edgar Allan Poe's prose poem *Eureka*, which Elizabeth Vincelette describes as Poe's "most ardent appeal to bring his audience to his vision of truth" (36). Through his discussion of German cosmology, specifically the Kant-Laplace Nebular Theory, Poe concludes that "no one soul is inferior to another; that nothing is, or can be, superior to any one soul; that each soul is, in part, its own God – its own Creator" and that in order for "God [to] be all in all, each must become God" (166, 169*n*). Through Poe's fiction, Beulah catches "tantalizing glimpses of recondite psychological truths and processes," but upon reading *Eureka* "with the eagerness of a child clutching at its own shadows in a glassy lake," Beulah is "amazed at the seemingly infallible reasoning, which, at the conclusion coolly informed her that she was her own God" (*Beulah* 121). Although Beulah is initially "mystified" and "shocked" by Poe's conclusion, her reading of *Eureka* becomes "the portal through which she entered the vast Pantheon of Speculation," thus beginning her spiritual quest (121).

Poe's *Eureka* is a somewhat curious choice made by Evans to use for Beulah's initiation into Speculation and metaphysics. From the time that it was first published, reviewers questioned whether "the whole thing was Poe's most elaborate hoax" (Manning

236). More than a century and a half later, scholars continue to debate the veracity of Poe's work: Susan Manning refers to *Eureka* as a "con-trick" (237), whereas Elizabeth Vincelette argues that the work "allows the possibility of a sincere reading" (37). However, even Vincelette—whose criticism of *Eureka* is based on accepting the work as legitimate rather than satiric—acknowledges that a sincere reading "relies upon accepting Poe as narrator" (37). Given the frequency with which Poe's works are cited as examples of an unreliable narrator, accepting the reliability of Poe as narrator requires the reader to trust an author who often worked to create mistrust between reader and narrator. To be sure, the extravagance of Poe's philosophy in *Eureka* easily can lead a reader to question the author's seriousness. Although Evans never mentions *Eureka* as a potential hoax, considering that the depth of her reading and references causes the chief complaint against Evans to be the pedantic way in which she shows off her knowledge, it seems highly unlikely that Evans would not have been familiar with the controversy over Poe's work. Keeping in mind that Beulah ultimately rejects philosophy largely due to its incongruity and that Evans's narrator refers to Beulah's reading as "chaff" (287), it stands to reason that Evans would select for Beulah's starting point a work of indeterminate veracity. It is important to note, however, that Evans's use of *Eureka* potentially because of the controversy over its seriousness is not an indication that Beulah is easily duped—after all, many scholars continue to read *Eureka* as a sincere depiction of Poe's philosophy, and Evans also presents Hartwell as taking Poe seriously. Rather, by giving an unverified work such a prominent place in Beulah's study, Evans foreshadows her depiction of the fallacious nature of philosophical systems, which she presents as self-contradictory and never leading to solidified truths.

Evans gives further examples of contradictory philosophy when Beulah advances to the work of Jean Paul Richter, via Thomas De Quincey's translation of *Analects from*

Richter, more specifically Richter's essay "Dream upon the Universe." The essay, in which Richter meditates upon the vastness and emptiness of the universe, concludes that "immortality dwelled in the spaces between the worlds and death only amongst worlds" and that, therefore worldly death is but the entrance to "those unseen depths of the universe which are emptied of all but the Supreme Reality, and where no earthly life nor perishable hope can enter" (qtd. in DeQuincey 210, 211). The enraptured Beulah refers to the piece as the "guide-book to [her] soul" and expects that the writings of Jean Paul will satisfy both her spiritual and intellectual longings (127). Hartwell quickly disabuses Beulah of this idea by presenting to her Thomas Carlyle's translation of Richter's "Speech of the Dead Christ from the Universe That There Is No God," in which Christ proclaims, in keeping with the descriptive title: "I went through the Worlds, I mounted into the Suns, and flew with the Galaxies through the wastes of Heaven' but there is no God!" (qtd. in Carlyle 157).

Although she protests to the contrary following her reading of Richter's "Speech," Beulah's faith begins to weaken. However, Beulah asserts herself regarding Hartwell's warning that continuing along her path of reading would shatter her faith: "[T]hink you I could be satisfied with a creed which I could not bear to have investigated? If I abstained from reading your books, dreading lest my faith be shaken, then I could no longer confide in that faith" (129). This is a point that runs throughout Evans's work: True faith is faith that can withstand challenges, whether the intellectual scrutiny seen in *Inez*, *Beulah*, and *St. Elmo* or the situational challenges depicted in *Macaria*, *Vashti*, and *At the Mercy of Tiberius*, among others. Rather than adhering to the idea of practicing or professing faith for the mere sake of doing so, as opposed to having a sincere belief, Evans asserts that faith should withstand challenges and intellectual examination and that intellectual rigor and faith are not mutually exclusive. Beginning with her study of Poe and then Richter,

Beulah challenges her faith by undertaking a years-long in-depth study of Scripture and philosophy, first encountering “puzzling passages of Scripture” and from there moving on to the writings of Emerson, Carlyle, Goethe, Feuerbach, and Cousin, just to name a few (209). She studies “German speculation” where “she believe[s] that she ha[s] indeed found the ‘true process,’ and with renewed zest, continue[s] the work of questioning” (209-10). Through reading Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* and the autobiography of Hugh Miller, a Scottish Christian theologian who argued against a literal reading of the creation account of Genesis (a reading that dominated American theological views at the time), Beulah reaches a point where “[s]he could not for her life have told what she believed, much less, what she did not believe” (210). As Beulah explains to Cornelia when discussing her difficulty reconciling various works of Emerson with one another (which itself is another example that Evans presents of philosophers seeming to contradict themselves in multiple writings), she “ha[s] no creed” but is “honestly and anxiously hunting one” (229).

As she searches for meaning, Beulah “plunge[s] into metaphysics, studying treatise after treatise, and system after system,” finding that “the psychology of each seemed different” or even “opposed” to one another (287). Through all of her study, Beulah finds nothing that she can recognize as truth. Additionally, her search is hampered by those with whom she associates and admires. Those whom she views as intellectual equals or superiors—Guy Hartwell, his colleague Dr. Asbury, and Cornelia Graham—are all agnostic; conversely, her devout Christian friends, Clara and Mrs. Williams, the retired matron of the orphanage where Beulah was raised, are simple in their faith and have never viewed it from an intellectual perspective. It is not until Beulah meets Reginald Lindsay, a cousin of the Asbury family, that she knows someone who not only is her intellectual equal but who is also a devout Christian.

Prior to meeting Lindsay, Beulah thought (as she had thought many times previously) that she had neared the end of her quest upon reading the psychology of Victor Cousin and studying his theory of Eclecticism. Having found no one philosophical system that fully sated her spiritual hunger but, rather, several that offered nuggets of hope in her quest for truth, Beulah approaches Cousin “with trembling eagerness,” believing that “she would surely find in a harmonious ‘Eclecticism’ the absolute truth she had chased through so many metaphysical doublings” (288). In his introduction to Cousin’s *Elements of Psychology*, C. S. Henry describes Cousin’s composite system as “far from...arbitrary” critical analysis of “all other systems” in order to distinguish between the “truth” and “error” of each system, thus neither wholly accepting nor rejecting any one system (xxx). However, when Beulah discusses Cousin with Lindsay, he explains how Cousin’s system ultimately leads to pantheism, which Beulah abjures. Through logic and referring to J. D. Morrell’s *Speculative Philosophy of Europe*, which claims that Cousin’s Eclecticism is pantheistic despite Cousin’s assertions to the contrary, Lindsay argues that to acquire the absolute truth that Beulah seeks through Cousin’s system “you must be the absolute: or in other words, God only can find God”; thus, the system equates humans with God, a proposition that Beulah does not accept (356-57).

Modeled after Evans’s own correspondence with her spiritual mentor Walter Clopton Harriss (Frear, *Letters* 123), her conversations with Lindsay ultimately lead Beulah to recognize the fallibility of the metaphysical and rational philosophy in which she had sought revelation. After finding nothing but abstraction and contradiction in philosophy, Beulah eventually cries out, “Oh, philosophy! thou hast mocked my hungry soul” and returns to God in humble prayer (*Beulah* 371). By putting her heroine through such a spiritual and intellectual struggle, Evans provides her own intellectual and theological example for those readers who might become swayed by any of the various

philosophers discussed in *Beulah*. Placing the crux of her own argument in Lindsay's mouth, Evans writes, "My philosophic experience has taught me that if mankind were to have any knowledge of their origin, their destiny, their God, it must be revealed by that God, for man could never discover it aught for himself. There are mysteries in the Bible which I cannot explain, but it bears incontrovertible marks of divine origin, and as such I receive it" (366). Rather than ignoring the threat posed to Christianity by many of the intellectual challenges of the nineteenth century and blindly accepting Christianity as the *status quo* without investigating any alternatives, Evans confronts those challenges just as she previously had challenged Catholic doctrine in *Inez*. However, unlike Florence's foray into Catholicism, which Evans presents as an intellectual weakness, Beulah—like her pseudo-guardian Hartwell before her—is led into skepticism through her intellectual strength and curiosity. By the same token, Beulah leaves her pursuit of truth through philosophy and returns to Christianity with not only greater intellectual strength but a much stronger faith as well.

Through Beulah's skeptical journey, Evans shows the inability of philosophy to reveal greater concrete truths and how an intellectually astute believer need not fear the challenges produced by that philosophy. Furthermore, she shows that such an intellectual undertaking, albeit torturous for the truth-seeker, can produce a stronger, more committed faith than that of a believer who never intellectually challenges his or her belief. Thus, Evans ultimately uses *Beulah* to argue two related points: 1) The increasingly popular philosophical systems of the nineteenth century were fallible and would not satisfy a diligent truth-seeker; and 2) A Christian should not fear the study of philosophy because an intellectual understanding of the challenges to Christianity would serve only to strengthen his or her faith, just as it does that of Beulah.

Swiss theologian Hans Küng writes that “[n]aïveté in matters of faith is not evil but at least dangerous. Naïve faith can miss the true Jesus” (164). Ultimately, through their intellectual exploration of religion and spirituality, Evans and her heroine move from the “naïve faith” exhibited in Clara to a faith that is rooted in reason and exploration. In almost all of her novels, Evans presents characters who, usually in moments of crisis, have brief periods of doubt. In addition to Beulah’s lengthy bout of skepticism, some of Evans’s most devout heroines—Florence Hamilton (*Inez*), Irene Huntingdon (*Macaria*), Edna Earl (*St. Elmo*), and Beryl Brentano (*At the Mercy of Tiberius*)—all express feelings of forsakenness following personal tragedies or during times of crisis, each ultimately growing in faith as a result. For example, while on trial for the murder of her grandfather, Beryl maintains her faith that she will be acquitted because God knows that she is wrongly accused, and, therefore, justice would dictate that she be found not guilty. When a jury convicts her of a murder she did not commit (and which is later discovered to not have been a murder at all), Beryl believes that God has abandoned her. However, while in prison she is given not only the opportunity to help the prison staff during a diphtheria outbreak, personally nursing some prisoners to health, but she also begins a ministry that leads other, hardened inmates to Christ prior to her exoneration. Through the refining experience of her trial and imprisonment, Beryl leaves prison with a stronger faith than she had before her trial, thus serving as an example of Evans’s depiction of how doubt and struggles yield a stronger faith than the blind faith which lacks all doubt or difficulties.

Even Evans’s novels begin to show a stronger degree of faith than she initially exhibits in *Inez*. Whereas in *Inez* Evans is virulently anti-Catholicism to the point of going beyond explaining doctrinal differences and into the realm of *ad hominem* attacks, her later novels, although still emphasizing Christian faith, are much more accepting of other ideas and the proponents thereof; the later Evans does not seem to view other views to

be as much of a threat as does the younger Evans. For example, as discussed above, Beulah wrestles with the philosophies of Jean Paul Richter and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among many others, before determining that the fallibility and the finitude of the human mind prevents any of these philosophies from offering her the truth that she seeks. However, Evans litters her later novels with apropos references to the ideas of Richter, Emerson, and other non-Christian thinkers, all in a positive context. Despite her conclusions about Cousin's pantheism as relayed in *Beulah*, it seems that Evans in part borrows from his system of Eclecticism, at least in the confines of her novels. Although outside of *Beulah* most of Evans's philosophical references are incidental to the plot, they still show evidence of how, while maintaining a Christian foundation, Evans adheres somewhat to Eclecticism and does not fear finding useful ideas in non-Christian sources or subsequently relaying those ideas to her audience. For example, in *Vashti* (1869), when comforting the agnostic Salome Owen, Dr. Ulpian Grey (a Christian) speaks to her of both Christ and Richter: "May God guide, and strengthen, and help you to be the noble woman, the consistent Christian, which only His grace and blessing can ever enable you to become. Remember the cheering words of Jean Paul Richter, 'Evil is like the nightmare, the instant you bestir yourself it has already ended'" (166). The primary emphasis of Dr. Grey's statement is on Christ's grace, but rather than quoting Scripture Grey cites Richter to elucidate his point. Several other such examples exist throughout the Evans canon, and Evans's message to her readers via such instances is clear: Stay rooted in a Christian faith, but do not discard valuable ideas just because they might come from a source that is not distinctly Christian or even is unarguably a non-Christian source. Rather, Evans shows the importance of critically examining various ideas and accepting or rejecting them on their merit; in Evans's case, her elevation of Christianity

indicates that she sees Christianity as having the greatest merit but only following a period of examination rather than a blind acceptance of Protestant doctrine.

Criticism of Christians' Behavior

Although Evans uses each of her first two novels to enter into debates regarding various modes of spiritual thought and to address the challenges to Protestant Christianity posed by Catholicism and agnostic philosophical systems, throughout her body of work Evans predominantly turns her critical eye toward Christians, raising the issue that the greatest challenge to Christian belief is not intellectualism or opposing belief but, rather, is un-Christian behavior exhibited by professing Christians. With this in mind, Evans used her novels to examine Christian behavior and admonish her readers to act in such a way as to bring others to Christ. Evans took great umbrage with professed Christians who lived in such a way as to lead others to fall away from Christianity and critiqued the behavior of Christians with the same zealous rigor with which she critiqued other belief systems. In other words, far from practicing the rote adherence to Christianity suggested by, for example, Nancy Alder (79), Evans acknowledges the challenges that Christianity poses for skeptics and attributes many of these challenges directly to the behavior of professed Christians. Although many similar novelists of the period wrote about their views on Christian living, the bulk of the criticism levied against Evans seems to discount the fact that, above all, Evans wrote to promote Christianity while raising intellectually-challenging questions about faith and society. Therefore, it is important in a study of Evans to examine her critique of what she saw as behavior that might cause skeptics to reject the Christian message along with their rejection of the messenger.

In *Beulah*, Evans expressed her opinion on the issue directly through Beulah's friend Cornelia Graham, a staunch non-believer who turned from the church after

witnessing actions that “shocked [her] ideas of Christian propriety” (231): “Those who call themselves ministers of the Christian religion should look well to their commissions, and beware how they go out into the world, unless the seal of Jesus be indeed upon their brows” (232). As briefly discussed earlier, Father Mazzolin’s sinister acts drove Inez from her faith, and the incongruity of Mrs. Grayson’s perfect church attendance and separation of Beulah from her sister played a large role in Beulah seeking solace from various philosophical systems. However, these are far from the only examples that Evans gives concerning the professed Christian’s influence—whether negative or positive—on others. For instance, in *Vashti* Salome Owen is characterized by a dark irreverence: at one point she even prays for the death of her romantic rival Vashti Carlyle (then known as Agla Gerome) and vows to never pray again when Mrs. Gerome recovers from her illness (298-99). However, throughout the novel Salome views Ulpian Grey as the model of Christian virtue and declares to him, “if I find my way to heaven, it will be because you are there” (344). By the end of the novel, Salome, robbed of the singing voice that brought her fame and independence, turns to Christ and helps Ulpian build a home to support her younger brothers and sisters. Similarly, in *Infelice*, it is not Minnie Merle’s complicated revenge plot³ that allows her reputation and her child’s inheritance to be restored; rather, it is Regina’s kindness and mercy to co-conspirator Peleg Peterson that causes him to confess the plot by General Laurence to annul any connection between his son and Minnie; Peleg writes to Minnie, “You owe your salvation to your sweet, brave

³ Prior to the beginning of the novel, Minnie, an impoverished launderer, marries Cuthbert Laurence, a wealthy heir, when both are underage. Cuthbert’s father, General Laurence tells his son that Minnie wants only their fortune and that the child she carries is actually that of Peleg Peterson, a scorned suitor who furthers the lie out of his own desire for revenge. In order to clear her reputation and win her daughter the inheritance that Minnie believes she deserves, Minnie, now a successful stage actress, concocts a revenge plot similar to the “Mousetrap” sequence of *Hamlet*. She first seduces General Laurence and convinces him to marry her. She then invites him and Cuthbert, on the eve of her wedding to General Laurence, to see her final performance: a play she wrote specifically for their nuptials and which details their family history.

child, and have no cause to thank me,” crediting only Regina’s “white soul” for his confessions (404). In each of the aforementioned cases, an ignoble character undergoes a transformation inspired by the godly attitudes of another; Evans uses such transformations to show her audience how they, too, can affect such changes in others.

The starkest example that Evans gives of how un-Christian behavior from a professed Christian can have an adverse effect on others occurs in *St. Elmo*. From the moment that St. Elmo Murray is introduced, he is presented as “a rude, blasphemous, wicked man” (15). St. Elmo later displays renunciation of all but his own ideas and desires, telling Edna that he alone is “the judge of [his] actions” and that he answers to no authority other than himself (44). In a story St. Elmo tells to Edna in flashback, St. Elmo reveals that he was once a pious seminarian, a mentee to Reverend Hammond, and close friend to Hammond’s son Murray, himself named after St. Elmo’s father. While in seminary, St. Elmo discovered that his fiancée and Murray had conspired to swindle his fortune away from him and elope together. Following this betrayal, St. Elmo, by his own admission, rejected his faith and “sold [him]self to [his] Mephistopheles, on condition that [his] revenge might be complete,” which occurs when he kills Murray in a duel and then begins a debauched lifestyle bent on deceiving women—including Murray’s sister, who dies of heartbreak—and then crushing their spirits (202). Ever prideful, St. Elmo denies his conceit and asserts that his hatred “of everything human, especially of everything feminine” supersedes any pride he might otherwise have (202). It is because of the deception and betrayal by Murray that St. Elmo develops his blasphemous hubris and overwhelming hatred, which he carries throughout much of the novel. Through his maintenance of a friendship with the Murray family and his mentoring of Edna, Reverend Hammond is depicted as perhaps the most noble character in all of Evans’s novels; his forgiveness of St. Elmo for his children’s deaths is so fully pronounced that St. Elmo

remains skeptical of it, even once he denounces his bitterness and agnosticism. By presenting Murray as the polar opposite of his father and showing how Murray's actions provide the impetus for St. Elmo's rejection of faith and virtue, Evans shows—albeit somewhat hyperbolically—the potentially adverse effect that irreligious actions by professed Christians can have on others, a logical point overlooked by many Christians both in Evans's time and today.

Despite the clear demarcation that she establishes in *Inez* between Protestantism and Catholicism, Evans's later novels extend her argument about Christian behavior to the squabbles and differences that lead to denominational separation. As discussed above, although Evans remained a member of the Methodist Church throughout her life, as she matured she no longer viewed doctrinal differences as an impetus for the segregation of believers from one another. In *A Speckled Bird* (1902), the tension between the Episcopal Eglah Kent and her Methodist maternal grandmother comes about from their doctrinal differences, which seem to focus on minutiae (such as the origin of Eglah's name) rather than creed. Moreover, Evans presents the difference between the two denominations as having more to do with prejudice than with faith. For example, Mrs. Maurice reluctantly cares for her granddaughter Eglah after the death of Eglah's mother, who became estranged from Mrs. Maurice after eloping with Eglah's father, an Episcopalian. Although, as with the example of St. Elmo as a profligate led astray through the anti-Christian acts of a professed Christian, the estrangement between Eglah's mother and grandmother over their denominational disagreement is somewhat hyperbolic, it was also not out of the realm of possibility among Evans's readers; thus, Evans offers their estrangement, which ends only when Marcia, Eglah's mother, dies in childbirth, as a cautionary tale.

More in keeping with the lengthy passages of argumentation seen in *Inez* or *Beulah*, however, is Evans's statement on denominational disputes in *Macaria*. When Irene asks her first spiritual mentor Amy Aubrey about the reason for so many denominations, each with doctrinal differences, Mrs. Aubrey offers Evans's Scripturally-oriented argument in response:

Because poor human nature is so full of foibles; because charity, the fundamental doctrine of Christ, is almost lost sight of by those churches; it has dwindled into a mere speck, in comparison with the trifles which they have magnified to usurp its place. Instead of one great Christian church, holding the doctrines of the New Testament, practicing the true spirit of the Savior, and in genuine charity allowing its members to judge for themselves in the minor questions relating to religion; such for instance as the mode of baptism, the privilege of believing presbyters and bishops equal in dignity, or otherwise, as the case may be, the necessity of ministers wearing surplice, or the contrary, as individual taste dictates, we have various denominations, all erected to promulgate some particular dogma, to magnify and exalt as all-important some trifling difference in the form of church government. Once established, the members of each sect apply themselves to the aggrandizement of their peculiar church; and thus it comes to pass that instead of one vast brotherhood, united against sin and infidelity, they are disgracefully wrangling about sectarian matters of no consequence whatever. In all this there is much totally antagonistic to the principles inculcated by our Savior, who expressly denounced the short-sighted bigotry of those who magnified external observance and non-essentials at the expense of the genuine spirit of their religion. I wish most earnestly that these denominational barriers and distinctions could be swept away, that the names of Methodist and Episcopal, Presbyterian and Baptist could be obliterated, and that all the members were gathered harmoniously into one world-wide pale, the Protestant Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. (53)

In this nearly three hundred-word essay inserted into the novel, Evans, by presenting Mrs. Aubrey's words as guidance for Irene, explains to her audience what she sees as the fallacy of having multiple Protestant doctrines, which only serve to divide the Church rather than unify it. Interestingly enough, however, Mrs. Aubrey clearly omits Catholicism from the discussion, and Evans still sets the Protestant Church apart from the Catholic Church. Evans does not reiterate her stance on Catholic doctrine—rarely does she expound at length upon a given topic in multiple novels—but she does indicate

what she sees as a problem with adherents to a denomination: that they are precisely that, adherents to a denomination who prioritize the traditions of said denomination over following Christ.

If, then, Evans's novels oppose false piety, the act of attending church services in order to create a social impression while acting uncharitably toward others, or elevating a given denomination over Christ, how does the author propose that professed Christians should act? Overall, Evans most emphasizes that Christians should act with humility—in terms of intellect, in terms of status, and even in terms of piety. For example, concerning humility of the mind, in *Beulah* it is only once Beulah humbly acknowledges the limited capacity of human understanding that she is able to return to Christ and end her struggle with skepticism, which in turn plants the seeds at the novel's end for Hartwell's potential conversion following his own long period of agnosticism. As Sara Frear points out, Beulah's return to Christ parallels Evans's own "eventual acceptance of faith as insoluble mystery" which "required both intellectual disillusionment and personal humility" (*Fine View* 144). And lest Evans's reader fail to recognize the importance of humility in restoration of faith, Evans explicitly points to the connection between humility and faith. In their final conversation before Beulah's repentance, Lindsay tells Beulah to "humble [her] proud intellect" (367). Shortly thereafter, Evans's narrator repeats this mantra, explaining that Beulah returned to faith when "[h]er proud intellect was humbled" (371). When Beulah finally returns to Christianity from her agnostic study of philosophy, she does so because she humbles herself, putting aside her pride that kept her from acknowledging the finitude of her mind. As Brenda Ayres puts it, "[s]piritualism without Christ is vanity, and that precisely is Evans' point" (60): Prior to her humble acceptance that neither her intellect nor various philosophical systems will provide her with meaning, Beulah pursues vanity by elevating human intellect above the nature of God. Only when she

acknowledges the Creator as greater than the creature can Beulah be reconciled to God. Thus, through Beulah's dynamic growth, Evans shows the importance of humility to any spiritual or intellectual undertaking. As discussed above, Evans uses *Beulah* to show how Christians need not fear study of the many emerging philosophical systems of the nineteenth century; by showing how humility eventually leads Beulah to the end of her spiritual quest, Evans emphasizes the necessity of humbly recognizing the limits of the human mind when undertaking such a quest.

Even in a practical sense, Beulah is unable to serve others as she desires until she first humbles herself before God. Recalling the stark contrast of the charitable actions of the agnostic Hartwell to the unsympathetic coldness of Mrs. Grayson, Beulah asserts to Mrs. Williams that she still can perform her "duty" without following God or attending church. However, Mrs. Williams counters with Evans's own question to those who seek to live moral lives without God: "If you cease to pray and read your Bible how are you to know what your duty is" (314)? As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese points out, "[i]t is all very well for Beulah to claim that she is following the path of duty, but perhaps she is merely confusing duty with her own recalcitrant pride" ("Introduction" xxx). This is not to say, of course, that Beulah is unable to serve others despite her lack of faith; rather, she develops a reputation for nursing others through various epidemics despite the risk that doing so poses to her own health and safety. However, rather than being motivated by humility and charity, Beulah is motivated primarily by her own attempt to prove that she can be wholly self-sacrificial without God, or, in other words, by pride. In short, although Evans emphasizes the importance of the intellect, she does deny its limitations or the hubris that can come with placing undue faith in one's intellect.

Although the examples of Beulah and St. Elmo each displaying their greatest pride could seem to indicate that Evans uses her characters to assert that pride is a sin of

the unfaithful, Evans does not limit a lack of humility to her apostate characters. Rather, one of the least humble, most judgmental characters in all of Evans's novels is the pious heroine of *St. Elmo*, Edna Earl. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes that "[j]udgment...runs like a thread through *St. Elmo*" ("Religion" 26). That thread of judgment runs almost exclusively from Edna toward others, primarily St. Elmo. Despite Reverend Hammond's protestations that Edna has "no right to visit [his] injuries and...sorrows" in judgment upon St. Elmo (*St. Elmo* 214), and despite St. Elmo's repentance for his sins, Edna, in Fox-Genovese's words, "usurp[s]...God's right of judgment" and refuses to forgive St. Elmo for sins he committed against others ("Religion" 26). Throughout much of the novel, Edna displays a hypocritical false righteousness, but begins to realize the hypocrisy of her unforgiving attitude after hearing a sermon on Matthew 7:12: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (325). Upon hearing the sermon from a visiting pastor with no knowledge of her history with St. Elmo, and which she believes was divinely inspired to admonish her for her sin of judgment, Edna begins to see how she has crossed over the line of merely holding St. Elmo accountable for his past actions and into the realm of hypocritically withholding forgiveness from St. Elmo even though all others had forgiven him. For the first half of the novel, Evans presents the fallen St. Elmo as a model of abandoned faith, but following St. Elmo's repentance, it is the overly pious Edna, who maintains and proclaims her Christian faith throughout the novel, who exemplifies the anti-Christian trait of condemnatory judgment.

As mentioned above, Evans shows abhorrence of the false piety of the kind displayed by Edna, which, as Evans indicates, ultimately is Edna's prideful elevation of her self over God. Throughout her work, the trait that Evans seems to champion above all others is humility as evidenced by self-sacrifice, which Evans's novels depict as

increasingly waning throughout society. By far, the most oft-discussed examples of self-sacrifice in Evans's novels are the characters Beulah Benton and Edna Earl forsaking their prosperous writing careers for marriage to Guy Hartwell and St. Elmo Murray, respectively. Much of this discussion takes a tone similar to that of Anne Goodwyn Jones, who chides Evans for removing Beulah from her career in order for her to "do 'holy' work, fulfilling a responsibility to others that came with submission, the submission to Christ" (56). However, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese points out, the conflict that Beulah and Edna face is not a result of their abdication of their careers but, in Evans's view, the result of "the evils of individualism" ("Introduction" xxviii). Evans believed what many of her critics seem to not: that a person must sacrifice his or her own desires and ambitions if she *or* he follows Christ; all people, man and woman alike, are called to die unto themselves. The examples of Beulah and Edna abandoning their writing careers will be discussed at much greater length in the next chapter, but they are far from the only examples of self-sacrifice that appear in Evans's novels.

The most obvious of these examples is Evans's third novel, aptly titled *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice*. The novel takes its title from the mythological figure of the same name, a character in Euripedes' *Heracleidae* who, "when Eurystheus threatened Athens, ...in order to save the city and the land from invasion and subjugation, willingly devoted herself a sacrifice on the altar of the gods" (*Macaria* 329). Within the context of the novel, the title refers to the sacrifice that Southern women made in sending their husbands or husbands-to-be to fight and die for the Confederacy during the American Civil War. As Irene tells Electra, the "Revolution has beggared thousands, and deprived many of their natural providers; numbers of women in the Confederacy will be thrown entirely upon their own resources for maintenance" (410). In order to do her part to aid those fighting in the war, Irene devotes herself to serving as a nurse in Virginia, near the site of many

battles, ministering to the wounded and alleviating the physical and spiritual pain of those near death. In addition to serving as a nurse, Irene sacrifices her own happiness by refusing to marry so that she may better tend to those affected by the war, which she does by using her fortune to open both a home for war-widows and a design school so that single and widowed women might have other opportunities for employment beyond working as “mantua-makers, milliners, or school-teachers” (410). Rather than living for herself, Irene “survived every earthly hope; and...calmly fronting her Altars of Sacrifice, here dedicated herself anew to the hallowed work of promoting the happiness and gladding the paths of all who journeyed with her down the chequered aisles of Time” (414).

In addition to her war-related service, Irene displays selflessness for the sake of others throughout the novel. She clandestinely acquires money to pay for Mrs. Aubrey’s eye surgery despite knowing her father would forbid her doing so. She risks her father’s wrath—which culminates in her being sent to boarding school—so that she can introduce Electra Grey to an artist who will help her career. She hides her love for Russell Aubrey because she knows that revealing it would only hurt his career by causing greater animosity between him and her father. She risks her health to nurse typhus patients in the lower class area of town and continues to care for those patients after recovering from her own bout with the disease. Through and through, Irene is an example of selflessness par excellence. As such, Evans uses *Macaria* not just to display the sacrifices necessary for Southern women in relation to the Civil War but to present to her readers, Southern and Northern alike, the necessity of making daily sacrifices as part of Christian duty. As discussed above, in *Beulah* Mrs. Williams chastises Beulah for assuming to know her duty without adhering to Scripture. Similarly, when Electra, at the end of the *Macaria*, asks Irene to teach her how to do her “whole duty,” Irene simply tells

her to “take Christ for [her] model” (413). Through this exchange, which occurs in the final pages of the novel, Evans, via Irene’s advice to Electra, tells her reader that looking to Irene—or, for that matter, any other person—as a model would prevent someone from following Christ; therefore, Electra, and the reader by extension, should follow Christ.

Furthermore, in keeping with her theme of negative models of Christianity pointing others away from Christ, through Irene’s winsomeness as a model and Electra’s desire to be more like Irene in character, Evans presents to her audience an example of the importance of following Christ. Unlike Mrs. Grayson, Irene did not provide an example of attending church services regularly while unsympathetically dividing a family. Nor does Irene insist that Electra follow Christ while maintaining a self-righteous, unforgiving attitude like that of Edna. Rather, Irene is able to point Electra to Christ because Electra first wants to follow Irene. Thus, Evans leaves her audience with two final messages: 1) If they want to follow Irene, they should follow Christ instead; and 2) If they want to point others to Christ, they must first display Him in their own lives.

Of course, Irene is not Evans’s only example of a selfless heroine. Even though *Macaria* focuses on self-abnegation more than any of her other novels, Evans still includes elements promoting sacrifice in most of her novels. Apart from *Macaria*, the most notable of these sacrifices occurs in *At the Mercy of Tiberius*, wherein protagonist Beryl Brentano steadfastly protects her brother—a vagabond whose existence is unknown to all but her—and is willing to be executed for a murder that she believes he committed rather than revealing him as the killer. Brought to trial for the murder of her grandfather, Beryl discovers that the evidence against her points to her brother as the murderer. Upholding a vow she made to protect her brother with her life, Beryl refuses to implicate him in the crime or even reveal his existence. Although she believes that she will be found innocent of the crime that she did not commit—but for which she is

convicted—Beryl is still willing to face prison or even execution for her brother's sake. Beryl believes that by taking her brother's place, "she could secure to him life—the opportunities of repentance, of expiation, of making his peace with God, of saving his immortal soul" (301). Through her willingness to "lay down [her] life" for her brother, Beryl shows the full extent of her Christ-like love for him (John 15:13). Whereas the cross that Beulah and Edna must carry is that of abandoning their careers, and Irene's cross is to remain unmarried so that she can better serve those forced to stay unmarried or widowed, Beryl's cross is that of Christ: she is willing to give her life for the sins of another. Similar to how the provision of a ram does not devalue Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac to God (Gen. 22:13), Beryl's willing sacrifice is of no less value when she is exonerated after the discovery that, although her brother did rob him, her grandfather was killed by a lightning strike.

In addition to the sacrifices made by her heroines, Evans also presents numerous examples of self-sacrifice in her male characters. To be sure, these sacrifices are not as prominent to the plots of the novels as those of the female protagonists, but only because the roles of Evans's male characters are not as prominent as those of her female characters. Even in *St. Elmo*, the eponymous hero is, at best, a co-lead protagonist with Edna and is the antagonist through much of the novel. St. Elmo's shift from antagonist to co-protagonist, however, occurs when he sacrifices his decades-long vengeful pursuit of selfish pleasure at the intentional expense of others in order to move toward service as a minister. In both of her war-set novels, *Inez* and *Macaria*, Evans features characters who literally lay down their lives for causes greater than themselves. Despite having already fled the San Antonio region with Mary and Florence, Dr. Frank Bryant (*Inez*) is guided by his Christian convictions to return to the area of conflict once he's assured that Mary and Florence are out of harm's way. Upon returning to Goliad to

help in any way he can, Dr. Bryant is killed along with many others during the Goliad Massacre.

Similar to Bryant's sacrifice, the two primary male characters of *Macaria*, Russell Aubrey and Leonard Huntingdon, both fight and die for the Confederacy during the American Civil War. Unlike, Bryant, however, Aubrey and Huntingdon are both motivated by Southern nationalism rather than Christian faith. Instead of sacrificing because of their faith, both Aubrey and Huntingdon develop their faith through their sacrifice. Lifelong nemeses due to Huntingdon's role in Russell's father's death in prison in retaliation for Mrs. Aubrey having once rejected his courtship, Russell and Leonard put aside their animosity as a result of their mutual sacrifice. As Huntingdon lies mortally wounded during the Battle of Manassas, he shouts encouragement to Russell as Russell continues to fight the Union forces. Later, Russell, himself wounded, helps his former enemy to rest and palliates his wounds, an act which Huntingdon refers to as "heap[ing] coals of fire on [his] head" (336), referring to Proverbs 25:21-22 ("If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; ²²For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the LORD will reward you."). Based on Russell's forgiving actions towards his adversary, Huntingdon then begs Russell's forgiveness, emptying his heart of malice and allowing him to receive Christ's forgiveness and salvation immediately before death (338). Prior to their leaving for battle, Irene individually implores both Russell and her father to accept Christ before it is too late for either. As a result of their "dying unto themselves," Russell and Huntingdon both turn to Christ before dying in battle.

Each of the above examples, of course, shows a practical application of self-sacrifice. Whether her characters sacrifice their careers, pursuits, wealth, freedom, or even lives, Evans uses depictions of self-sacrifice to teach her audience about the importance of no longer living for oneself if that person is to serve God. The most directly

vocal statement that Evans makes regarding abnegation of self occurs, appropriately, in *Macaria*. When Harvey Young, Electra Grey's paternal first cousin and Irene's spiritual mentor, leaves his position of wealth and privilege in order to take his ministry to the Western frontier, he tells his mother, "[W]hatever I firmly believe to be my duty to the holy cause I have espoused, that I must do ... but we who profess to yield up all things for Christ must not shrink from sacrifice" (98). By giving up his possessions to follow Christ, Harvey fulfills Christ's command to "go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Mt 19:21). Harvey similarly counsels Irene before his departure as to how to guard herself from the lures of the world despite her wealth, calling "selfishness...the real root of all the evil in the world" and stating that "I, Me, Mine, is the God of the age" (85). Through this brief statement, Evans makes clear the point of her examples of sacrifice: a person cannot worship God if that person worships him or herself instead. By giving this message to her audience, Evans teaches her audience that anything that is of the self—wealth, career, social status, fame, even freedom or life—is of no value if, in order to keep it, one must refuse to follow Christ.

This is not to suggest, of course, that Evans argues that sacrifice cannot exist apart from Christ. In fact, Evans gives examples of the exact opposite. For instance, just as the Christians Irene and Beryl risk their health to tend to others during outbreaks of typhus and diphtheria, respectively, the agnostic Beulah risks her health to act as a nurse during a yellow fever epidemic. Similarly, in *Devota*, the titular heroine is introduced to the audience via Mrs. Churchill telling of how she first met Devota on a ship bound from Europe when the then-stranger abdicated her stateroom to Mrs. Churchill's healthy children while assisting Mrs. Churchill in caring for her baby, who had diphtheria (15-16). Yet, Mrs. Churchill also describes Devota as "utterly incapable of any spiritual exaltation" (19), and, unlike the dynamic Beulah, Devota never makes a profession of faith by the

end of the novel. Even regarding Evans's male characters, as mentioned above, neither Russell Aubrey nor Leonard Huntingdon of *Macaria* comes to faith until nearing the point of death in sacrifice for the Confederacy. Rather than asserting that one must be a Christian in order to give of oneself sacrificially, Evans's main point regarding the importance of Christian sacrifice is that a person, even if that person claims to be a Christian and attends church regularly, must sacrificially exhibit the "fruit of the spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23) if that person is to point others to Christ.

As stated previously, Augusta Jane Evans believed that the religious education of readers was the primary purpose of fiction. Rather than emphasizing an education that taught her readers to blindly follow Christian precepts as a matter of habit or social conditioning, Evans's novels stress for readers the importance of questioning ideas and practices that might inhibit their faith or the exhibition thereof. Rather than championing an unquestioning faith, as some scholars suggest, Evans encourages her readers to question the tenets of their dominations against the foundation of Scripture, to test their faith against philosophical systems while simultaneously questioning the validity of those systems, and to question whether their own actions display only the social status of church-going as opposed to sacrificial Christian living. Because of her emphasis on questioning ideas—including the nominal practice of religion—in the context of Scripture, it is then reasonable to suggest that Evans also applied the idea of sacrifice for Christ over the serving of the self to other areas of life, namely feminism, slavery, and wealth and poverty, each of which shall be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

“Her Holy Work of Love”: The Roles of Women and Men in the Work of Augusta Jane Evans

As discussed previously, the most frequent topic of debate in Evans criticism has been, and continues to be, her portrayal of women. Many scholars are split on whether Evans can, in Diane Roberts' words, “be recovered for feminism” or whether her novels undermine women and promote a patriarchal society (xvi). On the one hand, Evans championed women's education and the intellectual ability of women; not only do some of her novels include lengthy discussions of women's education, but Evans's heroines are typically highly intelligent and are driven by intellectual pursuits. On the other hand, however, these same characters often put their intellectually-minded careers aside in favor of marriage, or else, as in the case of *Macaria's* Irene Huntingdon, the heroine's academic interests become little more than a dropped subplot. However, even though several scholars have acknowledged Evans's Christian roots, few have recognized that Evans's social view fell in line with neither that of women's rights leaders nor with those who upheld a patriarchal society. Rather, Evans promoted a Christian view that fit the mold of neither feminism nor patriarchy. Trying to examine Evans's views on gender relations through either worldly lens produces a conflict between Evans's portrayal of strong, independent heroines and her depiction of women who forsake their careers in order to support their husbands, especially since these women are usually one and the same. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, Evans promoted a Christian worldview and questioned ideas—including religious doctrine—that she presented as going astray of Christ. Thus, this seemingly conflicted depiction not only makes sense but is required in order to present gender relations fully from the Christian perspective from which Evans wrote. In this chapter, I will evaluate the valid points made by those who

claim Evans promoted feminism as well as those who claim she endorsed patriarchy; I will then reconcile the two by showing how they do not adequately describe the highly nuanced Christian worldview intended by Evans.

Augusta Jane Evans the Feminist

The main point raised by those who claim Evans for feminism is that her novels revolve around strong female protagonists and that Evans uses these protagonists to subvert the boundaries of traditional gender roles by having them exercise their independence and exhibit their high intellects. Nina Baym refers to Evans's heroines as "the strongest, most brilliant, and most accomplished in the long line of woman's heroines"; the typical Evans protagonist is "a heroine by election rather than a heroine in spite of herself" (278). Similarly, Helen Papishvily describes the ambition of Evans's heroines as being driven by "unremitting application" (158). This strength and ambition works to further one of the primary themes of Evans's novels; Anne Sophie Riepma argues that "Evans's message to her readers is clearly that it is of vital importance for a woman to have skills allowing her to be independent" (36). To be sure, each Evans novel features at least one female protagonist who is independent, ambitious, highly intelligent, and highly accomplished. In her first novel, *Inez*, Evans presents a wealthy landowner in Inez de Garcia, who has her land stolen from her by the local Catholic diocese. Beulah Benton (*Beulah*) and Edna Earl (*St. Elmo*) are both orphans who achieve literary fame and success through their scholarly philosophical articles or intellectual novels. In *Macaria*, perpetually spoiled heiress Irene Huntingdon has her articles on astronomy published in scientific journals and ultimately joins with her friend Electra Grey, herself an orphan and successful artist, to found an orphanage during the American Civil War. In *Vashti*, title character Vashti Carlyle is independently wealthy, and the orphaned Salome

Owen achieves fame through her singing talent. Similar to Salome, Minne Merle of *Infelice* builds herself from an impoverished washer-woman to a world-renowned stage performer who writes and produces her own work. Beryl Brentano (*At the Mercy of Tiberius*), prior to her murder trial, is an accomplished artist at the beginning of a notable career designing art for Christmas cards. Nona Dane of *A Speckled Bird* is a successful single mother and labor organizer. In Evans's final novel, *Devota*, the eponymous heroine Devota Lindsay, like Irene and Vashti, is independently wealthy and also has strong political connections.

Although each of Evans's heroines is successful, they all exert their independence in ways other than simple success. Rather than presenting characters who have no choice but either to starve or succeed, each of Evans's female protagonists succeeds through ambition rather than necessity. For example, in *Macaria*, Irene is intelligent, ambitious, and hard-working, and she eventually uses these traits in the founding of a successful orphanage. However, Irene is also an heiress whose father, on the occasion of a high society party, gives her a necklace worth far more than the property on which she plans to build the orphanage. Yet she voluntarily forsakes the glamour and leisure of wealth and luxury her father offers her in favor of using those resources to help others, even to the point of contracting typhus while caring for the sick in an impoverished area of the city. Even Evans's orphans are not forced into lives of hard work but choose to do so. Both Beulah Benton and Edna Earl have the opportunity to be adopted into wealthy households but refuse those offers. As Nina Baym puts it, they "are offered every advantage—are begged, indeed, to accept wealth, love, protection, position" but see any financial or social gift beyond the ability to complete their education as a hindrance to their pre-existing plans, consciously choosing to "struggle and strive" rather than live in lazy luxury (Baym 278). Given that Evans's loudest complaint against

the institution of slavery was that slaveholding, aristocratic women relied on slaves for all things, becoming mentally and physically lazy, it is fitting that her heroines would choose diligent work and intellectual endeavors over ease and material fortune.

By having her heroines work to succeed independently from wealth that they already possess or which is offered to them, Evans also presents young women who reject both the aristocracy and the patriarchy of Southern high society. Each of Evans's female protagonists shuns the society into which she is either born or introduced. As mentioned above, Irene Huntingdon parlays her exorbitant wealth into the founding of charitable causes, and Edna Earl rejects Mrs. Murray's attempts to thrust her into high society because it does not fit her personal ambitions or pride. In keeping with sentimental fiction, heroines opt to marry for love or not at all; Evans's novels are littered with rejected marriage proposals, each of which is either the socially anticipated marriage or one that could elevate the social status of the bride. Irene Huntingdon repeatedly rejects her cousin Hugh (to whom her father betrothed her in infancy); Electra Gray spurns her artistic mentor and benefactor; Beulah Benton rejects even Guy Hartwell's friendship until she is spiritually equipped to help him grow in his faith as his wife (a point discussed at length below); Edna Earl rejects multiple proposals, each of which would have made her immeasurably wealthy and comfortable, and accepts St. Elmo only when he is a pastor using his wealth for charity rather than to support his rakish world travels. In *Macaria*, the feud between Mr. Huntingdon and the Aubrey family stems solely from Mr. Huntingdon's anger at Mrs. Aubrey rejecting his wealth in favor of the love of her husband, a rejection that also caused her estrangement from her family. Even in *Infelice*, in which Minnie Merle originally, out of love, married Cuthbert Laurence while he was wealthy, his father's fears that she wanted only money kept them apart until years later, when his father died and wealth was no longer an issue.

While in the cases of Evans's orphans, this rejection of aristocracy is merely the rejection of a society to which they never made a claim, for Evans's heiress, Irene, rejection of aristocracy quite literally means rejection of patriarchy: her father, whom, as Brenda Ayres points out, she "defies...at every turn" (92). She disobeys his commands to stop visiting a woman—Amy Aubrey—who, unbeknownst to Irene, broke her father's heart years earlier; she repeatedly rejects the betrothal her father made on her behalf to her cousin Hugh, to the point where her father disinherits her for a period of time; and she refuses the high society into which she was born and which her father relishes.

Similarly, Ayres notes that the women of *Vashti*, Evans's fifth novel, show the same contempt for "male authority" displayed by Irene in *Macaria* (135). Although Evans makes male protagonist Ulpian Grey the moral compass of the novel, his authority is respected by neither of her female leads. From the time that Ulpian returns to the Grey household, his sister's ward Salome Owen sees his arrival as an undue burden because "men always make din and strife in a household" (9). Although Salome eventually changes her opinion of Ulpian and falls in love with him, she steadfastly refuses to change herself to meet his "standard of womanly delicacy, nobility, gentleness, and Christian faith" (60). The titular heroine Vashti Carlyle, however, does not even share in Salome's eventual love for Ulpian. Although she rejects his proposals out of her desire to stay true to her marriage vows (she is estranged from her husband, whom she realized married her only in a plot to con her out of her wealth), she also rejects his counsel on other matters simply as a result of her own strong will. Even when he attempts to fill his deathbed promise to Vashti's beloved nurse that he act as Vashti's spiritual mentor and guide her back to God, Vashti refuses to accept any authority or counsel other than her own conscience. In short, the women of *Vashti*, Vashti herself in particular, reject the idea that they need a man for support or for guidance. Interestingly, in naming her title

character, Evans invokes the Persian Queen Vashti, who is described in the Book of Esther as being removed from her position due to her refusal to submit to public degradation at the command of King Ahasuerus. Similarly, although Evans's Vashti anonymously tends to her husband when he faces a life-threatening illness (hence the novel's subtitle: *'Til Death Us Do Part*), she refuses to allow herself to be degraded by her husband's plot to con her out of her wealth. However, unlike the Persian Vashti, who is removed by the king, Evans's Vashti removes herself from her husband's life. In both cases, each Vashti refuses to submit to their husband's authority when they see that authority as being used in an unjust way. Thus, in naming Vashti as she does, Evans immediately establishes her as independent and autonomous rather than submissive to others.

One could certainly argue that many of Evans's examples of female independence—such as Vashti's refusal to listen to ideas other than her own or Edna's foregoing of sleep to research her books—could be seen as stubbornness as much as strength. However, the intellectual prowess of Evans's heroines cannot be denied. Evans viewed men and women as intellectual equals, as seen in the intellectual accomplishments and endeavors of her heroines. Beulah, Irene, and Edna each are published academics who show keen intelligence and the capability of presenting brilliant ideas. As discussed at length in the previous chapter, Beulah undertakes a rigorous study of philosophy and theology. However personal her study might be, she does not use her findings simply for her own edification but for the benefit of others, especially for women who might have similar aspirations. From the time of her valedictory speech as a teenager, in which she argued “that female intellect was capable of the most exalted attainments” (140), Beulah uses her voice—written or oral—to inspire the intellectual pursuit of others. Although Evans does not discuss the content of Beulah's articles at

length, she makes clear that Beulah writes articles of an intellectual nature. Furthermore, Beulah displays her own business savvy when she refuses to offer her publisher “gratuitous contributions,” asserting to the Southern-minded publisher that “it is no mystery why southern authors are driven to northern publishers” since northern publishers offer ample payment (241). Although Beulah’s publishing career is not given the prominence of the research that drives it, the combination of her research, business acumen, and publishing success indicates that Beulah raises deep intellectual questions to which many readers sought answers. Thus, *Beulah* the novel does the same work as Beulah the character: Through Beulah, Evans, as discussed in the previous chapter, provides intellectual responses to many philosophical and theological questions that troubled her audience.

Similar to Beulah’s intellectual rigor and depth of reasoning, Evans’s narrator describes Irene as having an “acute and logical” intellect and shows her expounding intelligently on such diverse topics as the true authorship of the works ascribed to Homer and the nebular theory model of the creation of the solar system (38, 222, 246). Evans describes Irene as spending several hours researching and writing an article on the Kant-Laplace Nebular Theory for publication in an unnamed scientific journal. Interestingly, it is this same topic upon which Poe devotes much of his thought in *Eureka*, the work that commences Evans’s Beulah upon her philosophical and theological quest. Although Evans never details her thoughts on this cosmological theory, the differing responses to the nebular theory by Beulah, for whom it began a period of skepticism, and Irene, who writes a commentary on it while not deviating from her faith, shows the emphasis that Evans places on education and research as they relate to faith. Beulah, whose faith is shaken after studying Kant-Laplace, is at the beginning of her study; Irene, whose faith remains strong, is deeper into her study of astronomy. This is not to say that Evans

favors Irene over Beulah or that she presents Beulah as naïve. Rather, Irene and Beulah are simply at different points in their intellectual development, and Evans uses both as an example of the necessity of intellectual inquiry for women, indicating the value of intellectual reasoning to developing a solid faith such as that possessed by Irene and Beulah at the ends of their respective novels.

Despite the academic endeavors of Beulah and Irene, by far the most intellectually-minded of Evans's heroines is Edna Earl, who "devote[s] herself to the acquisition of knowledge" (58). Edna spends virtually every waking hour—and even loses sleep—on academic pursuits, learning world history, world religions, mythology, theology, and multiple foreign languages, including Greek, Chaldee, and Hebrew. When suitor and fellow student Gordon Leigh complains to Reverend Hammond about the lack of affection shown to him by Edna, Hammond responds that Gordon "will never be Edna's husband, because intellectually she is [his] superior," asserting that, no matter what else Gordon might offer Edna, she will continually reject him because she does not respect him intellectually (123). With this exchange, Evans shows that a woman's intelligence is not only equal to that of a man but that a woman can also have an intellect that supersedes that of her male peers. As discussed previously, Evans continues to receive a great deal of criticism for the overabundance of obscure classical references in *St. Elmo*. However, although they make for cumbersome prose, they all work to support Evans's argument that a woman can achieve such depth and breadth of education and erudition. Even if, as some of her critics have done, one were to refrain from giving Evans the benefit of any doubt and were to insist that the references only serve to show off her own learning, either way Evans shows her audience what a woman can accomplish in the intellectual realm. Additionally, although Evans's seemingly pedantic prose resulted in much criticism of her style, it is important to note that Evans's later novels include fewer references of

the like seen in *St. Elmo*, indicating that their use is a display of woman's intellectual capabilities rather than a display of an overwrought style.

In addition to intellectually astute heroines, Evans often presented lengthy Socratic dialogues that made arguments in favor of women receiving the same educational advantages as men. When faced with the question of her educational pursuits, Edna retorts to Mrs. Murray, "I do not quite understand why ladies have not as good a right to be learned and wise as gentlemen" (56). In *Infelice*, Evans adds to her argument that not only are women as intellectually capable as men but that women should be well-educated if they are to have the strong Christian faith she advocates. When Douglass Lindsay and his mother debate Regina's academic education (with, interestingly, Douglass speaking out in favor of her education and his mother speaking out against it), Douglass argues, "True knowledge, which springs from fearless investigation, is a far nobler and more reliable conservator of pure vital Christianity" (111). Evans strongly believed that a woman would be unable to fulfill her God-ordained duties if she remained uneducated and that failing to exercise her intellect would, in fact, hinder a woman in those duties. Making her argument through Douglass, Evans writes,

I refer to the popular fallacy that in the same ratio that you thoroughly educate women, you unfit them for the holy duties of daughter, wife, and mother. Is there an inherent antagonism between learning and womanliness? ...Are we to accept the unjust and humiliating dogma that the more highly we cultivate feminine intellect, the more unfeminine, unlovely, unamiable the individual certainly becomes? Is a woman sweeter, more gentle, more useful to her family and friends because she is unlearned? (115)

In other words, Evans disavows the patriarchal notion that education is solely a masculine endeavor and that education and intellectual achievement make a woman less of a woman. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of Evans's main points in *Beulah* is that faith should not prohibit reason and that strong faith is bolstered rather than hindered by intellectual scrutiny. In line with that idea, Evans shows through the

academic pursuits of her heroines and through her direct arguments about education that an intelligent and well-learned woman can better lead others to Christ and be a stronger representation of Christian virtue than could a woman without the strength and intellect of Evans's heroines.

Those who claim Evans for feminism look beyond the independent attitudes and intellectual achievements of her heroines, examining how those attitudes lead to a rejection of societal and patriarchal mores. These scholars also point out how the independence of Evans's characters leads to a subversive representation of marriage. Ayres argues that "Evans seems to be saying that people are better off not marrying if they hope to fulfill life's purpose for them" (142). Nancy Alder and Naomi Z. Sofer concur with Ayres' assessment, stating that "Evans even suggested that remaining single may reflect a God-given duty to use her feminine talents in the world at large" and that Evans depicts little chance of "reconciling marriage and career by requiring her artists either to remain single or to give up their careers for marriage" (Alder 81; Sofer 103). In making their case that Evans argues against marriage, scholars primarily point to three Evans novels as evidence: *Beulah*, *St. Elmo*, and *At the Mercy of Tiberius*.

At the end of *Beulah*, the eponymous heroine leaves her career for marriage to Guy Hartwell but then seemingly looks back at her lost career. Karen Day argues that "Beulah's marriage represents ultimately not a repression of her feminism but an example of how in her refusal to forget her past, she fosters a feminist self-consciousness" (60). In other words, Day asserts that Beulah's forsaking of her career for marriage to Hartwell comes not with the celebration of a new beginning apart from her career but a degree of mourning for the life she must leave. However, this interpretation is somewhat problematic. Beulah does tell Hartwell that she frequently thinks of her past; however, her thoughts are not on her career but on her spiritual journey:

[M]y past can never die. I ponder it often, and it does me good; strengthens me, by keeping me humble. I was just thinking of the dreary, desolate days and nights I passed, searching for a true philosophy, and going further astray with every effort. I was so proud of my intellect, put so much faith in my own powers; it was no wonder I was so benighted. (418)

Far from mourning for her lost career, Beulah's recollection takes the tone of mourning that she was ever lured from her faith by what she came to determine were false philosophies. Beulah does not look upon her past with nostalgic longing; rather, she views it more as a foolish, quixotic quest, albeit one which Evans presents as necessary for Beulah to acquire a stronger faith rooted in intellectual reasoning. Based on her recollections, Beulah begins a lengthy exposition on religion and philosophy, with the end result being that Hartwell begins to question his own unbelief. Certainly, Beulah does abandon her career for marriage to a self-proclaimed "tyrant" (411); however, Beulah makes no mention of her career in her final speech to Hartwell. Rather, her thoughts are on the usefulness and the limitations of "human genius" (418-19). Beulah does not pine for her prior ambitions but instead challenges Hartwell: "you turn from Revelation, because it contains some things you cannot comprehend; yet you plunge into a deeper, darker mystery, when you embrace the theory of an eternal, self-existing universe, having no intelligent creator, yet constantly creating intelligent beings. Sir, can you understand how matter creates mind?" (419-20). Contrary to the idea that Beulah was ruminating on her career, she engages in the same sort of intellectual task that marked her spiritual journey as well as her literary career. By intellectually challenging Hartwell to resume his own philosophical, theological, and spiritual quest, Beulah takes the skills used in her career and uses them to influence the beliefs of her future husband, whose unbelief had previously provided the impetus for Beulah's quest of discovery. While Beulah's brashness in provoking Hartwell to examine his beliefs could signify a "feminist self-consciousness" as Day suggests, such self-consciousness would appear to stem from

Beulah's confidence in her knowledge and reasoning rather than a desire to resume her career. If anything, Beulah shows a "feminist self-consciousness" by rejecting the spiritual influence of Hartwell and, instead, influencing his own spiritual and philosophical thought.

Many critics have also pointed to the ending of *St. Elmo* as an example of Evans's critique of a social order that forces a woman to choose between marriage and success. At the time of their marriage, St. Elmo tells Edna, "Today I snap the fetters of your literary bondage" (365). Additionally, Edna's prevailing trait is her independence and refusal to marry for the sake of marriage. As Reverend Hammond tells her would-be aristocratic suitor Gordon Leigh, "If she ever marries, it will not be from gratitude or devotion, but because she has learned to love, almost against her will, some strong, vigorous thinker, some man whose will and intellect master hers, who compels her heart's homage, and without whose society she cannot persuade herself to live" (123). In looking at these passages, one cannot escape the language of slavery with words like "bondage" and "master." Examining such language, Elizabeth Fekete Trubey argues that, through language typically associated with slavery, Evans uses domesticity to reinforce proslavery ideas and establishes St. Elmo as "the figure of the paternal Southern slave owner" and that "Edna again takes on the metaphorical role of slave, this time in relation to her husband rather than her work" (142). Certainly, a comparison of marriage to slavery, even given Evans's proslavery stance, would seem to indicate a negative view of marriage. However, as will be discussed further below, this interpretation avoids discussion of Evans's elevation of marriage as a Godly institution wherein Edna chooses to use her gifts to support her new husband in his ministry.

Evans revisits the idea of marriage as a form of tyranny in *At the Mercy of Tiberius* (1887). Throughout the novel, attorney Lennox Dunbar is portrayed as harsh and totalitarian, working to intimidate Beryl at every turn. Even in proposing marriage, he tells

Beryl that he “claims his own” and asks whether she will “be loyal to [her] tyrant,” to which Beryl responds that she was “foredoomed to be always at the mercy of Tiberius,” referring to the Roman Emperor to which Lennox holds a resemblance (519-20). And to be sure, unlike the marriages of Beulah or Edna, which could be seen as putting the women in position to have spiritual influence on or support of their respective husbands, the ongoing imposition of Lennox upon Beryl indicates that their post-novel life would have little difference from their relationship as depicted. Referring specifically to this marriage, Ayres asserts that “Evans perceives marriage as a form of tyranny, specifically one in which the man reigns as tyrant and the woman becomes subject to his will” (186). Christiane E. Farnan shares this view, claiming that these three particular marriages show Evans’s own “resentment of the cultural necessity that forced her to end her career,” in keeping with the slow literary output that followed Evans’s marriage to Lorenzo Wilson (8). Like her heroine Beulah, who served as a stand-in for Evans in that Beulah’s crisis of faith mirrored Evans’s, Evans leaves behind her ambition for her marriage. However, Ayres does note that, unlike Beulah’s or Edna’s full abandonment of their careers, Evans “clearly identifies herself first as an artist” and that she continued to write throughout her marriage, the reduction in productivity in work coming about as a result of time spent managing her husband’s estate and fulfilling her new role of mother and grandmother (154). As seen above, no societal influence or temptation of wealth could lead Evans’s heroines to marriage; they married only for love. By the time of her marriage, Evans’s novels had earned her considerable wealth, and she appears to have felt no need, pressure, or desire to marry for reasons other than love.⁴

⁴ Fidler reports that Evans and Wilson first met as neighbors and developed a bond over mutual interests—combined with Evans’s maturity and Wilson’s youthfulness—and fell in love when Evans helped the Wilson family following the death of Lorenzo Wilson’s first wife.

Evans's Civil War novel *Macaria* adds further credence to the argument that she believed that women could do the most good for the world while remaining single. Jan Bakker argues that "*Macaria* becomes the strongest feminist statement to have been published in the South" during that time due to its protagonists "leav[ing] their stereotypical roles as self-sacrificing females in peace and war to assume center stage as advocates of the single, career-oriented life for women" (131, 132). However, Bakker misinterprets the sacrifice to which Evans refers in her subtitle *Altars of Sacrifice*. Her heroines, Irene and Electra, do not abandon roles of domestic "self-sacrifice" but sacrifice marriage and domesticity in favor of service to those who were physically, spiritually, emotionally, and financially wounded by the Civil War. By the novel's end, neither of the two protagonists have any prospects for marriage. Recognizing that the war has left many other women in the same plight, as well as created many widows and orphans, Irene uses land given to her by her father to found an orphanage and sells expensive jewelry to establish a school of design—which she enlists Electra to oversee—in order to train newly widowed women in careers that will allow for their independence and the subsistence of their families. These are not "women who dare to live alone," as Bakker alleges (139). Rather, as both Jennifer Lynn Gross and Anne Sophie Riepma have pointed out, the ending of *Macaria* depicts the situation that many Southern women faced after the Civil War. Remaining unmarried because of the deaths of fiancées or potential suitors, many women were never able to fulfill their traditional marriage roles. Ending *Macaria* as she does, Evans shows that "women who could never marry" as a result of the war could still "find usefulness and social acceptance in their lives" by displaying the same strength and independence depicted in Irene and Electra (Gross 48). Thus, through the ending of *Macaria* Evans indicates that a woman can find fulfillment apart from marriage.

In her book *All the Happy Endings*, Helen Papishvily writes that sentimental novels “were handbooks for another kind of feminine revolt” that “reflected and encouraged a pattern of feminine behavior so quietly ruthless, so subtly vicious that by comparison the ladies at Seneca appear angels of innocence” (xvii), referring to the emphasis on domestic power that these novels give to women, especially in their roles as “the exclusive keepers of the Keys to Heaven” in that sentimental novels tended to assign the task of men’s salvation to the women in their lives (107). Papishvily writes that sentimental novels create a theological scenario in which leading a person to God “no longer required theological training, a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew” but, rather, qualities typically associated with women such as “inspiration, intuition, spirit, [and] sensibility” (107). Evans goes one step further by combining these traits: especially regarding Beulah and Edna, her inspired, intuitive, spirited, sensible female characters also engage in deep theological study and learn both Greek and Hebrew, putting them in even stronger positions to lead their male counterparts. This leadership can be seen most clearly at the end of *Beulah*, where it is Beulah who challenges her husband rather than the other way around.

Ultimately, those who believe that Evans *can* “be recovered for feminism” see Evans’s novels as fitting into the mold that Paphishvily describes. Even though Evans vocally endorsed traditional women’s roles, “she also seriously undermined that ideology with her advocacy of freedom in all other areas of a woman’s life” (Ayres 257). In pointing to Evans’s female protagonists who achieved intellectual and personal success through their own efforts, exercised their independence from patriarchal society, and eschewed marriage for most of their lives and saw it as a hindrance to their goals, those scholars who favor a subversive, feminist Evans make a solid case for their argument. However, so do those who argue that Evans was an anti-feminist who promoted patriarchal society.

Augusta Jane Evans the Anti-Feminist

The majority of voices in the debate as to whether Evans was a feminist or an anti-feminist have echoed Anne Goodwyn Jones's oft-quoted statement that the marriage at the end of *Beulah* represents a "capitulation" to the patriarchy despite any protestations to the contrary (91). Mary Kelley concedes that Evans created female characters who defied typical gender roles but maintains that Evans "reinforced" those same gender roles and views of women through plots that ended with a woman forsaking herself for her husband (103). Those who argue against a feminist case for Evans point primarily to her own vocal views against the women's rights movement and give many examples of how they believe Evans's novels ultimately restore the patriarchal system that they might at first seem to subvert. Some who favor Evans as a feminist argue that she "overtly maintained that women could wield more power if they did it behind the façade of domesticity" (Ayres 177). However, it is undeniable that Evans vocally opposed the women's rights movement, believing that gender equality would reduce the status of women in society and eliminate woman's "moral authority and her influence on man" (Riepma 135). In a statement included in her 1909 obituary that appeared in the *Mobile Register*, Evans is quoted as saying, "If women attended to their privileges, they would not need to be keen about their rights" (qtd. in Fidler 164). Nancy Alder uses quotes such as this one along with evidence from Evans's novels to argue that "Evans conducted a determined attack against women's rights," a position with which many other scholars agree (79).

Bradley Johnson acknowledges that Evans's novels, in part, seem to subvert patriarchy, but he argues that Evans "rejects only those elements that prevent women from being fulfilled within the domestic sphere, elements that allow men to violate their

obligation to protect the home and its values" (16). In other words, Johnson claims that rather than challenging the patriarchal system as a system in and of itself, Evans merely sought to improve upon the existing system while keeping it in place. Other scholars have been less generous than Johnson in describing Evans's relationship to the patriarchy, arguing that Evans consistently "restores patriarchal order by destroying the femme fatale and returning the patriarch to a position of authority" (Entzminger 71). As an example, Entzminger cites *Beulah*, wherein Hartwell's first wife Creola (who never appears directly in the novel) adds to Hartwell's bitterness through her rejection of him. However, Creola—or many of the other "bad belles," as Entzminger refers to them—are not necessarily the best examples of independent women in Evans's novels. Rather than attempting to stand on their own intellects and hard work, characters like Creola, along with several other background characters who shape the actions of Evans's heroes, are more conniving than independent; Evans frequently uses the trope of a couple from a lower social class conspiring to swindle a member of the upper class out of his or her fortune, and Creola's story is no different. This is not to say, however, that Evans offers no examples that further Entzminger's argument but that better examples than Creola exist: Inez de Garcia (*Inez*) dies and is buried in an unmarked grave; in *St. Elmo*, Edna Earl's rigorous writing schedule exacerbates an underlying heart condition, causing her doctor to insist that she take an extended vacation from writing; Salome Owen (*Vashti*) loses her singing voice and is unable to perform professionally; Nona Dane (*A Speckled Bird*) is a labor activist who dies from injuries sustained in a labor riot. Looking at such examples, David Russell echoes Entzminger's sentiment, arguing that Evans "could [not] sustain a female character outside the control of the patriarchy for long" (60). The most scathing critique of Evans's presentation of patriarchy belongs, perhaps, to Amy McCandless: "the message is unmistakably clear: women are to look to their husbands

for physical and emotional succor. Independent women are unhappy, unhealthy, and unnatural; woman's place is at her husband's feet" (11). Although McCandless uses uniquely harsh language when describing Evans's apparent endorsement of patriarchy, many others share her view, and much of the criticism of Evans's two most widely critiqued novels, *Beulah* and *St. Elmo*, focuses on Evans seeming to undermine the independence of her heroines by having them exchange their careers for marriage.

By the end of *Beulah*, protagonist Beulah Benton has, through her own diligence, achieved first a successful teaching career followed by a successful career as an author. Yet when her estranged guardian-turned-romantic interest Guy Hartwell returns from a long trip overseas, she quickly accepts his offer of marriage, despite knowing that doing so will end her authorial career. In his marriage proposal, Hartwell directly inquires of Beulah, "do you belong to the tyrant Ambition, or do you belong to that tyrant, Guy Hartwell" (411). His meaning is clear: either he or Beulah's career will be the controlling factor in her life, and she cannot choose both. Even if Hartwell's choice of the word "tyrant" could be attributed to the playful banter of courtship, the fact that Evans typically uses language associated with domination or even slavery as part of courtship gives insight into her view of marriage. When taken in conjunction with the fact that Evans was a proponent of slavery who believed that slaves received better treatment than free laborers, language that compared the life of a wife to that of a slave—however odious that connotation might appear from the twenty-first century—cannot automatically be viewed as a negative comparison on Evans's part. Disagreement over how to interpret this comparison impacts the overall interpretation of Evans's view of marriage: Does she use the comparison to disparage the patriarchal view of marriage, or does she use it to enforce that view and to indicate that a woman is better off under the authority of her husband?

Kelley facetiously views the ending of *Beulah* as the heroine “properly forsaking literary fame and taking her rightful place beside Guy as his wife” (30). Alder further argues that, when the novel is viewed as a whole, Beulah’s choice has no appeal whatsoever. On the one hand, Beulah can follow her ambition and “deal with loneliness, hard work, broken health and poverty,” or, the other, she can “give up her individuality altogether” (82). Ultimately, then, Alder asserts that Evans gives her heroine no positive outlook and subjects her to the institution of the patriarchy. Jones, looking at the narrative progression of *Beulah*, states that the ending “turns back the forward motion of the novel” and “is not a resolution, but a forced stop” that adopts “the conventional formula for the domestic novel” (57). Here Jones touches on a chief criticism of Evans’s plotting technique; from a narrative standpoint, the marriage at the end of *Beulah* seems rushed and forced, lacking build-up other than a years’-long estrangement. Similarly, *St. Elmo*, *At the Mercy of Tiberius*, and *A Speckled Bird* all feature relationships between nemeses-turned-lovers with little-to-no establishment of anything other than animosity between the two characters. However, it should be reiterated that, just as Evans, in *Inez*, treats the events of the Mexican-American War as a vehicle for a novel about Catholicism, the marriages of her characters are not the focal point of her novels but are simply part of her delivery method for her broader arguments.

Critics have applied the same arguments to *St. Elmo* that they have to *Beulah*. Like Beulah before her, protagonist Edna Earl wholly abandons her self-made literary career for marriage. Similar to McCandless’s acerbic comments regarding Beulah’s marriage to Hartwell, Kelly argues that Edna “does not know her mind” but, rather, “her place,” and that Evans “cannot forego placing [Edna] where she belongs: in the home” (106, 192). At the novel’s end, St. Elmo asks Edna to return to Georgia to “be a minister’s wife” (363). Edna accepts his proposal and shortly thereafter leaves New York to be

married by Reverend Hammond in Georgia. During the ceremony, Edna faints against St. Elmo, leading him to declare following her recovery:

To-day I snap the fetter of your literary bondage. There shall be no more books written! No more study, no more toil, no more anxiety, no more heart-aches! And that dear public you love so well, must even help itself, and whistle for a new pet. You belong solely to me now, and I shall take care of the life you have nearly destroyed in your inordinate ambition.
(365)

Once again, Evans uses the language of bondage and ownership and applies it to the matrimonial bond. Trubey describes this scene as Edna “becom[ing] the marital property of St. Elmo,” at which point “she ceases to exist as an independent mind and, indeed, as an autonomous person” (128). Trubey’s assessment of *St. Elmo’s* ending describes the consensus among scholars who view Evans as an anti-feminist author. In keeping with the idea that Evans deviated from her narrative track in order to force marriages between her female and male protagonists, Susan K. Harris refers to Edna’s acceptance of St. Elmo in marriage as “a lie, a divine decree by an arbitrary author” (73). David Russell calls this ending an “endorsement of the patriarchy” (48) as opposed to one otherwise dictated by the narrative, and Bradley Johnson uses the oft-repeated word when discussing Evans’s heroines’ decisions to marry: “capitulation” (25), in that Evans and her heroine give in to patriarchal ideas rather than rejecting them in any way.

This view of marriage in Evans’s novel as the metaphorical death of her heroines extends beyond looking at these marriages from a worldly perspective and makes up much of the critique of the Christian roots of the relationships in Evans’s novels. Many scholars recognize the emphasis on Christianity in Evans’s novels; however, rather than viewing Christianity as a virtue, many argue that it is just another form of patriarchy. Stating that “Evans accepts a Christian form of patriarchy, one that repudiates violent and sexual transgressions of moral law,” Johnson argues that Evans’s focus on Christianity was simply a way of modifying and improving upon the existing patriarchy rather than an

alternate view of gender roles and relations (25). By asserting that Evans saw patriarchy as an institution with flaws that can be remedied rather than as an inherently flawed institution, Johnson tacitly links Evans's view of gender roles to her view of slavery, which she also did not view as an inherently flawed institution. In a unique turn on Johnson's idea, Jones acknowledges that Evans undermines the patriarchal system, arguing that Evans establishes a new patriarchal system in Christianity with "God as the authoritative father figure" (79). Kelley and Alder, however, are much harsher in their critiques of Evans's integration of Christianity and gender roles. Writing about *Beulah*, Kelley sarcastically states that Beulah is "freed at last from her obsession with the mind [and is] left with her God and her husband" (103). Similar in her sarcasm, Alder writes that "Evans rotely reminded her readers that God appointed women to rule in the home by divine right," insinuating that Evans argued from an uncritical Christian perspective (79). Both Kelly and Alder, however, do not take into consideration the fact that Evans spent much of her early adulthood engaged in deep study of philosophy and theology as she questioned her own faith. Therefore, they neglect to give Evans the credit that the intellectual backing of her faith warrants; the Christian arguments made in Evans's novels are far from her rote recitation of societal values. The prevailing position that Evans used Christianity to reinforce patriarchal gender views has some merit on its surface; after all, Evans heroines *do* leave their careers to support their husbands, and Evans *does* use slavery-related language to describe marriage. However, as will be discussed in more depth in the next section, such a view fails to grasp the nuance of Evans's position.

This oversimplification of Evans's approach to Christianity is but one of the flaws in the predominant feminist critique of Evans's novels, both in those who argue that her novels are anti-feminist and those who argue that her novels promote feminism in a subversive way. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese asserts that the "preoccupation with religion" in

the work of Evans and other similar novelists “challenges their critics to come to terms with the significance of a faith for which they themselves have little sympathy (when they are not openly hostile) and to show willing respect for the women writers whose accomplishments they are supposedly celebrating” (“Religion” 17). Considering the timing of Fox-Genovese’s work and reference she makes to prominent Evans scholars, she likely had in mind statements such as those above by Kelley and Alder; given the sarcastic tone of Kelley and Alder concerning Evans’s religious views, Fox-Genovese’s statement regarding hostility toward Christianity seems accurate, at least in their case. The condescension with which some scholars approach the endings of Evans’s novels lends support to Fox-Genovese’s statement that “[f]eminist literary critics have generally embraced the prevailing hostility of contemporary critics to religion, dismissing formal religion as inherently repressive, especially of women” (16). Although, as her friend and colleague Peter Stearns points out, Fox-Genovese “could misleadingly paint feminists as far more uniform than they actually were,” her approach to scholars who disparaged the views put forth in Evans’s novels reveals her own “deep belief that feminism was not representing most women’s needs or interests” (xi, x). In other words, Fox-Genovese seems to be arguing that much of the criticism that Evans reinforced patriarchal ideas does not represent women who, like Evans, view following God rather than a career, society, or, for that matter, a husband, as the highest priority in their lives. By approaching Evans’s novels as they do, commentators such as Kelley, Alder, Jones, and McCandless disregard rather than analyze Evans’s primary message of how all individuals, men as well as women, should follow God rather than societal norms.

Writing about *Beulah*, Fox-Genovese argues that feminist critics who show “impatience with the conventional ending may miss Evans’s real message, which concerns Beulah’s recovery of her faith...of which her marriage is but a secondary

manifestation" ("Religion" 25). Rather than being a "blanket condemnation of female independence," Fox-Genovese argues that *Beulah* shows Evans's belief that "conversion of faith represented the highest human accomplishment" ("Introduction" xxxii, xxxiii). Directly addressing Jones's argument about *Beulah*, but in a statement that could apply to many scholars' disapproval of Evans's novels, Fox-Genovese writes that arguments opposing the heroines' marriages "depend upon the assumption that in consigning [the heroine] to the role of devoted wife, Evans is consigning her to defeat" even though "Evans is celebrating not [her] defeat but her triumph" ("Introduction" xxxiii). In short, much of the feminist critique of Evans seems to stem from a reaction to the oppressive patriarchal ideas that were, in fact, rotely accepted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, such an approach to Evans's novels and the views she advocates therein inappropriately categorizes Evans with those who surrendered to societal mores or who used Christianity to enforce societal ideas rather than basing their ideas for social structure upon Christianity regardless of whether Christianity reinforced the traditional view. This nuance is important for understanding Evans (and, for that matter, the response of many Christians to social issues). The former structure begins with an existing social idea and looks for Christian support for that idea; the latter develops social ideas based on Biblical support for various competing ideas. Rather than maintaining a traditional social order, Evans maintains a Biblical model that challenges many aspects of the then-existing social order while maintaining others. Evans's heroines, particularly Beulah and Edna, do indeed abnegate their careers for marriage, but Evans makes clear that they are motivated by pursuit of what they see as a higher calling than by submission to the values of a patriarchal society. As William Perry Fidler states, Evans "assumes that a wife's major duty in life is to see that her husband and children go to Heaven," acting on the widespread belief that women were morally

superior to men (60). Taking Evans's own views into consideration, a full analysis of her portrayal of gender roles should not be dismissive of her Christian faith (and that faith as presented in her novels) but, rather, should examine Evans's portrayal of gender roles through the lens of her faith. The difficulty arises because, to a third party, the actions that Evans's heroines take in submitting themselves to God are nearly identical to those that they would take in submitting themselves to the social order. The greatest difference between the two lies largely in the motivation for the action.

Augusta Jane Evans the Christian

On their own, these two conflicting views of Evans—one arguing for her promotion of feminism, the other arguing for her promotion of the patriarchy—are irreconcilable from a worldly perspective. Each side makes a solid case for its argument, but each also asserts that Evans can be one or the other, either feminist or patriarchal, but not both. However, Evans did not write from a worldly perspective—which would make this contradiction, at the very least, inconsistent on Evans's part—but, rather, used her Biblical worldview to guide her writing career and the content of her novels. When viewed from a Christian perspective, the apparent inconsistencies in Evans's portrayal of women harmonize to form the argument about Biblical womanhood that Evans made to her audience. Although her correspondence and novels touch on arguments directly related to the women's movement of the nineteenth century and to women's involvement in politics, Evans's primary concern was teaching Biblical virtue to her readers. As T. C. DeLeon writes in "Biographical Reminiscences," which accompanies the G. W. Dillingham edition of *Devota*, Evans "never wrote one word in all the many she penned that the purest woman might fear to have her pure young daughter read and misunderstand" (133). In so doing, Evans approached womanhood from neither a

feminist nor a patriarchal perspective but from a Biblical view, following along with Mrs. Williams' admonition to Beulah that she can only know her "duty" if she "pray[s] and read[s her] Bible" (314). Presenting this Biblical view of womanhood necessitated that Evans create strong, intelligent female characters who are capable of independence but who humble themselves in order to promote the importance of a Christian family to society and to lead the men in their lives to Christ so that those men might receive salvation and be of greater moral and public good to the society around them. This is not to suggest, of course, that Evans asserted that women could or should have only an indirect influence on society—each of her novels gives a solid example of how this is not the case—but that Evans believed that the highest calling a woman could have was to build herself up intellectually and spiritually so that she could guide her family. In so doing, Evans challenges both patriarchal ideas of women's education *and* feminist ideas of women's rights. Although one could argue that, by her insistence that a woman's highest calling is the spiritual and moral guidance of her family, Evans simply reinforces the patriarchal notion that a woman is best suited for a domestic role, the difference between the view Evans presents in her novels and the patriarchal view is one of nuance and motivation. Through challenging the patriarchal order, Evans rejects the concept of a woman subjecting herself for the sake of social tradition. Rather, she emphasizes the importance of anyone, man or woman, submitting their lives to God, whatever the result might be.

To be sure, Evans presents several examples of a woman acting as her family's spiritual mentor. As discussed above, *Beulah* ends not with Hartwell's assertion that he will be Beulah's "tyrant" but with Beulah intellectually and spiritually testing Hartwell's skepticism and Hartwell subsequently pondering her claims. In other words, at the close of the novel, rather than Hartwell exerting domination over Beulah, Beulah begins to lead

Hartwell away from his agnosticism. Similarly, in *Macaria*, whereas Mr. Aubrey killed himself in prison following a death sentence on a manslaughter charge, it is Mrs. Aubrey who acts as the moral guide for her son Russell, an influence that profoundly affects Russell's life. After being unceremoniously fired from his position amid accusations that he stole money from his employer, Jacob Watson, along with a watch that he had left for collateral on an advance on his paycheck, Russell obtains irrefutable evidence that his former employer's son was the actual culprit. Tempted to make as public a spectacle out of the employer's son as his former employer had made of him, Russell asserts that he will show "as little" mercy to Watson's son as Watson showed to him. However, knowledge that his mother "would be grieved at the spirit he evinced" causes Russell to have a change of heart, and the matter is handled privately aside from the restoration of Russell's reputation (48). This incident impresses Russell's new employer, and helps to initiate a career that eventually leads to Russell's election to Congress and his command of a Confederate company during the Battle of Manassas. In both of these cases, a male character who, in societal terms, is in a position of leadership submits himself to the spiritual guidance of a woman.

In her book *Sentimental Materialisms*, Lori Merish points out that "sentimental narratives engender feelings of power as well as submission endemic to liberal political culture; they thus instantiate a particular form of liberal political *subjection*, in which agency and subordination are intertwined" (3). Although Merish critiques such aspects of sentimental novels, Evans offers a different take on such subjection by depicting her heroines as agents of power through their subordination to God. Given the patriarchal hierarchy of nineteenth-century Southern society, one could easily view Evans's novels as showing her heroines' subordination to that patriarchal structure. However, a more nuanced look at Evans's novels and views reveals that her heroines did not subordinate

themselves to their husbands but to God. Elucidating a belief that was much more widespread in the nineteenth century than the twentieth (and especially the twenty-first) and which shaped the Christian ideal promoted by Evans and her contemporaries, Swiss theologian Hans Küng explains that “Jesus expects his disciples voluntarily to *renounce rights without compensation*” (590, emphasis in original). Essentially, Küng describes what Evans promotes in her fiction: the Christian concept of dying to oneself—abnegating personal ambition and self-interest in service to Christ in accordance with Christ’s command, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it” (Mark 8:35). In other words, those who wish to follow Christ “must deny themselves and take up their cross daily” (Luke 9:23 NIV). In *Macaria*, Evans, via the character of Harvey Young, emphasizes such self-abnegation and denounces “selfishness [as] the real root of all the evil in the world,” stating that “I, Me, Mine, is the God of the age” (85), thus directly adding—on top of the numerous indirect examples from her novels—credence to Faust’s claim that Evans stringently opposed “unchecked individualism” (*Mothers* 171). Given her opposition to unlimited liberty, Evans clearly advocated the words of Paul in his letter to the Philippians: “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (1:21), meaning that true, eternal life—the life that Evans emphasized over worldly gain—comes about by living only for Christ rather than for the self. Ultimately, Evans prioritized Scripture to worldly ideas, many of which she found morally and theologically lacking.

In this regard, Evans’s heroines are neither subjugated by the patriarchy nor do they capitulate to it. Rather, they humble themselves before God. This humility is not, as Jones suggests, a false humility designed to exercise “power over...masters through service (78), but is a full humbling of the self in service to Christ without regard to the earthly outcome. In fact, the only instance in which an Evans heroine attempts to

subordinate herself to her husband in order to gain a degree of power over him ends in disaster. In *A Speckled Bird*, Eglah Kent for years rejects the advances of would-be suitor Noel Herriott, but she learns that he has documents proving her father's involvement in a financial scandal and finally accepts Noel's marriage proposal in hopes that doing so will convince him to destroy the documents. After they are married and Eglah makes her request, Noel responds that he "learned how a man feels when an angel he worshipped from afar stooped from her heights, led him up, up to the open gate of heaven, and, just as he was entering, the same angelic hand dropped him into hell" (302). Although Eglah and Noel eventually reconcile by the end of the novel, their estrangement is so divisive that Noel undertakes a years-long scientific expedition into the Arctic just to be as far away from Eglah as he can. As with other relationships in Evans's novels, the two are reconciled only when Eglah adopts a spirit of humility towards her husband and allows him to see that her love for him is no longer based on any type of business exchange, as it had been previously.

It has been well-established that Evans created highly-intellectual female characters who were more than capable of surviving on their own without help from a husband. None of Evans's heroines *needs* to marry, and the greatest current criticism of Evans focuses on how these self-reliant, intelligent women forego successful careers for marriage. However, in order for Evans's characters to be examples of true humility they *must* have been able to thrive on their own. In other words, for her heroines to adopt a true spirit of humility, they must do so voluntarily rather than by force of circumstance. Biblically, this idea is most clearly presented at the Last Supper: Prior to eating the Passover meal with His apostles, Jesus removes His outer clothes and washes the apostles' feet, saying to them, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). It is in this spirit of humble service that Evans uses her

characters to emphasize humility as being paramount to all relationships and especially to that between a wife and her husband.

In accordance with this idea of true humility, Evans first establishes her heroine's independence, intelligence, perseverance, and strong will. It is through their rejection of their realized ambitions in favor of serving their husbands and future families in marriage that Evans's heroines display their humility. Of course, many of Evans's critics, especially in light of her use of terminology such as "fetters," "bondage," "master," and "tyrant," argue that the turn from career to marriage exemplifies Evans's unwillingness to "sustain a female character outside the control of the patriarchy for long" (Russell 60). However, this line of reasoning does not consider the emphasis that Evans places on the unwavering pride of her characters throughout much of each novel.

To give but one example, in *Beulah*, Beulah's most defining characteristic for much of the novel is her pride. As Ayres puts it, Beulah is "an intellectual, self-reliant woman who does not desire or expect a man to take care of her" (46). Despite the fact that Hartwell—whether as guardian, friend, or suitor—offers Beulah a much more comfortable life than she ever achieves on her own, Beulah repeatedly rejects his offer because it would prevent her from accomplishing her own intellectual goals. However, Beulah's pride does more than make her independent of what is expected of her from society; it also causes her to see herself as independent from God. Along these lines, Ayres points out that Evans's primary point in *Beulah* is that "[i]ndependence and pride separate us from God" (60). From her early life at the orphanage, Beulah puts her deepest faith in her own intellect and abilities, reluctant to receive any assistance and accepting aid from Hartwell only on the condition that she attend public school rather than the expensive private school in which he wants to place her. Through her own ambition and intellect, Beulah graduates as valedictorian of her class and becomes both a

successful teacher and a successful writer. Similarly, Hartwell, too, is driven by his own pride and intellect, hence his early warning to Beulah not to follow in his footsteps lest her intellectual endeavors lead to the abandonment of her faith. However, whereas Hartwell follows his pride and intellect only to a point of skepticism, Beulah's intellectual ambition pushes her onward, prohibiting her from remaining unquestioningly skeptical and forcing her to continue searching for clear answers, which she eventually finds with her humble acknowledgement of the limitations of human intellect. Because her own spiritual journey had led her further than Hartwell's has led him, Beulah's work following the abandonment of her writing career becomes "to help her husband regain his faith" by providing a strong intellectual impetus that he cannot pridefully dismiss (Riepma 57). Just as Hartwell's influence began Beulah on her path to skepticism, her influence begins to lead Hartwell on a path to faith, with the novel ending as Hartwell "ponder[s] her words" on the necessity of God (420). Despite her abandonment of her writing career—a career driven by pride—Beulah adopts a new vocation driven by humility: working to lead her husband to a point of humility that will allow him to be saved. In her introduction to *Beulah*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues that Evans "is not celebrating Beulah's subordination to Guy Hartwell: She is celebrating Beulah's subordination to God" and is "entrust[ing] Hartwell's salvation to Beulah" (xxxiv). As discussed previously, Beulah's final statements to Hartwell are not of capitulation but are a challenge to him to dismiss his pride and to question his skepticism as much as he had his faith.

Similarly, despite Harris's assertion to the contrary, *St. Elmo's* Edna Earl does not "subordinate her life—and mind—to St. Elmo's" but humbly accepts God rather than merely professing to follow His will (69). Early in their friendship, Reverend Hammond forces Edna to acknowledge her hypocrisy and implores her to "make [her] life an exposition of [her] faith; let profession and practice go hand in hand" (65). In order for the

“profession and practice” of her faith to “go hand in hand,” Edna had to follow her own assertions made in her writing: that “true woman ruled the realm of her own family” and that “[w]oman reigned by divine right at home” (337-38). As Christiane Farnan points out, if Edna “refuses to marry [her] career would not have been to morally influence the populace but for her own glory and fame” (157-58). Edna herself states that she “wish[es] to be popular...not as an end, but as a means to an end—usefulness to [her] fellow-creatures” (294). In other words, had she not married St. Elmo, then Edna would have rendered her writings hypocritical. Thus, Edna abnegates her own ambitions in order to support and serve St. Elmo in his ministry. As with Beulah trading guidance of her audience for guidance of her husband, Edna puts into practice the philosophy upon which she based her entire career: that the highest calling a woman can receive is godly service to her husband.

The complication in reading Evans arises because, on the surface, Beulah or Edna leaving her career for her husband as a submission to the mores of a patriarchal society or leaving her career to pursue the calling of leading her husband to Christ (or, in the case of Edna, supporting her husband’s ministry) differs little in terms of outward appearance. The nuance lies not in the action but in the motivation. Evans’s heroines, Beulah and Edna especially, reject society at every turn. Hartwell and Mrs. Murray make every effort to introduce their respective wards into Southern society and strive to convince each to follow along with conventional societal values; however, Evans’s heroines, whether out of pride (as with Beulah and Edna) or faith (such as with Irene Huntingdon or Regina Orme), repeatedly rebuke society and its values. Rather, they work to change those values to ones that they (and Evans) saw as more in line with Christianity. For a time, that work occurs through their careers, but Evans presents their marriages not as a renunciation of their work but as a shift in its focus. In other words,

where Beulah or Edna had previously worked to disseminate their ideas to their reading public, after they marry, each then works to use the skills honed through her career to support her respective husband.

Much of this distinction can be seen in looking at just when each heroine makes the decision to forego her career for marriage. Both Beulah and Edna have numerous opportunities to accept the proposals not only of their future husbands but of other would-be suitors as well. At almost any point throughout either *Beulah* or *St. Elmo*, Evans could have presented her heroine as reinforcing patriarchal ideas of marriage by having them do as expected and accept an earlier marriage proposal. However, Evans not only has her heroines defy societal expectations by selecting husbands other than those whom others anticipate, but her heroines also wait until the right moment to marry their husbands. As discussed above, Evans's heroines marry only when they have humbled themselves in preparation of guiding their husbands; however, they also marry only when their husbands-to-be have humbled themselves in preparation of being guided by their wives. In other words, it is not just Evans's female characters who subordinate themselves to God; Evans's main point is that all people, women and men alike, should subordinate their desires and ideas to God, based on a close reading of Scripture. Despite his claims as a tyrant, Hartwell humbles himself to recognize Beulah's intellectual prowess and the acclaim, both of which she achieved without his aid. St. Elmo, however, must go even further than Hartwell; rather than simply being ready to accept Edna's guidance, St. Elmo—who often insists to Edna that he needs her guidance to return to Christ—must do so without her assistance due to her refusal to marry him unless he has already returned to Christ for no reason other than for the sake of doing so rather than in order to endear himself to Edna. As Frances B. Cogan points out, St. Elmo's conversion "is entirely of his own doing" and not the result of any direct action taken by Edna (140).

Although St. Elmo credits Edna's indirect influence for his change, and some scholars agree with his assessment (Riepma 145-46), Edna completely disavows any responsibility for St. Elmo's conversion, stating, "[i]f he is indeed conscientiously striving to atone for his past life, he will be saved without my influence; and if his remorseful convictions of duty do not reform him, his affection for me would not accomplish it" (309). Although Edna downplays her role as the impetus of his restoration, St. Elmo's journey from profligacy to the pulpit occurs under the direct guidance of Reverend Hammond and his own changed heart, without Edna's assistance and with no real hope of reconciliation with her. After St. Elmo's transformation, however, Edna can no longer ignore his proposal except as a matter of hypocritical pride and agrees to marry him, not as a matter of surrendering to societal values but as a matter of acting upon the Biblical beliefs about which she wrote and which led to her success.

The choice presented to Beulah and Edna is not one of pursuing a career versus submitting to a patriarchal society; rather, they make the choice of submission to God over submission to their personal ambition. Although Beulah and Edna are the most often-used examples, Evans uses her novels to make clear that duty to society can come about only through service to God rather than to the somewhat arbitrary nature of a patriarchal society. In *Beulah*, the titular heroine tells Mrs. Williams, the retired matron of the orphanage where Beulah was raised that she strives to fulfill her duty apart from Christianity. Mrs. Williams retorts that if Beulah "cease[s] to pray and read [her] Bible" she will not know her duty (314). Gross argues that Evans saw "marriage and motherhood as the ultimate goals of womanhood" (46), but Riepma takes this idea one step further stating that Evans believed women "were happiest in the home and under the guidance of religious faith" (57). However, rather than basing her ideas on women's worldly happiness, Evans uses her novels to teach that women should align their duty with God's

design for their lives. For some characters, such as Beulah and Edna, this comes within marriage, but for others, such as Irene and Electra, duty to God prevents marriage. Ayres points out that “Evans understood that it was the Christian woman’s duty to alleviate suffering whenever and wherever she could” (253), and this motif appears throughout Evans’s novels, regardless of the marital status of her heroines.

Certainly, one could raise the question of the biblical foundations of Evans’s presentation of women, or whether, like those whom she seems to rebuke, Evans begins with her own position and then seeks Biblical support for that position. However, even though she does not specifically refer to the well-known women of the early Christian church, Evans creates heroines who follow the Biblical examples of Lydia and Priscilla. Acts 16 describes Lydia, a garment trader who becomes the first European convert to Christianity and founder of the church at Philippi. Although Lydia is recorded as leading her household in baptism (Acts 16:15), no mention is made as to whether she was married, which likely indicates that she was not. If Lydia was unmarried, at least at the time of her conversion as scholars believe, then she is a prime example of the great influence that a single woman could have in spreading Christianity. On the other end of the marriage spectrum are Priscilla and Aquila, who became the first Christian converts in Corinth and helped Paul establish the Corinthian church (Acts 18:1-3). Working together as a couple—one is never mentioned without the other—Priscilla and Aquila show the power and influence of a couple working together. These two Biblical examples indicate how a woman can serve God regardless of their marital status, and Evans provides similar examples in her novels. Through the marriages of her heroines such as Beulah and Edna or the singlehood of heroines such as Irene, Electra, and Salome, Evans emphasizes that duty to God trumps all other obligations, including the perceived obligation to a patriarchal society.

The mark of the Evans heroine is that she denies personal ambition in order to serve others, or else, like Irene Huntingdon, she makes serving others her personal ambition. Although the two most frequently discussed examples of forsaking personal desire for service are the marriages of Beulah and Edna, Evans makes clear that Christian duty and service to God contradict the idea of a woman marrying for the sake of marrying. This is not a case of Evans simply presenting her own social view that veers slightly from the traditional social order. Rather, Evans's emphasis on Christian duty is firmly rooted in Biblical teaching. To give but an example distinctly related to marriage, in the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul stresses that duty to God supersedes marriage and that only those unable to "exercise self-control" outside of marriage should enter into marriage (1 Cor. 7:8-9). However, as MacDonald points out, Paul acknowledges that "each one has his own gift from God" (7:7), and that his assertions in favor of remaining unmarried do not necessarily apply to all individuals (1766). As seen above, the church of Corinth was founded largely with the support of the married couple Priscilla and Aquila. Evans shows the Pauline perspective on marriage by having her heroines marry only out of deep love for their husbands and only when Godly direction leads them to do so. Even Evans's most discussed married women, Beulah and Edna, each rejected other suitors, and had no intention to marry until humbling themselves and agreeing to marry Hartwell and St. Elmo, respectively.

One could certainly argue that because Beulah and Edna each eventually marry Evans equates duty with marriage. To be sure, that is certainly the case with Beulah and Edna, but Evans makes clear that their situations do not necessarily apply to all women. In *Inez*, Florence's future husband Dudley Stewart chastises her for her foray into Catholicism despite knowing his views on Papism. Florence quickly asserts her loyalty to God over her loyalty to Dudley, retorting, "Had I felt it my duty, your love or indifference

would not have weighed an atom in my decision to act according to my sense of right and wrong” (248). In other words, her actions were dictated solely by her belief in God rather than her desire to marry. Similarly, in *Macaria* Irene and Electra each vow not to marry, Irene proclaiming several times that she “shall live and die Irene Huntingdon” (317). It is through their status as single women that Irene and Electra are able to provide the services that they do: caring for wounded soldiers, running an orphanage for war orphans, and founding a design school to teach war widows a trade.

Of course, in many of Evans's novels, particularly the two most frequently critiqued, her heroine's submission to God leads to marriage. Writing much later than Evans, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes that “through marriage men are brought into being for the glorification and the service of Jesus Christ and for the increase of His kingdom” (207). It is just such a marriage that Evans presents in her novels. Evans used her work to promote the ideal of glorification through marriage, “believ[ing] that it was woman's God-ordained prerogative to exert spiritual influence on the man in her life” (Ayres 257). Karen Day acknowledges that Evans presented in marriage “an opportunity to achieve personal fulfillment and to do God's work” (60). This work is not a matter of domestic servitude, however; Evans presents the ultimate reason for her heroines to marry is to advance the Kingdom of God through either the salvation of her husband (as in *Beulah*) or through supporting her husband in his ministerial work (as in *St. Elmo*). Thus, rather than reinforcing patriarchal views of marriage, Evans reinforces service to God, which may or may not include marriage.

Evans presents numerous scenarios in which her heroines' greatest duty is to lead their husbands to salvation. In this regard, Evans presents numerous male characters in need of salvation, even by worldly standards, let alone Biblical standards. Her novels offer no shortage of drunkards, rakes, tyrants, and misanthropes. Even many

of Evans's more genteel men are guided more by personal ambition and worldly values than by faith and piety. As Ayres points out, "throughout all of the novels, rarely is there an Evans' male who is capable of making the right moral decision, and so it is up to the woman to make things right" (19). Evans features a few male characters—usually pastors—who serve as moral guides to her heroines, but aside from these few exceptions, it is Evans's women who fit the description of what David Reynolds refers to as the "moral exemplar," that heroine of domestic fiction who sets an example of piety for both her male counterpart and for the readers (*Beneath* 339).

In addition to the well-discussed examples of Guy Hartwell (*Beulah*) and St. Elmo Murray (*St. Elmo*), Evans presents many other men who exhibit Christian character only through the influence of devout women. Russell Aubrey (*Macaria*), Peleg Peterson (*Infelice*), Bertie Brentano (*At the Mercy of Tiberius*), and Eugene Graham (*Beulah*) all follow a path either of selfish ambition or profligacy—if not both—that they recant thanks to the moral influence of women in their lives. For example, as discussed previously, Russell Aubrey's mother has a great moral influence on his early behavior, such as offering unwarranted forgiveness to his former employer after being wrongly accused of theft. However, following his mother's death, Russell's bitterness and ambition drive him to personal and political success. Thus, he forgets his mother's teaching until reminded of it by Irene, who presents to him a Bible before he leaves for the warfront, telling Russell that she "can give [him] up to [their] country and not murmur that [he] died defending her liberties—if [she] has the conviction that, in that noble death, [Russell] found the gate of heaven" (328). As Russell later lies dying from wounds incurred in battle, he credits Irene with restoring the faith of his youth: "But for you, I would have forgotten my mother's precepts and my mother's prayers. Through your influence I shall soon join her" (403). In Russell, Evans shows a man who, when left to his own devices, follows a path of worldly

ambition and embitterment but who extends mercy and selflessness when guided by the teaching and example of the women in his life.

Similarly, in *At the Mercy of Tiberius*, Beryl's mother calls upon her to protect her debauched brother and to provide the influence that will lead to his salvation. Through Beryl's mother, Evans explains the importance of a woman's pious influence upon a man:

His conscience of course, is not sensitive like yours—because you know, a boy's moral nature is totally different from a girl's; and like most of his sex, Bertie has no religious instincts bending him always in the right direction. Women generally have to supply conscientious scruples for men, and you can take care of your brother, if you will. You ...must stand between him and trouble. (12)

This passage does feature broad generalizations regarding the “religious instincts” of each gender and shows an example of Evans reflecting the ideas of the age rather than questioning them. Here Evans explicitly states a message that she conveys less overtly in many of her novels: that men were in grave need of women to provide the religious instruction and guidance that will lead them to salvation (an assumption that is implicit in many other novels). In the case of Bertie, as with many of Evans's men, the generalization rings true. Bertie is a vagabond driven by anger and robs his grandfather on the night of his death, the presumed murder for which Beryl stands trial. Following her exoneration, Beryl tracks Bertie to Canada, where he resides with an order of monks and is dying from an undisclosed illness. Bertie confesses to the theft but confirms that General Darrington was killed by lightning, which scarred and blinded Bertie. He then credits Beryl's sacrifice of standing trial for a crime that she believed that he had committed for the change in his life that led him to a religious order. His sanctification is made obvious in his supernatural death, wherein “Death, God's most tender angel, laid her divine lips upon the scars of sin, that vanished at her touch,” leaving Beryl to gaze upon her brother's body, unscarred both internally and externally (536). Through Bertie's repentance and salvation, Evans indicates that the piety of a Christian woman can have a

far-reaching impact on her loved ones. In this case, Beryl and Bertie had not seen each other in many years, but his knowledge of her sacrifice for his sake causes Bertie to change his life.

In addition to familial influence, Evans shows how a Christ-like love can influence another, even despite a tenuous personal connection. In *Infelice*, Regina Orme receives a religious upbringing first at a convent and later as the ward of Reverend Hargrove while her mother focuses on her ambitious desire for revenge against Regina's father, Cuthbert Laurance. Unlike Minnie, whose primary goal is financial reparations for Cuthbert having abandoned her and her then-infant daughter, Regina simply desires to know the truth of her parentage. When Regina encounters Peleg Peterson, whose affections Minnie rejected in favor of Cuthbert's and who conspired with General Laurance to convince others that he was secretly Minnie's husband and father to Regina so that the wealthy Cuthbert would leave the working class Minnie, Peleg continues the charade and tries to convince Regina that he is her father in order to extort money from her. Despite the repulsion that she feels toward him, Regina helps Peleg based only on the belief that he is her father, a kindness that ultimately influences Peleg to formally recant his story thus allowing Minnie and Regina a legal claim on the Laurence name and fortune. When he reveals the truth to Minnie, Peleg directly credits Regina's compassion for his confession. This compassion, as presented by Evans and verified by Peleg in his confession, comes not from her mother but from her religious upbringing, indicating the positive effect that a woman of God can have and the change that her influence and charity can create.

Conversely, in *Beulah* Evans shows the horrific effects that an irreligious woman can have on her husband. Years after his adoption into the wealthy Graham family, Beulah's childhood friend Eugene marries a socialite, Antoinette, who devotes her life to parties rather than to her family. Seeing his wife prefer social company, Eugene does the

same and becomes a drunkard until he is involved in a near-fatal drunken carriage accident. Following his recovery from both the accident and his alcoholism, Eugene blames his “selfish” wife for his troubles, an assertion endorsed by Evans (354). Crediting Beulah with restoring his health and faith, Eugene says of his wife, “I followed her example, and went back to the reckless companions, who continually beset my path” (353). Through the character of Antoinette and the effect that her decadent lifestyle has on Eugene, Evans makes the argument that a woman will influence the men closest to her regardless of whether that influence is positive or negative. In the final line of Beulah, Evans offers a blessing: “May God aid the wife in her holy work of love” (420). While that is the future that Evans implies for Beulah and Hartwell, she presents the opposite in the marriage of Eugene and Antoinette. The author of Proverbs 31 writes that a virtuous woman “watches over the ways of her household” (31:27, NKJV). In Antoinette, Evans shows a disastrous example of violating this tenet; however, in Beulah, Edna, Amy Aubrey, and Beryl Brentano, Evans presents virtuous women who bring their loved ones to God through their virtue and who, according to Evans, “prove [themselves] worthy [of] the noble mission for which [they] were created” (Beulah 373).

Although Evans presents many male characters who make positive changes based on the Christian influence of women, this is not to say that Evans depicts only men in need of salvation. Her characters Reginald Lindsay of *Beulah*, Harvey Young of *Macaria*, Reverend Hammond of *St. Elmo*, Ulpian Grey of *Vashti*, and Peyton Hargrove and Douglass Lindsay of *Infelice* each provide the instruction and guidance that ultimately leads each of her heroines to the position wherein they, in turn, can lead her fallen heroes to a redemptive state. Sara Frear details Evans’s correspondence with Walter Copton Harriss, “a young Methodist minister...who played an important role in her eventual return” to Christianity following her period of skepticism that followed her

authorship of *Inez* ('Letters' 111). Frear suggests that Harriss served as a model for Reginald Lindsay (123), but it seems that Evans patterned each of her male pastors and mentors after Harriss. Harriss guided Evans through her own spiritual difficulties and assisted her with her questions, just as each mentor does for his respective heroine. Like Harriss with Evans, Reginald Lindsay asks Beulah the intellectual questions that bring her back to her faith. Harvey Young instills in Irene the importance of charity, which she carries with her throughout her life of service to others. Allan Hammond shows Edna the importance of humbling herself and forgiving St. Elmo for his part in a duel. Ulpian Grey provides a model for virtue that Salome Owen strives to emulate, and Peyton Hargrove and Douglass Lindsay provide Regina with early role models that prepare her to face the challenges that come with discovering her parentage. Just as Harriss provided Evans with the religious instruction that she passed on to her readers, each of Evans's mentors gives her heroines the instruction that is in turn passed on to Evans's infidels. Thus, Evans shows the importance of inter-gender interactions that are designed to further Christian precepts rather than those that occur for more material gains, which are readily spurned by all of Evans's heroines.

Augusta Jane Evans and the Masculine Role

Given that Evans was a female author who wrote for a female audience and primarily featured female lead characters, it stands to reason that the focus of her novels—and criticism of her novels—would be on her beliefs regarding women's roles in society and within their families. However, Evans also offers a sharp critique of masculine roles, and her depiction of profligate men serves as an indictment of commonly accepted masculine values and actions, none more so than the act of dueling, which Evans presents as an outmoded institution of patriarchal society, as a blight on civil society, and

as a repudiation of Christian values. As Johnson points out, Evans uses duels as the pinnacle of societal disruption, acts that destroy “legal, religious, and familial codes” that men are expected, but fail, to uphold (15). In *Macaria*, Irene—in an example of a woman standing up not only to the patriarchal mindset but literally to her patriarch—chastises her father for his treatment of the Aubrey family and his part in Mr. Aubrey’s death sentence, pointing out the hypocrisy of dueling:

The world has strange criteria to determine its verdicts. [Russell Aubrey’s] father was sentenced to be hung for committing murder; and my uncle...who deliberately shot a man dead in a duel, was received in social circles as cordially as if his hands were not blood-stained. There was more of palliation in the first case (one of man-slaughter), for it was the hasty, accidental work of a moment of passion; in the last a cool, premeditated taking of human life. But the sensitive, fastidious world called one brutal and disgraceful, and the other ‘honorable satisfaction,’ in which gentlemen could indulge with impunity by crossing state lines. (225)

In other words, had Russell’s father killed a man in a duel instead of in a fist-fight, then his actions would have been socially acceptable rather than leading to a manslaughter conviction and death sentence. By presenting this double standard, Evans provides a harsh critique of the societal paradigm that judged killing another as either honorable or conviction-worthy based solely upon the degree of formality of the conditions in which the killing occurred. Thus, Evans presents the masculine concept of revenge through dueling as an atrocity that should not be lauded but abhorred as any other murder.

In *St. Elmo*, her follow-up to *Macaria*, Evans’s commentary on dueling goes far beyond the hypocrisy of its acceptability compared to manslaughter. The novel begins with young heroine Edna Earl witnessing a duel, having the slain man’s corpse laid on her bed, and seeing his widow die of grief, which orphans their two children. Seeing the young girl’s outrage, the seconds in the duel assure her that what she witnessed was not murder but “the only method of honorable satisfaction open to gentlemen” (8). For the remainder of the novel, Edna remains steadfast in her hatred of dueling, and upon

discovering that St. Elmo's cousin is the man whom she saw kill another in a duel Edna makes no secret her belief that the man "is a murderer, and ought to be hung" (135). Edna goes on to argue that "even the infinite mercy of Almighty God could scarcely accord forgiveness" (136). Edna adheres to this belief even after discovering that St. Elmo also once killed a man in a duel, reiterating that "every man who kills another in a duel deserves the curse of Cain, and should be shunned as a murderer" (307). Chastised for her unforgiving attitude by both Mrs. Murray and Reverend Hammond, Edna eventually forgives St. Elmo for killing a man in a duel only after humbly realizing that continuing to refuse to do so following his repentance sets herself over God. Evans uses Edna's conflicted response to dueling to show not only the abhorrent nature of dueling and its social acceptability but also how those involved in the practice can receive forgiveness if they repent of their actions or endorsement of the practice. Evans's emphasis on forgiveness in *St. Elmo*, however, should not be seen as a means of absolving the practice of dueling, and through her critique of dueling Evans indicts the societally-approved masculine "satisfaction" and argues that the practice adversely affects society as a whole. Concerning the various claims that Evans used her novels to reinforce patriarchal values, her stark condemnation of dueling serves as evidence to the contrary. In both *Macaria* and *St. Elmo*, several characters argue with the heroines in favor of dueling as an acceptable part of honorable society. However, Evans and her heroines are firm in their rebuke of the practice, condemning it as formalized murder and simultaneously condemning the society that accepts it.

Dueling, of course, was a waning practice by the time Evans wrote her novels, and her arguments against it were not exactly revolutionary. Although Evans did challenge those who held to the traditional view on the subject, her view did not differ from much of mainstream society. However, Evans's opinion of dueling shows that she

did not blindly fall in line with traditional Southern patriarchal values for the sake of maintaining the *status quo* and would challenge ideas and institutions that she saw as misguided. Throughout her body of work, Evans looks critically at the issues that she raises, and, as with other issues that she presented in her novels, Evans presents a rational argument against the practice of dueling and responds accordingly to the arguments made by those who continued to favor the practice despite increasing opposition. By making such a strong argument against dueling, Evans denounces an institution that represented Southern masculinity in the nineteenth century, thereby showing that she does not simply bow to the societal idea of male superiority. Although Evans's novels reinforce the idea of women submitting to their husbands, she favors this concept as an act of submitting to God, denying that women should submit to men if doing so would go against God's commands. Evans presents dueling as unequivocally violating God's commands, and, as such, her heroines refuse to submit to this masculine concept.

Augusta Jane Evans and the Women's Rights Movement

Evans takes a similar approach to that she uses in her discussions of dueling when she addresses an issue that, at the time, was moving in the opposite direction of dueling in terms of popular opinion: a woman's right to vote. In offering her critique of women's involvement in politics, Evans presents political activity as a masculine activity that, although not one that necessarily harmed society, was beneath the character of a genteel woman. In discussing the role of women in the political climate of the Civil War-era South, Irene tells Electra—and, by extension, Evans tells her reader—that

Southern women have no desire to usurp legislative reins; their appropriate work consists in molding the manners and morals of the nation; in checking the wild excesses of fashionable life, and the dangerous spirit of extravagance; of reckless expenditure in dress,

furniture, and equipage, which threatened ruinous results before the declaration of hostilities... Women who so far forget their duties to their homes and husbands, and the respect due to public opinion, as to habitually seek for happiness in the mad whirl of so-called fashionable life, ignoring household obligations, should be driven from well-bred, refined circles, to hide their degradation at the firesides they have disgraced. (*Macaria* 368)

Much of Evans's reasoning for the assertion that "Southern women have no desire to usurp legislative reins" comes from the uncivil discord that she associated with politics and elections. In describing the election day in the legislative race between Russell Aubrey and Leonard Huntingdon, Evans writes, "Not a lady showed her face upon the street; drinking, wrangling, fighting was the order of the day. Windows were smashed, buggies overturned, and the police were exercised to the utmost" (229). In other words, Evans did not see women as beneath politics but, rather, because she viewed women as being morally superior to men, saw politics as beneath women because of the behavior it brought forth. As discussed previously, Evans uses her novels to assert her belief that the most powerful influence that a woman could have on society was not through direct representation but through indirect influence by following the Biblical principle that a woman should "looketh well to the ways of her household" (Prov. 31:27). This is not to say, however, that Evans argues that a woman should have no public influence whatsoever. In keeping with the second half of the above verse from Proverbs, Evans also presents the kind of heroine who "eateth not the bread of idleness"; Evans's heroines are far from idle and are engaged in the public sphere as well as in the home. Evans's belief that women should avoid the realm of politics is not a capitulation to a society that claims that women should have no such influence but is, rather, a sincere belief that a woman's influence on the values of society was a more valuable contribution than what could be offered in the political sphere.

Evans's reasons for women's avoidance of politics seem at best anachronistic, and her assertion that a woman could not be the moral leader of her family while also having a public influence is manifestly fallacious and even potentially hypocritical given that Evans continued to write following her marriage, albeit much more infrequently.⁵ However, Evans still shows a belief that women had a place in shaping the national conscience. In addition to Irene's statement to Electra that women should remain out of the political realm, Evans argues through both Electra and Irene that "women must exercise an important influence in determining our national destiny" and that "[t]he conscientious, devoted, and patriotic Christian women of a nation are the safeguards of its liberties and purity" (363, 369). Ultimately, Evans's belief that women should not take part in the legislative process does not stem from an anti-woman mindset but an anti-political one, viewing the political process as being beneath women. Through her assertion of the ways in which she believed women should influence society, Evans shows an emphasis on the Christian ideals of a woman as stated in Proverbs 31, which describes women as the moral leaders of their households, and Titus 2:3, which states that women should "be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things" to younger women.

By presenting ideas on the influence of women that seem contradictory until examined from their Biblical foundation, Evans marks her position in the broader theological and social debate regarding whether women can fulfill these Biblical tenets and be involved in the political sphere. Interestingly, aside from their different conclusions regarding women's role in politics, Evans and women's rights leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton had much common ground regarding a woman's relationship to God and to man.

⁵ At the peak of her career, from 1859-1869, Evans published four novels. It took thirty-eight more years for Evans to equal this output.

Fox-Genovese reports that, like Evans, Stanton wrote to Susan B. Anthony that a woman should “live first for God” and “not make imperfect man an object of reverence and awe” (qtd. in “Contested” 174). Stanton believed that a woman’s “dependence must be upon God, her true happiness must derive from accomplishment of her duty” (Fox-Genovese, “Contested” 174-75). The greatest difference between the viewpoint exhibited by Evans and that of Stanton is their interpretation of just what that duty should be. As discussed previously, the mid-nineteenth century featured much contention regarding “the meaning, use, and interpretation of Scripture” (Noll 368). Given that the broad church-going population of the time emphasized and accepted a democratic, *sola scriptura* reading of Scripture, many believers arrived at different conclusions in their interpretations of the Bible (Miller 42-43). Especially concerning social issues such as women’s rights and slavery, advocates of contrasting positions sincerely believed that the Bible supported their particular position over the other. On the one hand, Evans, although she emphasized God over man and over society, favored a more conservative, literal hermeneutic. Conversely, Stanton favored a hermeneutic that emphasized “individual conscience” and personal revelation (Fox-Genovese, “Contested” 175).

By following a literal hermeneutic rather than one based on individual conscience, Evans made arguments that, on the surface, seemed to favor patriarchal views while also offering the conflicting position in favor of women’s education and intellectual prowess. However, a deeper look at her presentation of female and male characters and their interactions shows a nuance that reveals a Biblical interpretation that favors the sovereignty of God over the autonomy of the individual; Evans supports the following of Scripture as opposed to the following of the self. Thus, Evans simultaneously condemned *both* traditional patriarchal society *and* the women’s movement, arguing that her readers, whether married or unmarried, should follow God rather than following any

societal idea developed to indulge individual power and autonomy for either men or women. In *St. Elmo*, Evans firmly establishes this position, once again using Edna as her mouthpiece: "...a woman has an unquestionable right to improve her mind, *ad infinitum*, provided she does not barter womanly delicacy and refinement for mere knowledge; and in her anxiety to parade what she has gleaned, forget the decorum and modesty, without which she is monstrous and repulsive" (254). Evans/Edna argues that having a strong intellect does not make a woman unwomanly but that "intelligent, refined, modest Christian women of the United States were the real custodians of national purity" (300). Jane Tompkins argues that such custodianship and its emphasis in domestic fiction "ultimately produces a feminist theology in which the godhead is refashioned into an image of maternal authority" (163). Similarly, Evans elevates the virtue of her heroines over that of her heroes (as seen in the above passage from *St. Elmo*), and creates an order of maternal authority, most explicitly in *St. Elmo*, in which Edna encourages Mrs. Murray to take up the mantle of leading worship among her household. However, the fact that she has both male and female mentors to her chief protagonists indicates that Evans saw both genders as responsible for maintaining and promoting Christianity. Even though Evans does seem to put the bulk of this responsibility on women, she does not delve into the propagation of a matriarchal society to the extent that Tompkins suggests is prevalent in domestic fiction. Rather, Evans emphasizes that women should exemplify the virtues of Proverbs 31 and Titus 2:3, as noted above, without a strict adherence to societal values that elevate the will of men *or women* over the will of God.

Ultimately, Evans does not seem to desire a change in women's roles but a shift in the perception of women. By showing the strength and intellect of women, Evans shows how they can better fulfill their roles rather than destroy them. Although this causes much consternation among critics who grapple with Evans's seemingly

contradictory views, when viewed from a perspective that emphasizes Christian character and the sovereignty of God over individual autonomy, as Evans does in her novels, the conflicting elements of Evans's presentation of gender roles, and of women in particular, become less muddled. Although this reconciliation of Evans's views likely would prevent Evans from, in Diane Roberts' words, being "recovered for feminism" (xvi), it enhances her work as part of a discussion of Christianity in literature.

Chapter 4

“The Character of the Master”: Slavery in the Work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Caroline Lee Hentz, and Augusta Jane Evans

One of the least-discussed aspects of Augusta Jane Evans’s fiction has been its depictions of slavery, an omission that seems unusual considering her proslavery stance, which itself has been widely discussed. Much of the omission, however, comes about because Evans did not give slavery a predominant role in her novels. In fact, in many of Evans’s novels, slavery fades so far into the background that the novels themselves give little to no indication that servants are slaves; in many cases, only the reader aware of Evans’s views on slavery would be aware of the presence of slaves in her novels. In her book *The Belle Gone Bad*, Betina Entzminger suggests that Evans glossed over the presence of slaves in her novels because “the institution...would somehow sully the domestic scenes” or “detract from an already complex story” (1, 67). Although a lengthy digression into slavery could negatively impact the pace of any of Evans’s narratives, such an impact did not prevent Evans from including long digressions on other issues such as Catholicism, philosophy, or women’s education. However, given the prevalence of novels designed by their authors to be either pro-slavery or abolitionist propaganda, both of Entzminger’s theories stand to reason, especially considering that Evans “directed southern writers to abandon ‘recrimination’ against the North and concentrate on their own art” (Shields 499), thus using their novels for reasons other than advancing the slavery debate or to spread their views on Reconstruction. Evans consciously avoided what Sara S. Frear refers to as “the most overt form of literary proslavery propaganda” by writing about areas of slaveholders’ lives that weren’t directly related to slavery (*Fine View* 237). Much of this avoidance of a full-fledged discussion of slavery stemmed from Evans seeing her novels as having a broader, more spiritual purpose.

Thus, Evans wanted to reach as broad and wide an audience as possible and, additionally, was a shrewd marketer and negotiator, so much so that she “cannily maneuvered and negotiated with Northern and Southern publishers” during the Civil War in order to ensure that her novels sold on either side of the battle lines (Homestead 669). With this in mind, Evans, given the strong arguments she made in her novels would not seek to compromise her position on slavery and, therefore, likely realized that promoting a solid proslavery view in her fiction could hamper the sales of her books, reduce the reach of her message, and hurt her financially.

Additionally, a plausible and simple, yet somewhat troubling, explanation for Evans to exclude broad discussions of slavery from her novels is that it might never have occurred to her to have included them. For Evans, like many other slaveholders prior to abolition, slavery was a regular part of life about which people did not give a great deal of thought one way or another. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese point out that, in the antebellum South “slaveholders, big and small, generally concentrated their thoughts on religion or politics or literature or mundane matters without fretting over the implications for their lives as slaveholders, and certainly without thinking that they had to defend their ownership of slaves at every turn” (1). In other words, slaveholders were not preoccupied with slavery; overseeing, caring for, and dealing with slaves were part of their daily routine, and slaveholders saw nothing out of the ordinary with having slaves. Even in her own communication, aside from complaints made about abolitionists, Evans’s most frequent comments related to slavery were based on her belief that women relied too much on their slaves and became mentally and physically lazy (Fidler 116). Reviewing the aforementioned topics that Evans discusses at length, Evans experienced the debate between Catholicism and Protestantism when her family lived in San Antonio; she personally underwent the spiritual and philosophical journey she depicts in *Beulah*;

and, as a well-read and well-educated woman, she had a vested self-interest in promoting women's education. In each case, Evans had first-hand experience with challenges to her existing ideas. Concerning slavery, however, prior to Emancipation, Evans had little direct experience with those who argued against the institution; Evans's family owned slaves and lived in slave-owning communities where slave ownership was taken for granted. Therefore, it is likely that Evans did not concern herself with slavery enough to feel that it warranted discussion in her fiction beyond a few brief acknowledgements that many opposed slavery or the ubiquitous presence of servants when needed by the main characters.

The fact that Evans wrote so little about slavery, of course, raises the question of why slavery in her novels should warrant the same level of discussion as issues pertaining to faith, gender roles, or class divisions, each of which occupied prominent space throughout Evans's body of work. There are three major reasons why such a discussion is necessary for the study of Evans. First and foremost is the fact that such a discussion has not yet taken place. Beyond biographical comments about her pro-slavery attitudes, brief mentions such as the aforementioned comment by Entzminger, or analogies between slavery and Evans's treatment of gender roles, very little attention has been paid to the pro-slavery element of Evans's novels. Thus far, a discussion of how Evans presented her views of slavery or how these views fit in with her position on other issues has been non-existent.

Secondly, it seems that Evans's pro-slavery stance has hampered the amount of attention she has received, with the bulk of the scholarship on Evans occurring in the early 1990s. In comparison to her abolitionist peers, Evans was every bit as popular in her time as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan Warner, Maria Cummins, or E.D.E.N. Southworth. However, unlike the others, Evans is on the proverbial "wrong side of

history” regarding the slavery debate. For example, comparing publication history, there have been multiple Norton Critical Editions of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the series regularly keeps an edition of the novel in circulation. Conversely, the most recent editions of Evans’s novels were published almost twenty-five years ago. Certainly, one could argue that Warner, Cummins, or Southworth have also not maintained the widespread attention that Stowe has received; however, each of those novelists frequently appears in discussions of popular novelists of the mid-nineteenth century whereas Evans is often omitted despite her popularity at the time.

Finally, slavery is an important part in a study of Evans simply because she did not propagandize the issue as so many of her contemporaries did. Because Evans was not as interested in making a direct pro-slavery argument, her depiction of the institution is as it appears to her characters and lacks the filter that an overt argument might have. Therefore, Evans offers a unique perspective on slavery: She presents it without, by and large, arguing about it; she shows it as part of her characters’ lives rather than trying to sway her readers to her position. Even though Evans’s characters, naturally, are willing participants in the institution of slavery, her treatment of slavery as a mundane part of life offers insight that is unavailable to those novelists—on either side of the debate—who used their fiction as a means of framing their argument about slavery; rather, Evans shows what many slaveholders thought about slavery when not directly confronted with abolitionist arguments. With a debate full of propaganda and spin as well as nuanced reasoning, statesmen, pastors, and writers on each side of the issue offered arguments that so starkly contrasted with the opposition, especially in relation to the condition of slaves, that an outsider at the time could have difficulty discerning truth from misperception or misdirection. For example, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe presents a lengthy discourse on the evils of slavery, using her text to present

examples that refute many of the arguments made by proslavery advocates. In her novel, Stowe shows the fallacies of common proslavery arguments and makes her case as to why slavery violates God's law. On the other side of the debate, Southern proslavery novelist Caroline Lee Hentz, ironically once an associate of Stowe's, penned her novel *The Planter's Northern Bride* as a direct rebuttal to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like her counterpart, Hentz showed perceived errors in her opponents' argument and offered her own perspective on the conditions of slaves and free laborers. Also, like Stowe, Hentz presented her case for how her side of the slavery argument aligned with Christian theology. With each author and her respective side claiming the will of God for their cause, an impasse is reached: the great disparity in their positions meant that, despite both finding Biblical support for their positions, both sides could not simultaneously be correct in their view that theirs was the Biblically-correct position. As Noll points out, both those who argued that the Bible "sanctioned the kind of slavery then prevailing in the Southern states" and that "the Bible forbade slavery" believed that their position was "self-evident" when interpreting Scripture (17). However, Noll goes on to note that, since slavery had been outlawed in England decades earlier, this debate occurred only among Protestants in the United States: "[N]o body of Protestants elsewhere in the English-speaking world agreed that the Bible sanctioned slavery" (17). In other words, the theological component of the slavery debate was unique to the United States, indicating that much of the debate could have been rooted less in developing an institution based on Scripture than in finding ways to Biblically support an already existing practice.

Stowe and Hentz each wrote their slavery novels to promote their opposing arguments and made said agendas the forefront of the novels while using the will of God as a supporting argument for their respective positions. However, Noll argues that Stowe, because of her family background in the Congregationalist ministry, "was as well situated

as any person in her age to take the measure of America's mainstream Reformed theology," a position that she showed more in later novels but only to an extent in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (325). Stowe, then, likely derived the argument made in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from her Christian beliefs. Similarly, Hentz primarily echoed the traditional Southern position, giving some attention to the theological basis of that position. However, despite their attention to Scriptural support for their positions, one could argue that Stowe and Hentz, like many of their contemporaries, based their arguments about slavery on regional norms as much as they did Scriptural interpretation. Of course, to assert that Augusta Jane Evans would be free from regional bias whereas her contemporaries were not would be to fallaciously elevate her above some of the most noted American figures of the time. However, Evans's novels show a history of addressing various issues from a position that was both Biblical and rationalist, applying the same worldview to all aspects of her novels. Because Evans eschewed using her novels to promote her views on slavery at length, she largely avoids the propagandizing seen in Stowe or Hentz, with her few references to slavery fitting in with her views on other topics. Thus, Evans offers a revealing look at slavery for the simple reason that her novels were not preoccupied with arguing its defense. This is not to say that Evans avoided political issues of the time—her third novel *Macaria* is unapologetically Confederate propaganda, and all of her novels address to an extent sociopolitical issues of the day. However, rather than having her views on these issues drive her novels—with the possible exception of the pro-Confederacy element of *Macaria*—Evans kept her focus on promoting her Christian beliefs, which informed her sociopolitical views.

Thus, by keeping her focus on Christianity while largely avoiding a direct argument about slavery, Augusta Jane Evans provides a subtler look at the institution and reveals more about the practice of slavery than she would have had she used her

novels to promote her position in the same manner as Stowe or Hentz. In order to examine fully Evans's treatment of slavery—or lack thereof—and how her Christian view leads to revelations made about the institution, this chapter will first look at the slavery debate as it existed in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, examining the core arguments of both abolitionists and proslavery advocates and how each party based its arguments on Scripture. The second section will look at how other novelists besides Evans framed the slavery debate, looking first at *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, followed by *The Planter's Northern Bride*. The third section will detail Evans's depictions of slavery and the implicit interactions with slaves, focusing not just on her antebellum and Civil War novels, but also looking at those written during Reconstruction or beyond.

The Slavery Debate

Looking back on the slavery debate, it is far too tempting and far too easy to dismiss slaveholders and proslavery advocates of the nineteenth century as Amy Cummins does when she refers to Augusta Jane Evans and fellow proslavery writer Caroline Lee Hentz as “racist and anti-abolition writers who denied the humanity of African Americans” (813). Suzanne Bost goes even further than Cummins and dismisses entirely Evans's work by stating that the novelist “is known for her racist romances of southern femininity” (503), a description that can lead a reader to infer that Evans's novels are littered with the worst kind of slaveholders or racial slurs as depicted by either Harriet Beecher Stowe or Mark Twain. In reality, a reader could read many of Evans's novels that feature slaves without realizing that slavery was even part of the novel, and many of her novels take place after Emancipation and give no discussion to slavery. To be sure, the race-based slavery of early America was racist by the very definition of the term, and even some abolitionists like Harriet Beecher Stowe were accused of having

racist views despite their opposition to slavery. However, it is important to note that such racism was not the malicious racism as people think of it today, but was much deeper and more structural in nature. Many slaveholders sincerely—and, of course, erroneously—believed that their slaves were intellectually and emotionally incapable of living outside the bonds of slavery. Certainly, one could argue that such deep-seated racism is more insidious than isolated incidents of malice, but it is crucial to understand that racism as it existed in the nineteenth century was much more institutionalized and ran far deeper than simply exhibiting overt animosity or malice. For example, in comparing Stowe's characters of Shelby and Haley, both the slaveholder Shelby and the slave trader Haley were racist in that they saw slaves as inferior despite Shelby being refined and compassionate whereas Haley is vulgar and malicious and would stand out to many modern readers as the more racist of the two.

However, to state that slavery existed only because of racism and ignorance underestimates the rational intellects of slaveholders. Drew Gilpin Faust posits that much of this dismissal stems from a desire of present-day Americans to “define [slaveholders] as very unlike ourselves” even though “their processes of rationalization and self-justification were not so very different from our own or from those of any civilization” (*Stories* 87). In other words, intelligent people, regardless of faith, creed, or worldview, will tend to rationalize actions and lifestyles from which they benefit. Because slavery was not a social taboo at the time, slaveholders easily rationalized owning slaves. More important than their justifications, however, is that many slaveholders were sincere in their reasons for advocating slavery and believed that they were acting in the greater good for society and their slaves. For example, in her biography of former South Carolina statesman James Henry Hammond, Faust quotes Hammond as sincerely believing that his slaves “love and *appreciate*” him (qtd. in *Hammond* 104, emphasis in original).

Additionally, Mary Boykin Chesnut, who was the wife of a slaveholder but who opposed slavery on the grounds that it led to sexual immorality, was aghast at slaves having murdered her cousin because she “had never injured any of” her slaves and couldn’t fathom why they would violently revolt (qtd. in DeCredico 71). These two examples are indicative of the widespread, albeit misguided, belief that slaves, as long as they weren’t physically abused, had no reason to feel toward their owners anything other than fondness.

Although people today can retroactively look at the delusion that slaves loved and appreciated their masters as an example of the ignorance of slaveholders, to do so ignores the fact that the slaveholding class was very intelligent and well-educated (Genovese, *Dilemma* 1). As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese point out in their book *Mind of the Master Class*, because “slaves produced the crops that afforded the primary source of wealth, the more slaves a family owned the more highly educated its members were likely to be” (1). With a slaveholding class that included statesmen, educators, and pastors, many intelligent, highly-educated, and well-respected men and women, including those who professed Christianity, championed slavery. This point naturally leads to a broader question of *how* such intelligent and well-educated people could have thought as they did. In looking at this question with twenty-first century eyes, the natural answer returns to the issue of race: that they favored slavery because of the institutionalized racism that permeated American thought at the time. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, however, suggest that this is not the appropriate question to ask. Rather, they suggest that the question should not be why people thought as they did but why Christians and, subsequently, non-Christians began to view “slavery as an enormity not to be endured” (70). In other words, rather than looking at why slaveholders justified their actions, scholars should instead examine how abolitionists

justified theirs; at the time, slaveholding was the *status quo* and abolition the countercultural view. Following thousands of years of slaveholding in its various forms, only within the past three hundred years did abolitionists, led by Christians, rise up against slavery, raising the question of what elements of western slavery became so odious to Christians that they fought for its abolition. Given that advocates on both sides of the issue professed Christianity and used what each believed to be a self-evident literal interpretation of Scripture to justify their position, the validity of Scripture and a literal interpretation thereof was a fundamental component of the slavery debate, so much so that the slavery debate had long-reaching implications on the core of Christianity, down to “the very existence of God” (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 528).

In examining the hermeneutical debate over slavery, Wayne A. Meeks raises the important question: “What are we to make of those cases in which an honest and historically sensitive reading of the New Testament appears to support practices or institutions that Christians now find morally abominable?” (232). This question formed the foundation of the slavery debate and was one that abolitionists were forced to answer. Meeks goes on to point out that the most challenging part of the slavery debate is that, although scholars looking at slavery from a presentist position easily can see why slavery as it existed in the nineteenth century went against Biblical principles, it becomes far more difficult “to state clearly why the proslavery readers of the Bible were wrong” in their general principle that the Bible endorsed slavery (245). Much of this difficulty comes from the fact that none of the Gospels record Jesus as ever making a direct statement about slavery one way or the other, meaning that a Biblical interpretation of slavery must be inferred from passages on general human relationships. For example, slaveholders took Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians for slaves to “be obedient to them that are your masters” (Eph 6:5a) as a license to own slaves while ignoring other commands for how to

treat all individuals, free and slave alike. Conversely, those who opposed slavery or argue against Biblical endorsement of slavery state that such acknowledgments of the practice should not be construed as an endorsement of it but are, rather, instructions of how to live in a Christ-like way, emphasizing the final words of the above verse: “as unto Christ” (Eph 6:5b), which thus indicate the importance of focusing on Christ rather than on one’s worldly situation.

By emphasizing Scriptural teaching that equally subordinates all people to Christ, many abolitionists, as early as Benjamin Rush in 1773, opposed slavery on the grounds that slavery, although not a sin in and of itself, was wholly incompatible with following Christ and that the institution of slavery led directly to numerous other transgressions (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 519-20). In *A Key to ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’* Harriet Beecher Stowe clarifies this idea, arguing that, because slavery cannot coexist with Christianity, “it is an unchristian institution, against which every Christian is bound to remonstrate, and from which he should entirely withdraw” (241). Stowe argues that the root problem with slavery is not that it is a God-ordained institution that has been corrupted through sinful acts, but that slavery itself is the “*corruption of servitude,*” the godly, unoppressive institution in which the “master” and the “servant” in fact serve one another in different capacities: the master providing for the needs of the servant, and the servant providing labor needed by the master (236, emphasis in original). The fact that the institution of slavery inherently was based on oppression rather than mutual voluntary servitude is why abolitionists deemed American slavery such a great transgression despite Scripture acknowledging slavery as acceptable provided that it did not otherwise lead either the master or servant away from Christ. Of course, it is this Scriptural acknowledgment of slavery that forms much of the slavery debate, and even today many skeptics point to passages about slavery to question the current relevance of the Bible.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer sheds some light on the apparent contradiction that God would forbid certain acts demanded of slaves but not forbid the institution completely (an argument which would at most call for close regulation of slavery but not its abolition), writing that “St. Paul was able to observe that the slave was clearly not prevented by his actual situation as a slave from living as a Christian” (320). In other words, slavery as a practice was Biblically acceptable provided that it did not interfere with either the master’s or the slave’s ability to follow Christ fully. As Stowe does in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—which will be discussed in more depth below—abolitionists argued that slavery in the American South did, in fact, prevent slaves from living Christian lives. First, unlike Old Testament commands regarding the acquisition of slaves, American slavery was forced upon slaves and lasted for an indefinite period of time, usually for the slave’s entire life. Second, as Stowe and other abolitionist novelists emphasized, slave laws opened the doors for wanton violence toward slaves, including sexual assault and murder. And third, American slavery was based entirely and exclusively on race rather than an agreement of mutual servitude.

One of the key differences between slavery as it existed in the antebellum South and slavery as depicted in the Bible is that American slavery was completely forced upon slaves. Biblically sanctioned slavery came about through the slave either selling himself into slavery to pay a debt or as reparations for theft. While it could be argued that the slave was indirectly “forced” into slavery, slave status came about as a consequence of one’s actions rather than as a result of one’s race or ethnicity. Furthermore, the model of slavery sanctioned in the Old Testament required that slaves be freed after six years unless choosing to remain behind with the master or a family that the slave had built while a slave, and a female slave was to be either taken as a wife, given in marriage as a daughter-in-law, or redeemed to one who would take her as a husband (Ex. 21:2-11).

These laws established a system which encouraged slaves to build and maintain families, whereas the American system of slavery often separated families through sale, an act that could not occur in the Biblical model. The system of Biblical slavery was so different from American slavery that, as Stowe notes in *A Key to 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,'* if Abraham had died without children, his head servant would have been his heir.—Gen 15:3” (116). Conversely, the greatest hope given to slaves in the American South was that their owner would free them upon the owner’s death; no American slave ever imagined becoming his master’s heir. Because American slavery was forced, slaves not only had no choice in the matter, but also had no hope of legal manumission beyond the willingness of an owner to grant a slave’s release or to allow that slave to purchase his or her freedom. In their book *Mind of the Master Class*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and her husband Eugene Genovese refer to forced servitude as “[t]he ultimate horror of slavery” (3). Although specifically referring to the oppression of Jews during the Third Reich, Bonhoeffer reinforces this point with his statement that the “[a]rbitrary deprivation of liberty...constitutes a violation which is given with the human body” (183). The fact that slaveholders were in complete, forced control over their slaves robbed the slaves of any autonomous liberty. Ironically, this deprivation of liberty included the liberty to follow God’s commands in that it created a paradox wherein the instructions to slaves that the “master is God’s overseer” would result in a conflict when the master’s commands violated God’s commands (Stowe, *Key* 244). Given American slave laws, slaves put in this situation had no choice but to obey their masters even if doing so meant disobeying God.

Some might argue that Biblical commands already put slaves in a position of forced servitude to their masters. However, this argument comes from the same distortion of Ephesians 6:5 (“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters

according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ”) that slaveholders used to control their slaves. When applied to a non-slaveholding world, this verse is commonly used to discuss employee-employer relations; although the employee is not forced directly to work for the employer, he or she is still called to obey the employer’s commands as he or she would obey Christ, so long as those commands do not violate God’s. Essentially, this command can be simplified as stating, “For those who are employed, do what your boss tells you to do.” It was this attitude of obedience and heart for service, rather than a command of force, that Paul called upon slaves to exhibit and for masters to reciprocate (Eph. 6:9).

Even slaveholders who followed their instructions to treat slaves as brothers and sisters in Christ still distorted these commands for their own ends. In *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, David Brion Davis states that “[t]o make American slavery conform to the ancient Christian ideal of servitude not only meant that Negroes should be baptized and instructed in the faith, but that they should be brought to internalize those precepts of humility, patience, and willing obedience which would allow masters to rule by love instead of force” (203). Although on the surface this concept seems to fit in with the Biblical model, Davis goes on to point out that “[i]n addition to making slaves better workers, Christianity was the best security against disloyalty and insurrection” (205). In other words, slaveholders often spread the Gospel to their slaves not for the slaves’ spiritual edification but because it improved the quality of their work and increased their value as slaves. Stowe considered this abuse of Christianity in order to increase a slave’s sale value to be one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, abominations of slavery, stating that it created a situation in which “the gift of the Holy Ghost shall be sold for money” (Key 144). By teaching slaves to follow Christ, even if done with the best of intentions, masters benefited financially from this instruction to the point that Christianity itself

became a commodity. For the slaveholder, however, despite any well-intentioned designs, instructing slaves in the Gospel created a means of controlling them without having to resort to violent force, and some slaveholders used the Gospel for this less-than-righteous purpose.

Even though many slaveholders preferred to rule through nonviolent means when possible, the violence wrought upon slaves was the inevitable accompaniment to forcing Africans into slavery. Although many slaveholders, particularly vocal proslavery advocates, denounced violence such as that depicted in the character of Simon Legree in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, violence, or the possibility of violence, still formed "the ultimate foundation of power in the slave south" (Faust, *Stories* 191). As Mary Boykin Chesnut, herself the wife of a slaveholder, wrote in her diary, a slave was not necessarily beaten as punishment for a crime, but because "their masters and mistresses are brutes" (21). The brutality of slaveholders and overseers, however, was not limited only to slaves, and it often begat violence to both animals and family members (Faust, *Stories* 190). However, unlike victimized family members, the legal system sided against slaves. Technically speaking, the law prohibited violence against slaves; however, the fact that slaves could neither bring charges against an assailant nor testify in court made these laws difficult to enforce, allowing slaveholders to violate the law as they saw fit. As novelist and abolitionist Lydia Maria Child argued at the time, "[i]f any one chooses to be a brutal despot, your laws and customs give him complete power to do so" (qtd. in Fox-Genovese and Genovese 382). Violence against slaves was prohibited by law, and the form of slavery idealized by proslavery advocates did not in principle necessitate violence; however, the entire slave system was such that it not only allowed for rampant physical violence but in many ways could not function without the threat and implementation of such violence, a clear violation of Christian principles.

In addition to being subjected to the same physical violence as men, female slaves were also subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of their masters. The impact of white masters' sexual relations with female slaves, which the slaves could not refuse, greatly distorted the families of slaves and slaveholders alike. Writing from the standpoint of a wife who had to endure her husband's adultery, Mary Boykin Chesnut considered the sexual abuse of female slaves by married white masters to be the greatest enormity of slavery because it completely destroyed the family bond and created a situation in which Southern wives had no choice but to accept their husbands' adultery and to see their husbands' illegitimate mixed-race children raised alongside their legitimate children. In fact, Chesnut's biggest complaint against *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is that Stowe "makes Legree a bachelor," meaning that Stowe fails to show the effect his treatment of female slaves would have on his family (122). From the slaves' standpoint, the situation was even worse than that faced by the master's family, itself a harsh situation that violated Biblical commands regarding adultery. Despite the fact that slaveholders argued "that slave families were not broken up by sale," sexual relations between a master and a slave—which, of course, the slave was not free to refuse—would often result in the mixed-race child of the master being sold because of the offense the child caused the mistress of the house (Genovese, *Fire* 18). Although the sale of children was illegal, as Stowe points out, these laws were often broken due to the fact that the only truthful testimony about the child's age would come from the African mother, whose testimony was invalid (*Key* 69). From adulterous abusive masters to masters' children being treated as slaves to the separation of slave families, American slavery was rife with examples that clearly violated God's commands for marriage and adultery, providing more evidence for abolitionists' claim that slavery was incompatible with God's law.

Although proslavery advocates acknowledged the aforementioned anti-slavery arguments as problems, they also held firm that these were examples of evils particular to certain individuals but not inherent in the system itself. Abolitionists, however, also pointed to one unbiblical aspect of American slavery that *was* inherent in the institution: it was entirely based on race. Historically speaking, the Otherness that led one group of people to enslave another had less to do with ethnicity *per se* and more to do with regional background or social class of the enslaved. David Brion Davis points out that “[t]he Hebrew (*‘ebd*), Greek (*doulos*), and Latin (*servus*) words for ‘slave’ carried no ethnic connotation” and could mean either ‘slave’ or ‘servant’ (*Image* 9). Furthermore, numerous New Testament passages condemn the racial prejudice that existed between Jews and Gentiles and break down ethnic divisions such as those that formed the foundation of the western enslavement of Africans. Although prejudice toward a group perceived as the Other is inherent in the very idea of slavery, American slavery was based on racial prejudice, wherein the only determinant for whether or not a person potentially could be a slave was whether or not that person had even a fraction of African ancestry.

Despite the strong biblical basis for abolitionist arguments, however, proslavery advocates would not be swayed. Because Christ did not explicitly forbid slavery, slaveholders understood Biblical instructions for people to exhibit Christ in all areas of their lives, including slaves toward their masters, as a key indicator that slavery, even as practiced in America, was Biblically sanctioned (Meeks 235). As discussed earlier, there are many flaws in this interpretation. However, in his book *Real Christianity*, which played a large part in the eradication of slavery within Great Britain, William Wilberforce points out that “almost any ideology can be distorted and misused to bring misery to multitudes or justification to the most bizarre behavior” (46). Similarly, an escaped slave, William

Wells Brown, also argued that “the slaveholders’ version of Christianity [was] a massive self-deception” (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 411). In short, knowing that the root of the slavery debate was the institution’s ability to withstand theological scrutiny, Christian slaveholders found ways to rationalize forced, violent, race-based slavery within the parameters of Christianity.

The primary argument levied by advocates for slavery was that slaveholders were given a position of stewardship over their slaves, a position that included instructing slaves in being better Christians and workers. While in retrospect, this seems like a ridiculous rationalization, at the time many slaveholders (including Augusta Jane Evans), believed “that in the hands of Christian masters slavery [was] not dehumanizing” (Meeks 250). Rather than viewing their slaves as property or chattel, many slaveholders viewed slaves as humans who were ordained by God to be under the care of their masters. For example, when his wife wrote him about possibly selling slaves who had been caught stealing from the family, North Carolina U.S. Representative David Outlaw, though upset about their actions, responded, “I cannot bring myself to [consider] them merely as property. They are human beings—placed under my control, and for whose welfare I am to some extent responsible (qtd. in Fox-Genovese and Genovese 365). Outlaw’s view of his slaves is but one example of how slaveholders believed themselves to be responsible for their slaves, both physically and spiritually; slaveholders did not extend this belief, at least not regarding spiritual well-being, to their physical property or livestock. Historian Drew Gilpin Faust reports that Virginia pastor Thornton Stringfellow believed that “slavery was inextricably related to the position he assumed as God’s steward” and that William and Mary law professor Nathan Beverley Tucker believed that “[t]he dependence of the slave upon his master...was analogous to that of man upon God” (*Stories* 28; *Sacred* 122). Even some Southern sermons, which are often reported as being notorious for

commanding slaves to obey their masters, also “demanded responsibility and restraint from masters” (Genovese, *Fire* 9). In other words, even though abolitionists considered slavery to be a distortion rather than an extension of organic Biblical servitude, these slaveholders, and many others who shared their view, considered ownership of slaves to be a duty and responsibility which they took as seriously as their duties and responsibilities to God.

This sense of duty toward slaves, of course, raises an important question: Why, then, did slaveholders not simply free their slaves and hire them as paid labor? In a somewhat ironic twist to the slavery debate—especially given the close connection between Southern crops and the Northern mercantile industry—proslavery advocates abhorred capitalism and the abuses that occurred within the free labor system. President of William and Mary Thomas Roderick Dew went so far as to argue that slavery “provided the bulwark against the social injustices of capitalism” (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 39). Extending from their view that they served as stewards over their slaves, slaveholders saw “slavery as a system of organic social relations that, unlike the market relations of the free-labor system, created a bond of interest that encouraged Christian behavior” (368). Many slaveholders strongly believed Christianity to be incompatible with the materialism of the free market because slaveholders would focus on their slaves from the position of following Christ, caring for their physical, material, and spiritual needs, whereas they believed that capitalists focused only on their own material interests rather than on the needs of their laborers (Genovese, *Fire* 117). This idea of slavery being preferable to the injustices of free labor is seen not only in the ideas of proslavery scholars of the period, but also in the work of proslavery novelists. In *The Planter’s Northern Bride*, Caroline Lee Hentz depicts Northern wage laborers as being envious of the treatment received by a visiting Southern slave, and most of the novels of Augusta

Jane Evans depict many characters speaking out against capitalism, with *A Speckled Bird* (1902) featuring a subplot of labor unrest and families being destroyed by unfair labor practices. Slaveholders made a strong case, founded upon Jesus' statement that a person "cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24, NIV), that mutual servitude was less exploitative and more Christ-like than free labor capitalism. Of course, that argument ignores the fact that the American brand of slavery was anything but organic, mutual servitude but, instead, was forced labor that often differed from the industrial working conditions slaveholders railed against only in that slaveholders provided paltry living conditions rather than paltry wages.

Although the preference for mutual servitude over exploitative labor is a valid argument in and of itself (consider, say, someone who agrees to work as caretaker of a home in lieu of paying rent), the argument does not apply to slavery as it existed in the United States due to the simple fact that slaves had no choice in the matter and were forced into labor: no mutual exchange existed. In other words, to continue the above analogy, the agreement between masters and slaves was not one of work in exchange for room and board but one of work in exchange for not being sold, beaten, or killed, with the master providing only meager accommodations and provisions. Regarding this argument, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese point out that those who abused slaves were, in general, considered by other slaveholders to be brutish and abusive and that oppression of slaves was deemed ungentlemanly. However, this opposition to oppression carried a caveat: "requiring obedience and subordination was not oppression" (366). This belief, naturally, led to violent instances that were considered justified, both legally and in the mind of the slaveholder, as correction for disobedience and insubordination. Even in cases in which the slaveholder did not resort to violence as punishment, as many abolitionists pointed out, the system itself and its supporting laws

did nothing to prohibit such violence. Given that this created a system in which violence toward a slave, or lack thereof, was dependent solely on the temperament of the slaveholder, Fox-Genovese and Genovese raise the important question of “how slaves would have been treated without the protection of Christianity” (382). Slavery laws favored owners naturally inclined toward violence, and even owners attempting to promote Christ to their slaves would resort to violent punishment if they felt it justified; therefore, no slave was completely safe from violence, regardless of how a slaveholder viewed his stewardship.

As tenuous as the argument that proslavery advocates used in response to charges of violence toward slaves, their argument for the racial basis of American slavery was even more so. To justify the racial basis of slavery, slaveholders used the “Curse of Ham” to argue that Africans were cursed by God to serve others (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 54). The so-called Curse of Ham comes from chapter nine of Genesis. Following the Great Flood, Noah planted a vineyard, got drunk on wine, and passed out naked. Ham discovered Noah in this state, and mockingly told his brothers, Shem and Japheth, about their father. Rather than joining in Ham’s mockery, Shem and Japheth approached Noah with a blanket over their shoulders and walking backwards so they could cover him without seeing him. As a result of Ham’s actions, “²⁴Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. ²⁵And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren” (Gen 9:24-25). In an attempt to rationalize race-based slavery, early American slaveholders stretched the interpretation of this passage to mean that all of Ham’s descendants, not just those from his son Canaan, were cursed to live as slaves, and that these descendants were Africans. However, this interpretation misrepresents the Scriptural context: Although Ethiopians descended from Ham’s son Cush, Noah’s curse did not extend to Cush, but

only to Canaan. Although it seems odd that Noah would curse only one son for the sins of his father rather than curse Ham and all of his descendants, William MacDonald suggests “that God’s grace allowed Noah to curse only a small segment of Ham’s descendants and not a possible third of the human race” (45). This theory stands to reason given that the alternative would have been for one-third of the world’s population being subjects to the other two-thirds. Furthermore, as MacDonald goes on to point out, the Canaanites dwelled in the Promised Land prior to it being given to the Israelites, and there is nothing to indicate that the Canaanites were racially different (at least not in terms of skin tone) than the Israelites (45). Additionally, many commentators point out that God giving the land of the Canaanites to the Israelites and allowing Israel to conquer and rule over Canaan is the fulfillment of this curse. In short, the use of the Curse of Ham to justify race-based slavery was not an extrapolation from Scripture but, rather, was an attempt to find some Biblical justification for racial oppression.

Although the slavery debate seems very clear-cut and one-sided in retrospect, at the time the outcome was not as clear as people today might think it should have been. From a theological standpoint, slaveholders had on their side explicit Biblical instructions for slaves, which they argued as implying acceptance, if not outright approval, of slavery. Conversely, abolitionists had to work to show how slavery was incompatible with other Biblical commands. Moreover, from an idealized abstract standpoint, much of the slaveholders’ argument had a solid basis; however, to attain this ideal, slaveholders would need to—as Paul charged Philemon to do with Onesimus—view and treat their slaves as equal brothers and sisters in Christ. However, the slavery debate was not settled by logically looking at whether slavery as an institution could realize and maintain the ideal position that slaveholders used as the foundation of their argument. Nor was it settled through theological reasoning. Noll argues that nothing “short of warfare” could

have brought the slavery debate to a close (17), but the war ended the debate only from a legal perspective, while creating a lingering sense of bitterness within former slaveholders and slaves alike. Rather, the debate was only later fully settled through the change in hearts of the public. And even though this change came about in large part because many people did, in fact, begin to see how slavery was incompatible with Christianity, much of what led to this change was people seeing slavery in its entirety, not through personal experience or examination, but through its depiction in fiction. Harriet Beecher Stowe believed that “[r]eality...cannot be changed by manipulating the physical environment; it can only be changed by conversion of the spirit” (Tompkins 153). It was this “conversion of the spirit” that Stowe and other novelists on either side of the slave debate sought to bring about.

Fiction and the Slave Debate

The Abolitionism of Harriet Beecher Stowe

Including *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in a discussion of slave novels seems cliché, but the novel's ubiquity necessitates its inclusion. The widespread popularity and influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the mid-nineteenth century has been well-documented. By using the popular genre of domestic fiction as the forum for her abolitionist argument, Harriet Beecher Stowe became an integral part of the antebellum slave debate. Through showing how slavery—at least as it existed in the United States--destroys families, how it dehumanizes slaves, and how it often requires slaves to violate God's commandments, Stowe's novel presents several examples of how the practice of slavery is incompatible with the practice of Christianity. Secondly, rather than simply showing the harshest cruelties of slavery, Stowe often shines the best possible light on slavery in order to show

that it is an evil institution under even the best conditions. Thirdly, Stowe includes two short but important scenes that depict the Biblically idealized model of slavery.

As discussed above, whether or not the institution was believed to be Biblically ordained played a crucial role in the slavery debate. Proslavery advocates argued that the lack of explicit condemnation of slavery combined with instructions to slaves indicated Biblical approval. Conversely, abolitionists argued that slavery conflicted with Christianity and that the Biblical acknowledgement of slavery did not indicate approval. Fully knowing the crux of the argument, Stowe littered her novel with examples of how Christianity and slavery could not coexist. Given that Stowe worked within the domestic genre, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* includes several instances that show how the institution of slavery desecrated the institutions of marriage and family. From the novel's opening, young children are sold away from their mothers. Stowe presents several examples of children, some as young as infants, being removed—or at least attempted to be removed—from their mothers. For example, the slave trader Haley makes a deal with Shelby to remove Harry from Eliza and later sells a child away from his mother while transporting Tom and other slaves to New Orleans. Haley evidently engages in the practice frequently enough to have developed a system for separating mothers and children, boasting to Shelby about removing the child when the mother is not present so as to keep her from resisting the sale. Haley tells Shelby that when a child is removed from a mother without the mother being present, that the mother will, unlike “white folks...gets [sic] over things” rather than grieve for her lost children (5). Stowe shows time and time again the error of this dehumanizing view and the emotions it induces. Eliza's protective instinct leads her to escape with Harry and to cross the Ohio River by jumping from ice floe to ice floe. Lucy—the woman whose child Haley sells while traveling south—silently mourns and then, consumed by grief, drowns herself in the river. In extending this situation to other

characters, Stowe shows how George Harris and Cassy each become hard and embittered by the forced separation from their families, with George being separated from his mother and sister and Cassy being separated from her children. Later, Stowe reveals that Cassy, who takes care of Tom after Legree has him beaten, is the mother of Eliza, whom Tom and Chloe treated as a daughter. Therefore, Cassy's story of separation from her children is also Eliza's story of separation from her mother. Given their own origins, Eliza and George work to prevent Harry from suffering the same fate that they did and successfully escape with him to Canada.

Within these many scenes of brokenheartedness, Stowe makes an emotional plea to her readers to see that, despite arguments to the contrary, separating child slaves from their mothers, also slaves, had a lasting and deleterious effect. Stowe directly draws her reader into the scene when Eliza, seeking refuge at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Bird, asks directly if Mrs. Bird has ever lost a child. Sharing her anguish, Mrs. Bird and her husband, a Senator who just moments before argued with his wife as to why he voted in favor of fugitive slave laws, assist Eliza in her escape. Through this argument, Stowe shows the slaves' humanity rather than denying it as many of her proslavery characters had. Although proslavery advocates argued that laws prevented the sale of young children, Stowe shows how the adherence to such laws rested only within the integrity of the slaveholder. Whereas Mr. Shelby had reservations about splitting apart Eliza and Harry, he still separated them, and only Mrs. Shelby rejoiced when Eliza escaped with Harry, praising God when they were discovered to be gone and instructing her slaves Sam and Andy to go easy on the horses and not "ride them too fast" so that Eliza would have more time to escape (40). Through Mrs. Shelby's response to Eliza's escape and attempted recapture, Stowe not only concedes that some slaveholders opposed the separation of mothers and children but also, along with the scene of the Birds helping

Eliza, presents the Biblical answer to an ethical dilemma. From a legal standpoint, Eliza and Harry should have been returned, but Mrs. Shelby and the Birds, when forced to decide between laws concerning escaped slaves and Biblical laws concerning emancipation and family, follow the words of the Apostle Peter: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), which, in this case, put them in direct opposition to laws that bolstered slavery.

In addition to these scenes of separation between parents and children or between siblings, Stowe further shows how the institution of slavery violated God's law by countermanding the institution of marriage. For example, one of the acts that serves as the final impetus for George Harris's escape is his master threatening to sell him south if he refused to leave Eliza and take a wife on the Harris plantation. Although this rejection of a marriage between slaves is but one element used to show the cruelty of George's master—along with beatings, jealousy over George inventing a machine used to clean hemp, and the drowning of a puppy—similar sentiments that devalue marriages between slaves are later echoed by Mr. Shelby regarding Chloe's marriage to Tom. Even though the two men have very different motives for proposing violation of marriage—Harris so that George will not leave his plantation and Shelby because he sees no reason for Chloe to wait for Tom's unlikely return—the result is the same from both. Regardless of their motives for doing so, both Harris and Shelby make clear that they disregard the vows of marriage made between two slaves.

As with the mother-child relationship, Stowe uses the character of Mrs. Shelby to show how the marriage bond between slaves was subject to the integrity of their masters. When Mr. Shelby suggests that Chloe take another husband because he does not intend to bring Tom back to the farm, Mrs. Shelby retorts that she has "taught my people that their marriages are as sacred as ours" and that the morality that she instills in her slaves,

which Mr. Shelby attempts to undermine is “only the morality of the Bible” (220). Mrs. Shelby’s promotion of marriage is seen further in Stowe’s description of Eliza’s wedding, which Mrs. Shelby hosts in her parlor and “herself adorned the bride’s beautiful hair with orange-blossoms, and threw over it the bridal veil, which certainly could scarce have rested on a fairer head; and there was no lack of white gloves, and cake and wine,—of admiring guests to praise the bride’s beauty, and her mistress’ indulgence and liberality” (11). Mrs. Shelby takes Eliza’s marriage seriously, giving her a formal wedding ceremony, but in pointing out that guests saw it as Mrs. Shelby’s indulgence, Stowe indicates that such affairs exist only at the pleasure and whim of the masters—or, in this case, mistresses—and are an exceptionally unusual occurrence in slave society. That Eliza received such a wedding ceremony is an indicator of Mrs. Shelby’s generosity, belief in marriage, and whimsy is most evident when George Harris explains to Eliza the power that his master has over their marriage: “Don’t you know a slave can’t be married? There is no law in this country for that; I can’t hold you for my wife, if he chooses to part us” (15). In other words, slaves can be married at the desire of a master, and they can be separated at the desire of a master; the bonds of slavery eliminated the bonds of matrimony.

This prohibition of marriage between slaves is but one of many examples that Stowe gives to show how slaves were seen as less human than their white masters, but Stowe also shows how a Christ-like treatment of slaves can have an opposite effect. The effects of the dehumanization of slaves can be seen most overtly in the story of Topsy, the slave girl whom St. Clare, acting on compassion instilled in him by his devout Christian mother, purchases for his cousin Ophelia to reform. Topsy, whom St. Clare purchased from a restaurant because he “was tired of hearing her screaming and them beating and swearing at her,” has been dehumanized by her masters to such an extent

that Stowe even refers to her appearance as “odd and goblin-like” (208, 207). When Topsy discusses her origin with Ophelia, Ophelia becomes incredulous at the fact that Topsy not only has no knowledge of her parentage but that the very concept that she was actually born is beyond her comprehension (209). Topsy retains her “goblin-like” personality until the Christ-like love of Eva elicits a positive response from the child and initiates a change within Ophelia that leads to her taking greater personal care of Topsy rather than treating her as harshly as her former masters had. Through the humanizing love shown to her first by Eva and then by Ophelia, Topsy grows from a “goblin-like” child unaware of her own birth to an educated young woman who serves as a missionary. Although Stowe’s novel contains many examples of both dehumanization and humanization, only in the character of Topsy are the two shown in such a way that the latter does away with the former. Thus, Stowe uses Topsy to show the contrast between the dehumanization of slavery and the humanization of Christianity, showing again the incompatibility of the two.

Although Stowe focuses on how slavery dehumanizes slaves and forces them to violate God’s commands for family and marriage, she also shows how it leads to a situation wherein the master sets himself up as a god over the slave. This is most evident in the interactions between Tom and Simon Legree. Upon purchasing Tom and discovering his hymnal, Legree vows to force Tom to abandon Christianity, emphatically stating, “I’ll soon have *that* out of you...I’m your church now” (292-93, emphasis in original). Throughout Tom’s time on Legree’s plantation, Legree repeatedly tries to break Tom of his Christian faith. When Tom refuses an order to whip another slave, he tells Legree in no uncertain terms, “my soul an’t yours...It’s been bought and paid for, by one that is able to keep it” (309), referring, of course, to Christ. Later, when Legree tries to tempt Tom rather than threaten him—in a scene that recalls Satan’s temptation of Jesus

in the wilderness—Tom becomes so resolute in his faith that “cheerfulness and alertness seemed to return to him, and a quietness which no insult or injury could ruffle seemed to possess him” (341). Like Satan taking Jesus to the mountaintop and declaring, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9), Legree promises Tom that he will have full charge of Legree’s plantation if he will abandon his faith and essentially worship Legree. However, Tom, like Jesus in rebuking Satan, rebukes Legree and becomes unshakable in his faith, even to the point of martyrdom, thus allowing Legree no control over Tom’s heart, soul, or actions. Despite Tom’s spiritual victory, however, Legree still controls what happens to Tom and eventually has Tom beaten to death when he refuses to reveal the location to which Cassy and Emmeline escaped. Like the previously discussed case of Mrs. Shelby and the Birds helping Eliza escape, Tom chooses to obey God’s law rather than man’s. However, unlike Mrs. Shelby or the Birds, Tom’s choice results in the penalty of physical death, with laws concerning slaves being such that no law existed to bring Legree to justice. Aside from a lack of witnesses other than slaves, who could not testify in court or bring charges, as Stowe points out in *A Key to ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’* “Tom’s resistance was *insurrection*”; therefore, he could legally be executed for his crime (104, emphasis in original). Although Legree failed in making himself Tom’s spiritual god, as Tom’s master, the law allowed him full physical power over all of his slaves, including the power of unjust execution.

Some slaveholders, of course, considered brutality such as that exhibited by Legree to be an aberration that was not representative of slavery as an institution; many proslavery advocates asserted that masters were God’s stewards over slaves, tasked with the responsibility of caring for their slaves’ every physical, material, and spiritual need. When presented with examples of masters’ barbarity, slavery advocates, if they did not outright dismiss such claims as falsehoods, would at most acknowledge such

instances but deem them as exceptions. Stowe responds to this argument in two ways. On the one hand, she presents the common rebuttal that laws concerning slavery allowed for those exceptions to go unpunished, such as Legree's killing of Tom. And on the other, although she also includes barbarous masters, Stowe largely features slaveholders who fit the proslavery description of kind stewards, thus showing the evils of slavery even under the ideal conditions that were presented as the norm by slavery advocates.

Mr. and Mrs. Shelby are kind to their slaves and have developed close relationships with certain slaves, even raising Eliza from infancy and giving her a formal wedding. Augustine St. Clare is gentle with all of his slaves; their workloads are light, and he at most gently scolds them when they do something that displeases him, such as when Adolph wears his clothes. However, Stowe argues that the kind masters such as Shelby and St. Clare allow the brutal ones like Legree to exist. On the boat toward Legree's plantation, another slaveholder tells a Northerner that he should not view Legree's crass demeanor and boastful attitude about working slaves to death as representative of Southern slaveholders. To this, the Northerner retorts that

'it is you considerate, humane men, that are responsible for all the brutality and outrage wrought by these wretches; because, if it were not for your sanction and influence, the whole system could not keep foothold for an hour. If there were no planters except such as that one...the whole thing would go down like a mill-stone. It is your respectability and humanity that licenses his brutality.' (295)

In her "Concluding Remarks," Stowe repeats this sentiment, arguing that "[t]here is, actually, nothing to protect the slave's life but the *character* of the master" and reiterating that if free labor supervisors killed their workers occasionally, such acts would not be dismissed as exceptions to the norm. Rather, Stowe argues, "[t]his injustice is an *inherent* one in the slave system,—it cannot exist without it" (381, emphasis in original). In other words, Stowe's novel makes the argument that slavery in and of itself violated Christian

teaching by necessitating the possibility of conditions such as those on Legree's plantation and causing even those slaveholders who refused to engage in brutality to allow brutality to continue because stopping it would mean doing away with the entire institution.

Above and beyond arguments about slave law, by having two out of Tom's three masters fit the mold that proslavery advocates held up as the ideal representation of the institution, Stowe shows the importance of freedom as well as how the flawed nature of humankind causes a situation as close to ideal as could exist under slavery to quickly and easily change. With many proslavery advocates rebutting abolitionist arguments as pertaining to individual slaveholders rather than the institution itself, Stowe confronts these assertions by having Tom serve masters who are virtually blameless toward their slaves—blameless except, of course, for holding them in bondage. Stowe depicts the fallacy of an "ideal" slavery in two ways: 1) She shows how slaves desire freedom regardless of whatever comforts a slaveholder might provide; and 2) She shows how the flawed human nature of slaveholders poses a danger even to the most allegedly ideal situation. Stowe portrays the inherent desire of slaves for freedom—rather than to simply have kindness and comfort as many slaveholders argued—in a dialogue between Tom and St. Clare when St. Clare announces that he has begun the legal process of fulfilling Eva's deathbed wish that Tom go free. Much to St. Clare's initial chagrin, Tom responds with elation, explaining that despite the material comforts provided by St. Clare, he would "rather have poor clothes, poor house, poor everything, and have 'em *mine*, than have the best, and have 'em any man's else" (265, emphasis in original). Although Tom recognizes St. Clare's kindness, he also recognizes his lack of liberty and that he owns none of his comforts.

In addition to showing how the allegedly ideal situation for slaves was not as ideal as slaveholders professed, Stowe also shows how easily that situation could change for the slave and how, unlike Biblical slavery, a slave could be removed from a relatively comfortable situation and placed in a cruel one based on nothing more than the business dealings of his or her master. One of the chief complaints about Stowe's novel from slavery advocates was that no slaveholder would sell a slave as loyal and hard-working as Tom. In his review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the October 1852 issue of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, George F. Holmes asks why "a sensible man like Mr. Shelby could be expected to sell so much of prudence, honesty, foresight, sobriety and affection as were found in Uncle Tom, for any sum that Haley would be willing to allow him" (473). Stowe answers this question in her portrayal of Shelby: in short, Shelby is *not* "a sensible man," at least not concerning business matters. As the transaction takes place, Shelby frequently reiterates that the only reason he sells Tom and Harry to Haley is because the debt that he owes Haley is so great that the only alternative is to lose all possessions, including the Shelby home, and have all slaves go into Haley's hands. Although the exact nature of the debt Shelby owes to Haley is never discussed, the fact that a slave trader has acquired such a large mortgage over Shelby indicates Shelby's propensity to risk the welfare of his slaves and even that of his own family in speculative business dealings. In an ironic twist, Stowe offers her own argument regarding the ability of women: The Shelby family escapes debt only after Mr. Shelby dies and Mrs. Shelby gains control of the family finances. Stowe likely would not argue with Holmes that "a sensible man" would not sell Tom to pay a debt, but she shows how a flawed and insensible man with poor business skills can be forced to abandon his Christian principles by getting in a compromising financial position, especially when matching business

prowess with a skilled and unscrupulous trader such as Haley, thus making the sale of Tom much more probable.

The initial sale of Tom, however, providentially places Tom in an even more comfortable situation than he had been in with the Shelbys. Although Tom still longs for his freedom and misses his family and wants to be reunited with them, his living conditions arguably improve. The workload given Tom is light, and he appears to spend more time reading the Bible and talking about Scripture with Eva or other slaves than he does working, which gives Tom ample opportunity to cultivate his faith prior to the extreme test of faith that he faces at the hands of Legree. The conditions for all of St. Clare's slaves are such that, when the slaves are put up for auction, one potential buyer states that he would never purchase any of them because of their coddled treatment (288). Although St. Clare's wealth—and, presumably, his business sense—far exceeds that of Shelby, Stowe depicts him as foolhardy in other ways, which prove equally as detrimental to Tom as Shelby's financial mismanagement. Whereas Shelby is presented as foolhardy and lacking in business skills, Stowe portrays St. Clare as given to drunkenness and lacking in foresight. For example, in a scene foreshadowing Tom's fate, Ophelia forces St. Clare to sign Topsy over to her, arguing that he "may die, or fail," leaving her no legal recourse for Topsy (268). St. Clare protests that he can sign over Topsy, free Tom, and make provisions for other slaves at any time, but he eventually relents concerning Topsy. However, St. Clare makes no such arrangements for Tom or any other slave, stating that he will tend to it "one of these days" (269). Before freeing any slaves, however, St. Clare is killed in a knife fight just a few hours after granting Ophelia rights to Topsy, thus leaving all of the slaves in the hands of Marie, a mistress so self-absorbed that she deems the dying wish of both her daughter and husband that Tom go free as a conspiracy against her. Tom, along with the others, is sold at auction, and his

time with slaveholders that fit the image often promoted by proslavery advocates comes to an end.

Through the two examples described above, Stowe presents an argument of how the slave utopia proclaimed by slaveholders could tragically end for the slaves. However, such events could be argued by proslavery advocates like Holmes as being highly improbable. For this reason, Stowe's novel, although replete with the improbable events pointed to by many detractors of domestic fiction, focuses not on what is *probable* but what is made *possible* by the institution of slavery and its governing laws. Through Shelby and St. Clare, Stowe shows that slaves, even in the best conditions, by virtue of being subject to human masters are also subject to human fallibility. Both Shelby and St. Clare are kind and have good intentions not just toward Tom but toward all of their slaves. Both slaveholders, however, are human and, therefore, flawed. These flaws—Shelby's poor business sense and St. Clare's procrastination and lack of foresight—each result in harsh consequences for the slaves, who are subject to their masters' failings as well as their virtues.

Although Stowe presents several strong arguments against slavery, the slavery debate extended much further than the failings of the institution. Beyond simply arguing against American slavery, Stowe, along with other abolitionists, was faced with the difficult task of explaining why, if slavery was wrong in and of itself, Mosaic law provided instructions for slave ownership and why the patriarchs, most notably Abraham, had slaves. Rather than arguing against this assertion, Stowe presents two brief scenes that serve as models of Biblical slavery. In the first of these, St. Clare describes an early experience he had as a slaveholder; in the second, George Shelby frees and hires all of his family's slaves. In the midst of relaying to Marie and Ophelia his rationale as a slaveholder who opposes slavery, St. Clare tells how he once, through kindness, "broke a

fellow in ... that all the overseers and masters had tried their hands on in vain" (203). St.

Clare describes the slave, whom he purchased from his twin brother Alfred, as

"a regular African lion. They called him Scipio. Nobody could do anything with him; and he was sold round from overseer to overseer, till at last Alfred bought him, because he thought he could manage him. Well, one day he knocked down the overseer, and was fairly off into the swamps. ... Alfred was greatly exasperated; but I told him that it was his own fault, and laid him any wager that I could break the man; and finally it was agreed that, if I caught him, I should have him to experiment on. So they mustered out a party of some six or seven, with guns and dogs, for the hunt. ...

"Well, the dogs bayed and howled, and we rode and scampered, and finally we started him. He ran and bounded like a buck, and kept us well in the rear for some time; but at last he got caught in an impenetrable thicket of cane; then he turned to bay, and I tell you he fought the dogs right gallantly. He dashed them right and left, and actually killed three of them with only his naked fists, when a shot from a gun brought him down, and he fell, wounded and bleeding, almost at my feet. The poor fellow looked up at me with manhood and despair both in his eye. I kept back the dogs and the party, as they came pressing up, and claimed him as my prisoner. It was all I could do to keep them from shooting him, in the flush of success; but I persisted in my bargain, and Alfred sold him to me. Well, I took him in hand, and in one fortnight I had him tamed down as submissive and tractable as heart could desire." (203)

In his lengthy narration, St. Clare shows how violently rebellious Scipio was to all others, so much so that they planned to kill him for convenience's sake. However, St. Clare describes his "taming" of Scipio not as the worldly process of breaking in a slave through abuse but as the Biblical process of treating a slave as a brother: "Well, it was quite a simple process. I took him to my own room, had a good bed made for him, dressed his wounds, and tended him myself, until he got fairly on his feet again. And, in process of time, I had free papers made out for him, and told him he might go wherever he liked" (203-4). Rather than leaving, Scipio uses his new-found freedom to remain with St. Clare. St. Clare describes how Scipio converted to Christianity, faithfully oversaw one of St. Clare's plantations (presumably in a manner similar to how St. Clare oversaw his

house slaves), and nursed St. Clare to health during a cholera epidemic that eventually took his own life.

Certainly, St. Clare's language is less than Biblical. By stating, albeit somewhat in jest at the very idea of slave-breaking, that he "had [Scipio] tamed down as submissive and tractable as heart could desire," St. Clare seems to be promoting a different approach to making a slave more obedient. However, two important points related to this argument must be considered: 1) St. Clare's ultimate goal with Scipio was to free him, indicating that he expected to receive no benefit from his kindness toward Scipio; and 2) St. Clare's slaves generally acted in ways that would have been considered disobedient and insubordinate. Furthermore, Stowe shows how St. Clare and Scipio, despite St. Clare's religious skepticism, treat each other not as oppressor and oppressed but similar to Christian brothers who care for and respect one another despite St. Clare not personally following Christ. First St. Clare nurses Scipio back from the point of death, and then Scipio does the same for St. Clare. Even their association begins in a Biblical manner. Although no mention is made of whether St. Clare pierces Scipio's ear in order to mark him as a servant for life, Scipio's freedom and continued servitude follow the Biblical commands for having servants given in the Book of Exodus: "5And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master...; I will not go out free: 6Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever" (21:5-6). In accordance with these verses, Scipio is not in St. Clare's service because he has no choice but because St. Clare offered him his freedom and he chose to remain. Furthermore, by omitting the Biblically-sanctioned mark of permanence created by an ear piercing, Stowe shows the full volition of Scipio's service to St. Clare: He is not marked as St. Clare's servant and is free to leave at any time. In short, Stowe using the episode

between St. Clare and Scipio as an example of the mutual servitude that she saw the Bible as advocating over the chattel slavery that proslavery advocates promoted.

Similarly, the novel proper ends with George Shelby, now the master of his father's farms and slaves, freeing all of the Shelby slaves. Shortly after his return from Simon Legree's plantation and his burial of Tom, George "appear[s] among [the slaves] with a bundle of papers in his hand, containing a certificate of freedom to every one on the place" (379). Like Scipio, the Shelby slaves refuse to leave. However, George announces that he does not intend for them to leave but, rather, intends to hire them as free labor so that they could not be subject to sale upon his own death or financial hardship. The slaves celebrate by singing the line "The year of Jubilee is come" from the Charles Wesley hymn "Blow Ye the Trumpet," linking their freedom with the Biblical year of Jubilee, in which all slaves are freed and all debts are canceled (380). George's solution combines the Biblical model of servitude with the free-market labor that had arisen with the growth of other industries. Although Stowe's proposed solution reveals issues in the implementation of Emancipation in that many freed slaves had no choice but to continue working on plantations as hired hands, it also shows Stowe's depiction of a Biblical model: the slaves are free to leave or remain as they choose rather than having to remain because of the threat of physical violence. Ultimately, it is this model of voluntary servitude based on mutual love and respect—in which a worker agrees to provide a service and an employer agrees to provide compensation, whether monetary or in the form of goods or housing—that Stowe advocates as a true model of Biblical servitude as opposed to the "corruption of servitude" that was slavery.

The Proslavery Position of Caroline Lee Hentz

On the opposite side of the slave debate is Caroline Hentz, who wrote her 1854 novel *The Planter's Northern Bride* as a direct rebuttal to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ironically, the two writers—Hentz and Stowe—were associated beyond their competing novels, both previously having been members of the same Cincinnati writers circle. However, after their time in Ohio, whereas Stowe moved further North, Hentz went deeper South and gained the first-hand plantation experience that her authorial rival lacked (Ellison viii). In her novel, Hentz counters Stowe's argument that slavery is an abusive, immoral system that devastated families. Hentz uses her book to argue for slavery as "a humane institution and a beneficial arrangement for both white and black" as well as "the only political system that cares, nurtures and reconstructs" the family (Ellison xvi; Cuenca). In short, whereas Stowe expounded on the evils of slavery, Hentz extolled what she saw as its virtues.

The Planter's Northern Bride is told largely through the viewpoint of the titular character, Eulalia Moreland née Hastings, the daughter of a Northern abolitionist and new wife of Southern planter and slaveholder Russell Moreland, who meets and woos Eulalia over the course of several trips made to the North. Unlike *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Hentz's novel contains very little action or conflict, with, as Rhoda Coleman Ellison points out in her introduction to the 1970 Southern Literary Classics edition, "the principal crises...[being] the planter's verbal challenges of those who attempt to violate the institution of slavery" (xiv). The greatest narrative conflict occurs through the actions of abolitionists who work to free slaves who travel North or to bring about an uprising on Moreland's plantation. To be sure, Hentz's novel is more of a five-hundred-eighty-page proslavery tract than it is a work of fiction. The plot itself is negligible, and the characters and situations are constructed for the exclusive purpose of promoting propaganda. As

such, the current attention paid to *The Planter's Northern Bride* stems from its association with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* rather than any literary merit the novel might possess. Even during Hentz's career, her other novels, written more as works of sentimental fiction than as propaganda pieces, received more attention from readers, many of whom sought novels with less of an overt proslavery bent.

Hentz devotes much of the novel to comparing the conditions of Southern slaves to those of Northern free laborers, especially those free laborers of African descent. In describing the treatment of slaves, Moreland assures his Northern listeners that masters and slaves share a close relationship, "next to [their] own kindred" (23). Later in the novel, when Eulalia first visits the plantation with Moreland, she marvels that he is greeted "More like a father welcomed by his children than a king greeted by his subject" (332). Lest Hentz's reader believe that Moreland receives this treatment due to fear from the slaves, the minister Dr. Ellery previously tells Eulalia of having received a warm welcome when visiting a plantation, where he saw only "hospitality and kindness" from both the family he visited and their slaves but saw no sign of "scars and stripes and chains" (129-30). Moreover, Moreland assures abolitionists that chains are used in the South only for the same reason that they might be used in the North: when "outrageous and criminal behavior" dictates such action (50). Rather than treating slaveholders as oppressors, Hentz shows them as caretakers of their slaves, who, in turn, provide their masters with necessary labor. But even then, the labor is treated as less than that purported by abolitionists, as Hentz depicts through a woman who complains to Eulalia that Southern slaves "were treated a great deal too well" and idled more than they worked (184).

Hentz fully shows the ease of treatment of slaves in the character of Albert, Moreland's house slave and personal valet. Through Albert, Hentz argues that the

abolitionist depiction of a typical slave is nothing but a fallacy or myth, if not an outright lie told by abolitionists to sway others to their cause. When the narrator introduces Albert, he is presented as refined and eloquent—very similar to the character of Adolph in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—to the point that someone who expected the stereotype of an uneducated slave “could not but be astonished at the propriety of his language and pronunciation” (14). When introduced to Northerners, they doubt Albert’s veracity and believe him to likely be covered in scars underneath his fine clothing. Not only does Albert lack the scars sought by the abolitionists, but he also has difficulty maintaining the workaday drudge of Northern laborers. When Moreland offers Albert’s services to his Northern landlady, he later regrets his offer because of how harshly Albert was worked and treated.

This is not to say that Hentz turns a blind eye to cruel treatment of slaves by their owners. However, she treats such instances as anomalies rather than typical. In discussing such treatment with Eulalia’s father, Moreland acknowledges it as wrongdoing and attributes cruelty from masters to instances where masters have “abused [their] privileges” (83). In depicting the lack of cruelty to slaves, Hentz draws on her own experience; in her preface to the novel, the author writes that she has “never *witnessed* one scene of cruelty or oppression, never beheld a chain or a manacle, or the infliction of a punishment more severe than parental authority would be justified in applying to filial disobedience or transgression” (5, emphasis in original). Ultimately, Hentz treats the life of the slave as one of light labor, freedom from wants, and kinship with the owner, one to which freed or escaped slaves strive to return, such as the case with Judy, a free laborer who begs to be purchased and who takes up the mantle of slave to Moreland’s sister Ildegerte after Ildegerte’s husband dies and her personal slave, Crissy, absconds with abolitionists. Crissy herself later returns to the Moreland house after fleeing from the

abolitionists. In other words, Hentz describes slavery as a lifestyle to be cherished as opposed to one from which to be rescued.

Conversely, when writing of Northern laborers, Hentz emphasizes “the bondage of poverty, whose iron chains are heard clanking in every region of God’s earth” (27). Hentz shows the Northern free laborer and the Southern slave as comparable in many respects save for one:

The Northern laborer has anxious thoughts for the morrow, fears that the daily bread for which he is toiling away may be withheld, that sickness may paralyze his strong arm, and his children feel the pangs of destitution. The slave thinks not of the morrow, lays up nothing for the future, spends his money for the gratification of the present moment, and gives care and trouble to the winds. (336-37)

Rather than seeing Northern labor as free, Hentz disputes the suggestion of freedom, arguing that “[p]overty...stands behind them and urges on the life-consuming task” whereas slaves are free from want and have all their needs met by their caring masters (240). In addition to her expositions on the possibility of poverty facing Northern workers, Hentz also features several scenes of Moreland reflecting on the plight of downtrodden, aged, or infirm Northern workers who lacked the security of a master’s care in which a slave could take comfort. On the one hand, Moreland sees “a poor young woman, entirely dependent on her daily labor for the support of herself and aged mother, incapacitated by sickness from ministering to their necessities, thrown back up on her home, without the means of subsistence,” but on the other he believes “that the sick and dying negro, retained under his master’s roof, kindly nursed and ministered unto, with no sad, anxious lookings forward into the morrow for the supply of nature’s wants, no fears of being cast into the pauper’s home...had in contrast a far happier lot” (25-26; 27). Through this juxtaposition, Hentz creates a picture of suffering for the despondent Northern worker but of palliation for the slave in poor health. Contrary to the declarations of escaped slaves such as Frederick Douglass, who describes his grandmother as dying

“all alone, in yonder little hut, before a few dim embers” (38), Hentz presents slavery as a form of social welfare where those who can no longer care for themselves are cared for as a result of the slave system.

By presenting such a stark contrast between the lives of slaves and free laborers, Hentz adds credence to the oft-repeated argument that slaveholders were sanctioned by God with the responsibility for caring for the slaves in their charge. When Eulalia’s father confronts Moreland as to why he does not free his slaves, Moreland asserts that to do so would force upon the slaves harder lives than what they experience under slavery, stating that it is the slaveholders’ “duty to take care of [their slaves], to make the life of servitude, which seem their present destiny, as much as possible a life of comfort and enjoyment...to nurse them in sickness, provide for them in old age, and save them from the horrors and miseries of want” (83). Although opposed to the slave trade, Moreland views the inheritance of slaves as the inheritance of a responsibility of caring for others, a duty reflected in Hentz’s portrayal of the working conditions and lives of slave and free laborers.

In keeping with this presentation of slavery as a God-ordained duty, Hentz presents abolitionists as violent usurpers of that duty who wish to do no more than further their own personal agendas regardless of the potential negative effect that doing so could have on the slaves whom they help escape from bondage. From the novel’s outset, abolitionists who help slaves escape are presented not as sincere Christian missionaries but as silver-tongued con artists who try to lure slaves away from their masters with false promises of freedom and prosperity. As they prepare to make their first trip to the North, Moreland warns Albert to be on his guard for abolitionists who will “try to persuade” him that “it is [his] duty to run away” (15). Aware of abolitionist arguments, Albert responds

that he has “hearn it often enough already” (16), in other words, he is too familiar with the tactics of the con to fall prey as a mark.

Hentz presents the alleged con of abolitionism in full effect with the escape of Crissy, the personal slave of Moreland’s sister, Ildegerte. When Ildegerte and her dying husband Richard travel to Ohio for his ultimately unsuccessful medical treatment, an abolitionist couple, the Softlys, convince Crissy to flee from her mistress despite her own statements that she prefers to remain a slave. Hentz’s narrator emphasizes the hypocritical duplicity of abolitionists by asking of the Softlys, “Why did this man and woman, who had enrolled themselves under the banner whose angel-inscribed motto is ‘peace and good will to *all men*,’ thus labor and travail to rend asunder the bonds of affection and gratitude which united this faithful heart to the master and mistress she so fondly loved?” (280). Hentz later answers this question in describing Mr. Softly’s mindset regarding Crissy: “She should be free! It was *her* duty to be so, whether she desired it or not. It was *his* duty to make her so, in spite of her resistance and remorseful scruples...[I]t was a shocking thing to them, that a person should presume to be happy in a situation in which they had resolved she should be wretched” (381). In other words, because the abolitionists could not imagine how a slave could be content with his or her life, then that must mean that the slaves were all discontented and sought freedom. Hentz asserts that these abolitionists were at best oblivious and at worst callous to the actual desires of the slaves, which, according to Hentz, was to remain in the comfort of slavery. To reinforce her point that slaves preferred slavery to freedom, Hentz not only has a freed slave, Judy, take Crissy’s place as Ildegerte’s attendant but has Crissy return to the Moreland plantation after her escape from the abolitionists.

Hentz’s animosity toward abolitionists is seen most completely in the character of the novel’s antagonist, Mr. Brainard, an itinerant minister who falsely wins the confidence

of slaveholders to himself in a position to incite rebellion amongst the slaves. As Jamie Stanesa puts it, Brainard “poses a fundamental threat to the certainty and necessity of the southern social order grounded in the Bible” (239). Other abolitionist threats, such as that represented by the Softlys, occurred when slaveholders brought their slaves to free states—enemy territory—but Brainard covertly intrudes upon the slaveholding lifestyle “under the pretense of worshipping God” and spreading the Gospel to the slaves (Hentz 500). Hentz portrays Brainard as a charlatan who uses Scripture to further his own ends rather than as a minister who sincerely wishes to spread the Gospel, a depiction indicative of her view of religious abolitionists. As discussed above, the debate over slavery was closely tied to religious faith, and whereas Stowe depicted slaveholders as being at best indifferent to religion (such as seen in *Shelby* and *St. Clare*) or, in the case of *Legree*, openly denouncing Christianity and setting themselves up as a god to their slaves, Hentz uses the character of Brainard to argue that abolitionists preach a false Christianity designed to win others—including slaves—to their cause for little reason other than to promote their agenda.

Instead of the Gospel, Brainard brings anarchy, encouraging the slaves to revolt against Moreland and putting Hentz’s protagonists—especially Moreland, Eulalia, and Albert—in danger. Instead of bringing freedom to the slaves, Brainard brings greater restriction. Hentz shows how the once relaxed, familial relationship between Moreland and his slaves becomes strained, restrictive, and more authoritarian as a result of Brainard’s interference. Additionally, Brainard is later exposed as an even greater fraud when he attempts to pass off a freed slave’s accidental injuries as signs of intentional abuse. Through this presentation of abolitionists as self-serving con artists who create nothing but distrust between slaves and owners, Hentz adds to the proslavery argument that slaveholders had greater concern for the slaves than did abolitionists. Her view on

the hypocrisy of abolitionists is clear with a statement she makes through Moreland: “At a distance they stretch out their arms, and call [the slave] brother, and exclaim, ‘Are we not the children of the same Father?’ but when near, they forget the ties of consanguinity, and stand back with a *holier than thou* written on their brows” (202). In other words, the abolitionist falsely promised the slave kinship and equality that would never be given nor received.

This is not to say, however, that Hentz portrays any sense that slaveholders saw themselves as equal to slaves. On multiple occasions, Moreland references white superiority as the reason for slaveholders needing to care for their slaves, stating to Eulalia that “God has not made all men equal” and that “God never intended that you and I should live on *equal* terms with the African” (305; 202). Moreland, again as a mouthpiece for his author, acknowledges that he and the African slave are spiritual brothers under God, but he resolutely draws the line at allowing for any other equality between whites and any of African descent, whether slave or free. Unlike Stowe, who fills *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with Biblical allusions and realistic hypothetical scenarios to further her argument, and who cites Scripture chapter and verse throughout *A Key to ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’* Hentz offers no Scriptural nor scientific support for Moreland’s claims. Rather, she presents such statements as agreed-upon facts that audience members should understand. In other words, despite a lack of support for her argument, Hentz furthers the proslavery idea that Africans are less capable of living in a civil society than are whites, and, therefore, it is the responsibility of whites to care for their so-called weaker brothers and sisters in Christ.

In a gross understatement, Heidi Jacobs refers to the “proslavery agenda” of *The Planter’s Northern Bride* as “justifiably problematic” (68). The caricaturing of slaveholders and abolitionists creates a one-sided propaganda piece in which abolitionists are

portrayed as devilish con-artists who exploit unwitting slaves and lure them into the toil, poverty, and neglect that, in Hentz's presentation, define the practice of free labor. Conversely, slaveholders are depicted as Christian heroes who, through the institution of slavery, follow Jesus' command to care for the "least of these" (Matt. 25:40). Thus, Hentz's novel takes an uncritical look at an issue that, as discussed above, was made highly complex by the sincere views of those on both sides of the debate and by its far-reaching implications concerning the interpretation of Scripture.

Augusta Jane Evans's Role in the Slave Debate

Although Evans indicates agreement with many aspects of Hentz's position, she still did not make slavery a major part of her novels for various reasons, potentially ranging from wanting to not detract from her spiritual message to wanting to reach as broad an audience as possible; at most, she makes brief references to slavery but avoids putting the institution in the forefront of her work. Even the war-time *Macaria*, which includes a lengthy dedication "To the Army of the Southern Confederacy," makes arguments about slavery only indirectly. Despite the widespread—and accurate—assessment of the novel as Confederate propaganda, the emphasis of the propaganda is on "Southern political values" rather than slavery (Fox-Genovese, "Introduction" xiii). As Suzy Holstein points out, Evans offers "neither an apology for slavery nor a clear ideological stand opposing slavery while upholding states' rights" (117). The servants are never referred to as slaves, and they are, in Holstein's words, "all-wise and devoted" (117). Evans's strongest example of wisdom from a servant is seen in *Macaria* when Irene Huntingdon seeks the counsel of Aunt Nellie, her nurse-turned-personal attendant, regarding her unwanted betrothal to her cousin Hugh Seymour. Aunt Nellie advises Irene,

You know some families run out, and I don't think master ought to try to overturn the Lord's plans...It is a sin for near kin like you and Hugh to

marry, and you ought to set your face against it. He is just like his mother over again, and you will see trouble, as sure as your name is Irene, if you don't take a stand. Oh! they are managing people! and the Lord have mercy on folks they don't like, for it isn't in Huntingdon blood to forgive or to forget anything. I am so thankful your [maternal] uncle Eric has come he will help to stand between you and trouble. (166-167).

Aunt Nellie's words do not go unheeded. Irene looks to her as a wise counselor and takes her words to heart. Nellie's view on incestuous marriage becomes Irene's view on incestuous marriage: henceforth Irene declares her opposition to cousins marrying as a major part of her objection to the proposed union. Additionally, Irene takes Nellie's advice and frequently turns to her uncle as a buffer between her and her father.

Also, further supporting Holstein's claim, in *Macaria*, slaves show immense devotion to their masters, even facing death in order to be of service. For example, Mr. Huntingdon's personal servant William shows such a commitment, following him onto the field of battle and promising Irene that he "will take good care of" her father (306). At the Battle of Manassas, William "followed [Mr. Huntingdon] so closely that he was shot through the head...he was faithful to the last" (336). In an unusual display of compassion, these tearful words of Mr. Huntingdon eulogizing William show not only William's dedication to Huntingdon but Huntingdon's appreciation of his loyalty. Following Huntingdon's death, also at the Battle of Manassas, his house slave Andrew "sobbed convulsively" at the news of his master's death (343). Despite Huntingdon being an unforgiving tyrant who pulls strings to have a romantic rival sentenced to death for a non-capital crime and who ostracizes his own daughter for her failure to capitulate to his infant betrothal of her to her cousin, his slaves show him a degree of devotion generally expected to be shown only to close loved ones.

Similar to Huntingdon's appreciation of William's sacrifice, his brother-in-law Eric, who disagrees with Huntingdon on almost all issues, shows great appreciation for his servant, Willis, acknowledging him as "invaluable" and stating that he "could...be free at

any moment he felt inclined to do so" but does not do so because of his loyalty to his master (348). To be sure, unlike the abrasive, unforgiving Huntingdon, the gentle invalid Eric would likely earn such devotion from a well-treated servant, whether free or slave. However, Evans does not link the loyalty of Willis or the Huntingdon slaves to their masters' temperaments; in each case the love and devotion coming from slaves seems to be unconditional and undying, leading to the suggestion from Evans that slaves are inherently loyal to their masters.

Although Stowe also presents Tom as being loyal first to the Shelbys and then to St. Clare, she also shows how that loyalty, although a testament to his Christian character, does not prevent him from requesting his freedom. Additionally, Stowe shows how Tom's loyalty is reciprocated only to an extent as neither Shelby nor St. Clare honor Tom's wishes, instead creating situations that lead to Tom's acquisition by Legree. In opposition to Huntingdon, Evans portrays Eric as reciprocating his slaves' loyalty rather than manipulating it; however, similar to how neither Shelby nor St. Clare frees Tom, Evans at no point indicates that Eric would consider freeing Willis. Evans uses their relationship to strengthen her pro-slavery position that a slaveholder can be loyal to and care for his or her slaves while maintaining the master-slave relationship. However, the fact that Evans does not depict Eric as wanting to free Willis also shows that Evans saw the duty of a master to a slave ending before the point of granting that slave his or her freedom, which stands in stark contrast to Stowe's portrayal of the further calamity that could befall slaves if their so-called loyal masters do not grant their freedom. Additionally, whereas Stowe emphasizes that Tom does not have the freedom to be anything other than loyal to his masters, Evans ignores the fact that in order to show William's devotion to Huntingdon she must gloss over the fact that he does not have the freedom to do otherwise.

Throughout Evans's work, the author must omit the negative realities of slavery in order to present what she considered its merits. Unlike Stowe, who puts Tom into a materially optimal situation with St. Clare in order to show the fallacy of the slave ideal, Evans depicts what she saw as an idealized version of slavery without overtly revealing its negative aspects. As previously discussed, Evans eschewed using her novels to promote a proslavery agenda, but on the rare occasion that she addresses the issue, Evans does follow a pattern similar to that of Hentz, favorably comparing the life of slaves to the hardships faced by Northern factory workers. On this point Hentz and Evans seem to diverge only with the importance of the scene in question; for Hentz, such points are integral to her plot, but for Evans they are merely sidebars. For example, in Evans's first novel, *Inez*, Evans offers a description of Mary and Florence's new life in San Antonio, highlighting the domestic bliss of Aunt Fanny, the family's domestic slave:

The breakfast was brought in by a middle-aged negress, whose tidy appearance and honest, happy, smiling face presented the best refutation of the gross slanders of our Northern brethren. I would that her daguerreotype, as she stood arranging the dishes, could be contrasted with those of the miserable, half-starved seamstresses of Boston and New York, who toil from dawn till dark, with aching head and throbbing heart, over some weary article, for which they receive the mighty recompense of a shilling. (42)

Through this brief description, Evans endorses the argument that the working conditions of slaves are better than those of free workers in the North. However, unlike Stowe's distinction between material comfort and freedom, Evans keeps her argument confined to the realm of creature comforts by focusing only on Fanny's light domestic work compared to the difficult factory work performed by free laborers in the North. Rather than offering any negative examples of the slaves' conditions, Evans depicts the two slaves present in the novel—Aunt Fanny, described above, and Isaac, a coachman with whom Florence is reunited at the end of the novel—as happy, well-cared for, and, above all, loyal and loving toward their masters. Certainly, much of the difference between the depth of

Stowe's look at slavery and Evans's cursory portrayal can be attributed to the fact that Evans does not make slavery the focal point of *Inez* or any of her novels. Instead, Evans merely inserts descriptions such as the one above rather than providing multiple examples and narrative asides—such as those she does for other issues—in order to make a lengthy proslavery argument.

What Evans does show in her first novel, however, are scenes of familial closeness between slaves and their mistresses. When Mary and Florence leave San Antonio to escape the violence of the Texas Revolution, Aunt Fanny cries over their departure, knowing that Mary's health is deteriorating to the point that she is near death and will "die away from old Fanny" (202). Later, when Florence discovers that her father's former slaves are owned by Dudley Stewart, her new husband, a joyful reunion turns bittersweet when Isaac learns of Mary's death and briefly mourns before driving the newlyweds to their home. Although Evans certainly uses these scenes to shine a positive light on slavery and on master-slave relations, as Stowe points out regarding similar scenes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, such positive scenes "would be brighter still if the element of slavery were withdrawn" (*Key* iii). Through such scenes, Evans presents the master-slave relationship as following the symbiotic, Biblical model in which masters and servants care for one another; however, Evans does not acknowledge the point that Stowe realizes when she writes that such moments of loving-kindness would be better off without the "element of slavery": that the slaves have no choice in whether or not they have a relationship with their masters and that such a relationship can end at any time based on the whims or actions of the master.

Interestingly, like Stowe showing how quickly Tom's situation changes based on the poor financial dealings of Shelby and the overall behavior of St. Clare, Evans also presents occasions wherein slaves are removed from a relatively positive situation based

on actions of the master. Early in *Inez*, Florence tells Mary that Mr. Hamilton “has been very unfortunate in his speculations” and is forced to sell the home and slaves and move the family to Texas (15-16). However, unlike Stowe’s depiction of Uncle Tom’s fate when faced with similar circumstances, Evans largely ignores the fate of the slaves when the story follows the main characters to San Antonio. Only at the end of the novel does Evans add to the requisite happy ending by reuniting Florence with her slaves, whom Dudley inherited from an uncle who had purchased them from Hamilton. Florence is happy to see Isaac, but not mention was made of him throughout the novel. In other words, Evans does give some examples of positive treatment of slaves, but she otherwise ignores their presence.

Like Stowe’s Shelby, who engages in speculative business dealings without regard for the effect on his family, let alone on his slaves, Hamilton’s poor business ventures also ensure that he is no longer the master of the slaves with whom his family has bonded emotionally. Even if one were to dismiss the possibility that either Hamilton or any of his associates would ever sell his slaves to a master such as Legree, the fact remains that a servant with avuncular, reciprocated affection for the family was sold away from the family in order to cover losses acquired through poor business deals. Given the devotion that Isaac shows toward Florence and Mary, the suggestion that, had he been a free laborer, he might have found some way to remain in the family’s employ is not altogether baseless. However, because he was a slave, Isaac had no choice in his being sold away from the family, and was reunited with Florence through no doing of his own. With this in mind, these scenes that Evans used to show the love and devotion that slaves and their masters have for one another instead show that the slave 1) has no choice in the maintenance of any relationship that is built, and 2) is always subject to the possibility of being sold to pay a debt, regardless of how close their relationship might be

to those they serve. This is not to suggest, however, that Evans adopted an antislavery position similar to that of Stowe. Rather, her presentation of relationships such as that between Florence, Mary, and the Hamilton slaves indicates an awareness of flaws in the institution of slavery; however, Evans approaches these flaws more from a position of reform rather than abolition.

For instance, Evans makes a brief, subtle acknowledgment that the institution of slavery is not the ideal situation that many proslavery advocates such as Hentz depict it as. At the end of *Macaria*, Irene returns home from serving as a battlefield nurse because “[t]he extension of the Conscription statute had, several months before, deprived [her] of a valued and trusty overseer,” and she wants “to satisfy herself concerning the character of his successor” (408). In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe argues that “[t]here is, actually, nothing to protect the slave’s life but the *character* of the master” (381, emphasis in original), an argument corroborated by Southern Civil War diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut, who writes that “[m]en and women are punished when their masters and mistresses are brutes, not when they do wrong” (21). By having Irene take such consideration in hiring an overseer, Evans acknowledges the veracity of Stowe’s and Chesnut’s claim: were slaves not at the mercy of their masters or overseers, then Irene would have no need to find an overseer whom she trusted to treat her slaves kindly, gently, and charitably. However, unlike Stowe, who uses such a fact as an indictment against slavery as an institution in that it allowed for cruelty from masters, Evans treats it as an indicator of the responsibility of slaveholders and of the necessity for slaveholders to maintain the highest Christian character. In her brief foray into the slavery debate that played a large part in sparking the Civil War, Evans holds up Irene, who fits the mold of what David S. Reynolds dubs the “moral exemplar,” as the ideal slaveholder, always treating her slaves with kindness, acknowledging their sagacity, and going to lengths to ensure their care.

Conversely, Evans also presents examples of non-Christian slave owners who are severe in their interactions with others, be that person an acquaintance, family member, or slave. As discussed in the previous chapter, Guy Hartwell of *Beulah* declares himself a “tyrant” over Beulah (411). However, his tyranny extends beyond his ward-turned-wife. For example, early in the novel, when Beulah—at this point barely an acquaintance—leaves Hartwell’s home following an insult by his sister, May Chilton, Hartwell threatens to “send [May and her daughter] Pauline out into the world without a dime” but refrains from doing so only because it would upset Beulah. Regardless, he still removes his sister and niece from his house but agrees to pay for their living and for Pauline’s education (103). Moreover, Hartwell seems equally as harsh a slave owner. To be sure, there are no scenes of Hartwell abusing slaves, but this seems to be more a product of their obsequiousness rather than his temperament. When Beulah thanks Hartwell’s slave Harriet for tending to her during a prolonged illness, Harriet responds that she is “obeying master’s orders” and, when Beulah says that she will be fine without Harriet’s assistance, Harriet falls back on her “orders,” stating that Beulah “might as well fight the waves of the sea as my master’s will” (65). Throughout their interactions depicted in the novel, Hartwell is nothing but kind to Harriet, but her statement to Beulah indicates Harriet’s awareness that his kindness reaches only as far as another’s obedience to his wishes.

An even clearer example of Evans’s depiction of the austerity of irreligious slaveholders is her most popular protagonist at the time, St. Elmo Murray. Aside from his general cruelty to all who cross his path—such as cursing Edna’s grandfather for taking too long to shoe his horse (14) or beating his own dog nearly to death for cornering Edna by a tree and chastising Edna for imploring him to cease his brutality (43)—St. Elmo has cultivated an environment of fear among his slaves. Upon Edna’s arrival at the Murray

household, the house slave Hagar, to whom Mrs. Murray had commanded Edna not to speak, warns Edna to “be sure not to cross Mass Elmo’s path.” Hagar elaborates that “[e]verybody is afraid of him, and gives way to him, and you must do like the balance that have to deal with him. I nursed him; but I would rather put my head in a wolf’s jaws than stir him up; and God knows I wish he had died when he was a baby, instead of living to grow up the sinful, swearing, raging devil he is” (36). Through this brief exchange, Evans shows what Frances B. Cogan refers to as St. Elmo’s “satanic” nature (144) as well as the effect that such a satanic deportment has on those around him. Unlike Irene’s or Florence’s slaves, whom Evans depicts as showing nothing but legitimate love and care for their Christian owners, the slaves of the irreligious St. Elmo live in constant fear of him, and even his nursemaid would prefer that St. Elmo had died as Christian rather than live as an apostate.

Through this stark difference in slaveholding characters, Evans on the one hand acknowledges the license for cruelty that slave owners possess and how, as Stowe and Chesnut point out, slaves are at the mercy of their owners. However, rather than treating such a situation as an argument against the institution itself, Evans treats it as an argument for the importance of Christian mercy among slaveholders. As stated previously, Evans makes very few arguments about slavery in her novels but, for the most part, maintains a focus on promotion of Christianity. As such, even the depictions of slavery and slaveholders which are found in *Macaria* and *St. Elmo* advance her argument about Christianity as opposed to an argument about slavery as an institution.

Aside from her comments in her first novel, *Inez*, Evans does not make any other direct arguments about slavery until her 1902 novel, *A Speckled Bird*. In a conversation about the rise of women’s colleges and the emancipation of women from men, Ethelberta Higginbottom chides Eglah’s rejection of the idea by retorting, “Your Southern bigotry is a

mill-stone around your neck. The very word 'emancipation' is a red rag to old slaveholders and their progeny. You never can forgive us for breaking the shackles of groaning millions held in bondage" (118). Eglah, however, argues that "[t]he white south is 'emancipated' from the moral responsibility of elevating the black race" (119). Through Eglah's words, Evans revisits the claim that slaveholders saw themselves not as oppressors of slaves but as being charged with the care and instruction of their slaves. Additionally, Eglah states that "Southern people no more want our negroes back as slaves than [Northerners] desire the return of hordes of Indians whom you so completely dispossessed of their native lands," pointing out the hypocrisy of fighting to free slaves but to then displace Native Americans through westward expansion and Indian removal (119). Additionally, Evans also subtly addresses the longstanding pro-slavery argument that the free labor system resulted in worse treatment for workers than did the slave system. In one of the novel's subplots, Evans gives an example of the care given to workers in capitalist society: Through Nona Dane, Evans presents the story of Silas Bowen, a trolley worker who was maimed when a corroded post fell on him while fixing a trolley wire. The trolley company paid his medical bills but fought payment of any other remuneration and, through producing a false witness who testified that Bowen was intoxicated when the accident occurred, successfully won an appeal that left Bowen and his wife and nine children penniless (214-15). In this sequence, the trolley company is portrayed as a representative of all businesses that go to great lengths to avoid expenditures, even if doing so detrimentally affects an injured worker and his family, thus providing a juxtaposition to Eglah's argument about slaveholders viewing slaves as a responsibility to be cared for rather than as a commodity to be cast aside when no longer profitable.

Combined with Eglah's statement about slaveholders viewing slaves as a burdensome responsibility, Evans's depiction of labor unrest and corporate greed at the expense of workers and their families offers a subtle rejoinder to the abolitionist argument that favored free labor over slave labor. In her novel published nearly forty years after the end of the Civil War, Evans seems to suggest that the violent labor strikes at the turn of the twentieth century were a result of the free labor practices denounced decades earlier by proslavery advocates. Given that *A Speckled Bird* is Evans's last full-length novel, this seems to be Evans's final public foray into the slavery debate, holding fast to the positions that she held during the antebellum and wartime periods.

Ultimately, the retrospective proslavery argument Evans presents in *A Speckled Bird* provides a summation and example of Evans's position that slavery, at its core, was an institution driven by mutual service between slaves and slaveholders whereas free labor was driven largely by the greed of corporate executives. As stated, Evans preferred to avoid using her novels to take part in the slavery debate, and only two of her novels make direct arguments related to slavery. Even then, slavery is discussed only as an aside, and Evans wrote the two novels more than fifty years apart, writing one at age fifteen (and, presumably, before she determined to recuse her fiction from the slavery debate) and the other in the twentieth century, almost forty years after Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, thus situating her conversation within the context of revisionist propaganda rather than designing an argument to sway national political opinion about an ongoing issue.

This is not to say, however, that Evans completely ignored slavery in her novels. Rather, she treats it as but one aspect of life, which, in fact, it was for many antebellum Southerners, Evans included. Moreover, rather than using Scripture to defend slavery, Evans treats slavery as an area in which she encourages her audience to behave

similarly to her moral exemplar, Irene Huntingdon, rather than her devilish rake, St. Elmo Murray (whose harsh tyranny over slaves, not likely coincidentally, she withholds until a novel published after the end of the Civil War). In other words, rather than using Christianity to make an argument about slavery, Evans uses slavery—that is, of course, when she mentions it at all—to make an argument about Christianity and Christian behavior.

As seen, the slavery debate of the early and mid-nineteenth century in large part hinged on a nuanced interpretation of Scripture and a differentiation between Biblical acknowledgement of slavery and Biblical endorsement of slavery. Statesmen, pastors, educators, and novelists on both sides of the issue created a wealth of writings, both convicted and contentious. Although Southern novelists at the time were virtually expected to write novels in defense of slavery, Augusta Jane Evans never followed the model set by Caroline Lee Hentz, opting instead to use her propaganda novel *Macaria* to encourage Confederate soldiers and their wives rather than to argue in favor of the institution of slavery. With the exception of brief mentions in her first and last full-length novels, Evans de-emphasizes slavery, treating it more as a way of life rather than a practice to be defended. As such, Evans, unlike Hentz, never overtly denies the negative aspects of slavery, and even subtly acknowledges such behavior in the character of St. Elmo throughout the first half of his novel. One can only speculate as to the scope of the argument Evans would provide in a full-fledged pro-slavery novel, especially given the intellectual approach she lauds in *Beulah* and *St. Elmo*, written immediately before and immediately after the Civil War, respectively. However, Evans's avoidance of an extended look at slavery is in keeping with the rest of her work. Although she does dip into brief discussions of social issues, doing so is but one way to further Evans's primary reason for writing: to enhance the Christian virtue of her audience. To be sure, the same

could be said of many novelists of the period, including Stowe and Hentz; however, Evans maintained this single purpose despite proslavery advocates' calls for novels that promoted slavery. Although she never takes an abolitionist position, Evans treats slavery the same way she treats other areas of life. Instead of viewing it as an isolated sociopolitical issue, she presents slavery as but one of many areas in which an individual can exhibit Christ-like behavior, regardless of his or her situation. However, it bears repeating that Evans apparently did not believe that Christ-like behavior toward slaves extended to freeing them. Like many other proslavery advocates in the nineteenth century, Evans falls into the paradoxical belief that the only way masters could care for their slaves was to keep them enslaved. This belief certainly tarnishes Evans's work somewhat among modern readers, and it stands to reason that the fact that she avoided a full proslavery novel like that of Hentz allows Evans to receive the critical attention that she has received over the last several years.

Chapter 5

“The Key-stone of Christianity”: Augusta Jane Evans’s Gospel of Wealth

As has been discussed, Augusta Jane Evans lived and wrote during an era when the fabric of Western society was in a state of great flux. Various emerging philosophies called into question the Christian beliefs that had dominated American thought; the rising women’s movement rallied against existing gender roles and rights; slavery was abolished, and African-Americans were granted Constitutional rights. In addition to these changes, the shift from an agrarian society to an increasingly industrial one led to further disparity between the upper and lower classes and the very nature of capitalism began to face unique challenges. In 1850, the same year that Evans published her first novel, *The Communist Manifesto* was first translated into English, calling into question the unequal class structure of capitalist society. Interestingly, such questions were not reserved for Marx or followers of his socialist ideas. Throughout her novels, Evans shows opposition to the excesses of capitalism; however, she also explicitly denounces socialism and the methods through which many socialist activists sought to achieve their goals.

In so doing, Evans positions herself as neither a capitalist nor a Marxist or socialist. Rather, she presents a model of Christian stewardship that, although not doing away with class distinctions, calls for wealthy Christians to support those who would otherwise live in poverty. Interestingly enough, scholars as seemingly diverse as Christian theorist Luke Ferretter and Marxist theorist Slavoj Žižek have noted the connection between Christianity and Marxism. Whereas Ferretter cedes only “a certain amount of common ground” (71), Žižek goes even further, acknowledging “a direct lineage from Christianity to Marxism” (2). Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre takes a similar position, suggesting that Marxism is a “natural successor of Christianity” because both “rescue individual lives from the insignificance of finitude” (6, 112). Essentially, this

link derives from the Biblical doctrine calling for those who have more than they need voluntarily giving to those whose needs are not met.

Especially given the atheist bent of Marxism, this link between Christianity and socialism creates a difficulty for Christians—including Evans—who, on the one hand, endorse charity of such great extent that it bears a surface resemblance to Marxism but who, on the other, also denounce the overall practices and motivations of Marxism. In several of her novels, Evans takes a seemingly paradoxical stance against both socialism and unrestrained capitalism. Just as she uses her novels to present her ideas on the importance of critical reasoning on faith or the intellectual equality of men and women but the need for humility of both, Evans makes a nuanced examination—rooted in her Christian faith—of issues related to class and wealth. In her novels, Evans presents her opposition not only to a capitalistic system that emphasized wealth, greed, and opulence but also her opposition to the ideology of Marxism and the socialist leanings of the labor movement, even though many labor activists opposed the same capitalist ideas opposed by Evans. In many ways, Evans's view of the role Christianity plays in issues of wealth and social class is similar to the movement that would become known as Christian socialism, which emphasized the connection between Christianity and socialism, favoring a use of resources by those with wealth to provide for those in need. Although Evans does not explicitly adhere to Christian socialism and, based on her use of the term *socialism* as a pejorative in describing the downfall of Nona Dane in *A Speckled Bird*, likely would avoid association with the movement, the position she presents shows the connection between the ethical tenets of Christianity and Marxism. On the one hand, Evans shows the conflict that occurs between social classes and the oppression of the lower classes by the upper class; on the other, she shows the fallibility of a labor movement driven by the ideology of an enforced socialism. Certainly, Evans paints a

simplified picture of class conflict; however, as with other issues, Evans's primary emphasis is on Christian faith and living, and to that end Evans presents a model of Christian faith that undermines a societal emphasis on greed while circumventing the need for a secular socialist movement. While doing so, Evans offers a negative critique of any so-called Christian practice that does not selflessly act to help the downtrodden and impoverished.

Evans Presents the Problem of Class Warfare and Oppression

Throughout her body of work, Evans presents a class struggle between the wealthy and the impoverished, and, similar to her approach to other social issues, Evans' proposed solution to this struggle is rooted in her Christian faith. From an early scene in her first novel, in which protagonist Mary Irving declares that she "fear[s] neither poverty nor hardships" when expressing her loyalty to her uncle following the loss of his fortune, Evans approaches wealth as a status not to be lauded and poverty as a condition not to be feared (*Inez* 18). As Irene explains to socialite Grace Harriss in *Macaria*, "Is people's worth to be determined only by the cost or the quality of their clothes? If I were to give your cook a silk dress exactly like that one your uncle sent from Paris, and provided her with a shawl and bonnet to match, would she be your equal do you think?" (21). In other words, Evans, through Irene, expresses that expensive ornamentation has no bearing on the value of an individual, which is not predicated upon that person's wealth or social status. Rather, as will be discussed below, Evans uses her novels to show that the only real value that wealth has is as a measure of Christian stewardship, a tool to help those in need.

As has been and remains a common trope in sentimental fiction, Evans's characters frequently choose to marry out of love rather than money, even when that

marriage might cost them their existing fortune. *Beulah*, *Macaria*, *Infelice*, *At the Mercy of Tiberius*, and *A Speckled Bird* all feature at least one character whose background is highlighted by ostracism from family members (or the threat thereof) for marrying someone deemed to be of a lower class. Lest the readers of Evans's novels get the message that only the upper classes are concerned with the class status of those whom their children wish to marry, she also presents cases in which those of a lower class truly are attempting to use a marriage to someone in the upper class to further their own positions or ambitions. *St. Elmo* and *Vashti* both feature flashback scenes that explain radical changes in the titular characters that came about because each discovered that his or her betrothed was using love in order to gain access to the other's fortune. Although the examples of St. Elmo Murray and Vashti Carlyle may appear to lend credence to the upper class fear that any lower class suitor is interested only in the person's fortune and position, they underscore Evans's overarching message concerning wealth: that wealth is neither inherently good nor evil but that the improper pursuit of or use of that wealth is what a person should avoid. In other words, Evans showed examples of how "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10).

Of course, the idea of marrying for love rather than for money certainly is not unique to the novels of Evans. However, rather than highlighting the romantic ideal of a marriage that crosses class lines, Evans presents these marriages as being fraught with tyrannical oppression extending from offended family members, thus using these marriages as a means of presenting wealth-based social inequality. Throughout *Macaria*, Evans expresses contempt at what she, via Irene, refers to as "ridiculous nonsense about aristocracy of family" (14). Much of the second half of Evans's wartime novel deals with conflict on the battlefield, but the novel as a whole deals with the conflict between classes

and the willful oppression of those in poverty. In describing Amy Aubrey's rejection of marriage to Leonard Huntingdon (and his fortune), Evans writes,

Mrs. Aubrey was the only daughter of wealthy and ambitious parents who refused to sanction her marriage with the object of her choice; and threatened to disinherit her if she persisted in her obstinate course. Mr. Aubrey was poor, but honest, highly cultivated, and, in every sense of that much-abused word, a gentleman. His poverty was not to be forgiven, however, and when the daughter left her father's roof, and wedded the man whom her parents detested, the die was cast; she was banished forever from a home of affluence, and found that she had indeed forfeited her fortune. (10)

Amy's choice is not simply one of love over money; the ramifications go much further than the selection of one spouse over another. Through the response of Amy's family to her rejection of a union based on wealth and social status, Evans begins her novel with a depiction of warfare between social classes, one which she furthers through Russell's conflict with his employer and through Huntingdon's perpetual hostility to all members of the Aubrey household.

When falsely accused of theft by his former employer, Jacob Watson, Russell attributes the slanderous accusation that hinders his finding another job to the class differences between himself and Watson, asking whether "the rich and the unprincipled [shall] eternally trample upon the poor and the unfortunate" (31). Through these words, Evans continues the issue of class warfare, observing that the wealthy use their money and status to oppress the impoverished. Evans elaborates on the un-Christian nature of this conflict via Russell's description of the situation, in which Watson, a professed Christian who "talks often about widows and orphans...knowing the circumstances that surround me, my poverty, my mother's affliction, on bare and most unwarrantable suspicion" fires Russell and spreads word that Russell committed a theft, one which is later discovered to have been committed by Watson's own son (31). As discussed earlier regarding Evans's criticism of Christians' behavior, Evans often used her novels to

admonish professed Christians against exhibiting decidedly un-Christian behavior, and she uses the incident between Russell and Watson as such an example, setting it as an indictment of those who proclaim their faith but who use their higher social status and wealth to encumber those who are without such means.

This brief subplot involving Russell and Watson serves as a prelude for Evans's depiction of the larger conflict involving Huntingdon and the Aubrey family, one which, although originating with Amy Aubrey's rejection of Huntingdon as a suitor, continues through Huntingdon's use of his wealth and power to tyrannically target the Aubrey family for oppression.

As discussed previously, Huntingdon used his wealth and influence to have Mr. Aubrey sentenced to death for manslaughter after he accidentally killed a man in a barroom fight. Later, when Irene discovers that Mrs. Aubrey needs an expensive, experimental surgery to prevent blindness, not only does her father forbid her from seeing or helping the Aubrey family in any way but he also takes "deep, unutterable joy" at Mrs. Aubrey's poor financial and physical health (25). He later sends Irene to a boarding school for trying to help Mrs. Aubrey's niece Electra with her art career, and he unsuccessfully tries to sabotage Russell Aubrey's political career (ironically sabotaging his own in the process). Of course, Mr. Huntingdon's actions toward the Aubrey family can rightly be attributed to personal revenge; however, it is through his financial power that Huntingdon exacts his revenge. This stands in stark contrast to Irene, who, as discussed below, uses her wealth and privilege for the benefit of those in need, frequently violating her father's wishes in order to do so, acquiring the money for Mrs. Aubrey's surgery, continuing to support Electra in her art career once both have moved to New York, and selling an expensive necklace her father purchased for her to wear.

Macaria is Evans's most extended exploration of oppression of the lower classes by the upper class, and many of her novels deal with such individual oppression, such as General Darrington's renunciation of his daughter and her family following her marriage to a man from the lower class (*At the Mercy of Tiberius*). However, Evans later shows a more institutional form of class oppression in her 1902 novel *A Speckled Bird*. The novel, released during the height of turn-of-the-century labor unrest driven by the rise of robber barons who amassed wealth at the expense of their workers, presents Evans's opposition both to the practices that led to labor unrest and to the methods undertaken by the labor movement to express that unrest. When speaking to her employer about a looming trolley workers' strike, Nona Dane reminds him of a former employee named Silas Bowen, who lost a leg and most of one hand when a trolley wire post, "decayed at its base," fell on him. The trolley company then found a man with a personal grudge against Bowen to falsely testify that he was intoxicated and unable to comprehend warnings about the post, thus leaving Silas Bowen and his family destitute (214-15). When the strike turns into a riot, Bowen not only refuses to leave to tend to his family, whose low-rent tenement apartment had just burned down, he throws a makeshift bomb that kills or fatally injures several people, including Nona Dane (218-20). Evans directly links all of these incidents back to the character traits of the trolley corporation owner by referring to his conscience as a "sieve" (214). In sum, Evans shows how an unconscionable deference to corporate finances created a chain of events that led to the collapse of a neglected post, the loss of a worker's leg, that worker being denied compensation, his family seeking substandard housing which then burns, and that worker being filled with rage to the point of throwing a bomb that kills several people. In other words, had the corporate owner acted out of conscience rather than being motivated only by financial concerns, none of the tragedies surrounding Silas Bowen would have

occurred. By treating Silas Bowen's case not just as one of neglect in maintaining safe working conditions and showing how the corporation used false testimony to cheat Bowen out of any worker's compensation, Evans presents a case of institutional oppression of the working class and the tragedy that can result from such oppression.

This is not to say, of course, that the only way in which Evans presents class warfare is in scenes of wanton oppression. Many of her novels also include depictions of animosity between classes, mostly stemming from the upper class. For example, in *Beulah*, the title heroine's life immediately following her departure from the orphanage is fraught with conflict that occurs simply because others look down upon her because of her status and origins. When Beulah takes a position as a governess, the children for whom she cares frequently belittle her. During this same period, Mrs. Grayson, who adopted Beulah's sister, Lilly, refuses to let Beulah see her sister, even when Lilly is near death. Described by Evans's narrator as "weak and worldly," Mrs. Grayson tells Beulah that she "ought not to expect to associate with [Lilly] as [she] used to do" because Lilly will "move in a circle very far above" that to which Beulah belongs (32). Most biting, Mrs. Grayson tells Beulah, "I am very sorry you happen to be her sister" (32), thus negating any familial bond in preference for bonds created by wealth and social status.

Even after she is taken in by her guardian—and future husband—Guy Hartwell, Beulah is subjected to insults because of her humble origins. After being sternly admonished by Mrs. Chilton, Hartwell's sister, to remain out of sight so that her upper class guests do not see her, Beulah leaves Hartwell's home and returns only when he vows to leave his sister and niece homeless and penniless if she does not. Similarly, Beulah implores her guardian to remove her from a private school and place her in a public school in order to avoid the harsh scrutiny of her classmates. Even once Beulah has established herself as a teacher and a writer, she still maintains a modest home

along with her former matron at the orphanage. This is not to suggest, however, that Evans creates a novel in which all wealthy characters are cruel and all impoverished characters are virtuous. Beulah becomes good friends with the affluent Asbury family, and Cornelia Graham, who had previously snubbed Beulah at the private school, becomes one of Beulah's closest friends. Conversely, Claudia and Eugene, Beulah's closest friends at the orphanage become estranged from her for a time after each becomes enraptured by the excesses of fashion and wealth.

As in her other novels, Evans does not use *Beulah* to oppose wealth *per se*. Rather, her primary critique in *Beulah* regarding wealth and social status is an invective against the behavior of certain wealthy individuals, especially those who purport to follow Christianity but who act as poor representatives of their faith. Most notably, Beulah discovers that Mrs. Grayson, who previously barred her visitation of her sister, even when Lilly was dying, is a professed Christian who attends weekly church services (84). Conversely, Guy Hartwell is an agnostic whose skepticism about belief in God wavers only at the novel's end. As discussed previously, this distinction casts the first seeds of doubt within Beulah regarding her own faith. In short, Evans uses the disparity between Beulah's treatment by wealthy Christians such as the Graysons and wealthy agnostics such as Hartwell and his colleague Dr. Asbury to underscore the importance for Christians to not confuse their prosperity with virtue, instead using their wealth as a means of helping others rather than helping only themselves while denigrating those who are less fortunate.

In later novels, Evans moves from simply showing the importance of the wealthy not rejecting or oppressing those in poverty and begins to show an outright rejection of fashionable society by those of the lower social class. In *St. Elmo*, after Edna is taken under the guardianship of Mrs. Murray, Mrs. Murray tries to mold her ward into the

epitome of high society, going so far as to pressure Edna into a courtship with wealthy bachelor Gordon Leigh, a courtship which Edna rejects because she cannot bring herself to love Gordon or to respect his intellect, which she deems inferior to her own. From the outset, Edna scoffs at the idea of her entrance into high society, chiding Mrs. Murray for acting as if Edna “had nothing else to do,” thus showing Evans’s preference for Edna’s intellectual and cultural pursuits over association with upper class society for no better reason than to do so (73). After humoring Mrs. Murray’s plan for her to attend a society event, Edna later exclaims, “Heaven save me from such aristocrats! and commit me rather to the horny but outstretched hands, the brawny arms, the untutored minds, the simple but kindly-throbbing hearts of *le prolétaire!*” (77). After experiencing similar belittlement as Beulah did at her private school, Edna proudly and adamantly rejects the society to which Mrs. Murray attempted to introduce her.

It is also worth noting that Edna’s denunciation of wealthy society is highlighted by her use of language that has come to be associated with Marx, citing a preference for “*le prolétaire*” over the upper class. Evans’s reference raises questions about its inclusion, with many possibilities for its use. Although it could indicate an allegiance to the Marxist ideal, Evans’s later writings show a marked opposition to socialism and a preference for capitalism if it can be removed from the corporate greed it often spawns. Given that she later equates the spread of Communism to Reconstruction in the South following the Civil War (*Tiberius* 58), one can safely assume that she viewed Communism with as much hostility as she and other Southerners viewed Reconstruction. Use of such terminology also fits right in line with the pedantic nature of Edna’s character. As has been widely discussed, in *St. Elmo*, Edna often drops references to other texts or lapses into other languages while speaking. As such, Edna’s reference to *le prolétaire* simply could be another such example of this pedantic quality. Furthermore, Edna’s

exclamation against what she saw as Southern aristocracy does not stem from a rejection of wealth per se—after all, she otherwise maintains her devotion to her wealthy guardian. Rather, her rejection of high society stems from the snobbish character traits she witnesses, thus serving as another example wherein Evans asserts that wealth is not a virtue in and of itself.

Perhaps Evans's greatest indictment of a society that emphasizes wealth as a virtue to be sought and obtained occurs in *Infelice*. When warning Regina of the dangers of the city and of the society which she is entering when she comes to live with Erle Palma, Olga explains,

Moloch reigns here, in far more pomp and splendor than the Ammonites ever dreamed of. Crowned and sceptered, he is now called 'Wealth and Fashion,' holds daily festivals, and mighty orgies where salads, boned turkeys, charlotte russe, *pistachio soufflés*, creams, ices, champagne-julep, *champagne frappe*, and persicot call the multitude to worship; and there, while the stirring notes of Strauss ring above the sighs and groans of the heroic victims, fathers and mothers bring their sons and daughters bravely decked in broadcloth and satin, white kid and diamonds, and offer them in sacrifice; and Moloch clasps, scorches, blackens all! (189)

By invoking the Ammonite idol Moloch, whose worship is notorious for involving child sacrifice, Evans, via Olga, makes a statement about the excesses of the bourgeois society and the sacrifices needed to maintain a presence in said society. Additionally, the reference to Moloch would carry a harsh connotation for Evans's Christian audience given that the Old Testament often places Moloch directly in an adversarial position against God. Olga nearly succumbs to the pressures of society, narrowly surviving a suicide attempt after discovering that the man whom she loved was using her as a stepping stone for his own advancement. Regina, however, follows the warning given to her by Mrs. Lindsay and "hold[s] fast to [her] principles" and avoids the pitfalls of "fashionable society" (168). Not only is Regina able to stay true to her Christian upbringing, by doing so she is able to introduce Erle Palma to a form of worship that is

not rooted in church attendance merely for the sake of appearance. Additionally, by maintaining her principles, Regina causes Peleg Peterson, who falsely poses as her father, to confess that he claimed to be her father after being paid to do so by General Laurence so that Regina's mother would be cut from his inheritance.

Beyond presenting examples of class oppression and animosity, Evans's novels are littered with barbs against those who define themselves by their wealth and display no other virtues. For instance, in *Infelice*, responding to an inquiry from Regina as to whether her father was a gentleman, Erle Palma states that he does not deserve "that honorable epithet; yet in the eyes of the world your father assuredly is in every respect a gentleman" (346). Through this quip by Regina's guardian, Evans dissociates Cuthbert Laurence's character from his wealth. This does not mean, however, that Evans ascribed such character to all who are wealthy—Palma himself is wealthy. In fact, at no point does Evans resort to the fallacy of a false dichotomy; rather, she separates a character's intrinsic character from his or her extrinsic wealth, providing protagonists and antagonists along all points of the social and financial spectrum. In so doing, Evans, who herself lived on each side of the class divide at various points in her life, presents wealth as neither an inherent good nor an inherent evil, instead emphasizing that any virtue related to affluence lies only in how a person uses that wealth. That said, the fact that, by and large, Evans's heroines either come from humble beginnings or humble themselves in spite of their background, indicates a greater sympathy with the lower class. Even Evans's heiress, Irene Huntingdon, is most notable for the charity that she performs throughout the novel and is, thus, perhaps Evans's strongest example of what she saw as a solution to issues related to wealth inequality.

Evans Presents Her Solution to the Problem

In addition to the individual cases of Silas Bowen or the snobbish attitudes faced by Beulah and Edna, Evans speaks out against the systemic oppression of the working class by the wealthy. However, rather than issuing a statement against what she saw as corporate greed, Evans puts in the mouth of Nona Dane not only an indictment of the upper class but also, when combined with other statements about Nona Dane's ideological activism, the seeds of criticism of the socialist ideal. In explaining to her estranged husband, Episcopal Priest Vernon Temple, the nature of her activism, Nona states that her fight is "the struggle of the poor to loosen the strangling clutch of the rich on their throats," a struggle that "will end only with the downfall of aristocrats" (191). Nona continues her denunciation of wealth by emphasizing the importance of "a pure woman" above that of a "crowned head" and by portraying society women as more attentive to their "opera boxes" and "lap dogs" than to their families (191-92). While this opposition to a society that favors wealth, luxury, and social status falls in line with Evans's emphasis on faith and selflessness, Evans also offers a critique of what she saw as the methods of socialist activists, which she presents as violent and misguided.

Over the course of the novel, Nona is described as a "socialist of the extreme type" who "seems to have gone wild among the hedges and ditches of socialism" (76, 134). She explicitly evokes Karl Marx in her speeches and associates with Russian Nihilists. Moreover, Evans depicts Nona as advocating such hyperbolic ideas as suggesting that "millionaires...be hunted like other criminals" and that the only classes that should exist be "workers and drones, governed by beehive laws" (191-92). Despite Nona's later plea with striking trolley workers to avoid resorting to violence, Evans presents her as an extremist motivated by a somewhat noble cause in fighting for an end to oppression of lower classes.

However, inasmuch as Evans shows sympathy towards an end to economic oppression, she also indicates that she views activists such as Nona as having ulterior, less altruistic motives to their actions. In describing the activism of Nona and others who share her views, Noel Herriott disparages them as “the clans of the disgruntled...who absolutely believe that the only real ‘devil is private property’ [and] denounce wealth and preach their gospel of covetousness” (76). In other words, Herriott argues that the “clans of the disgruntled” oppose the upper class not out of ideological principle but, rather, out of envious desire for wealth. Evans later echoes such sentiment in *Devota*, in which Mrs. Churchill laments that

[d]emagogues are persuading the disgruntled of all classes that they are now kicking the vile, corrupt body of corporations, but ... the kicks are aimed at the cornerstone of civic equity—the universal and inalienable right of every human being to the fruit of his labor, mental or manual—whether that fruit be dividends of the capitalists, or daily wages of miners, blacksmiths, and ploughmen. (64)

Through this statement, Evans presents the argument that those who attack corporate leaders for acquiring wealth are, in actuality, denying those leaders or businesses the earnings of their work just as if they were taking the earned wages of manual laborers. Mrs. Churchill continues to assert that the “popular creed” of “‘Love thy neighbor’s goods’” has taken hold of that same society that has fallen prey to the “gospel of covetousness” that Evans denounces in *A Speckled Bird* (65). Through her use of Biblical language—*gospel of covetousness, fruit of his labor, love thy neighbor’s goods*—Evans inextricably links her argument about class warfare tactics to Scripture, indicating a belief that labor activists were taking an unbiblical approach to the issue.

To sum up, Evans uses her novels to speak out, on the one hand, against greed and oppression of lower social and financial classes. Yet, on the other hand, she also uses her novels to speak out against the lower, oppressed classes taking matters into their own hands in order to eradicate their oppression and oppressors. Although these

two positions seem contradictory, they both stem from the idea of Christ-like selflessness that Evans promotes throughout all of her novels. Essentially, Evans presents both the oppressors and the activists as being equally desirous of power and wealth with the only difference being which individuals or institutions have that power and wealth. As with other social issues that she addresses, Evans encourages a Scriptural solution to the issue. In the case of the problem of class warfare, Evans indicates the need for those with wealth and social position to follow a Biblical model by using their resources to help others. In short, she calls for an intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation for the wealthy to give what they have to those who have none.

Evans ascribes no degree of inherent virtue to wealth, depicting it not as an end unto itself but a tool through which the wealthy follow the command of Jesus to the rich young man to “go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor” (Matt. 19:21) and follow the example of Barnabas, who “having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” for distribution among the impoverished (Acts 4:37). Throughout her novels, Evans presents many examples of such charity, one that acts fully in the interests of others.

In one of the most oft-quoted Biblical passages, Paul expounds upon the concept of charity, writing in the first letter to the Corinthians, “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not... Charity never faileth ...And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor. 13:4; 8; 13, KJV). Because of a change in meaning of the word charity, recent English translations such as the English Standard, New International, and New King James all use the word *love*, translated from the Greek word *agapé*, in place of *charity* throughout this chapter of 1 Corinthians. Paul Tillich describes this difference in translation thusly:

Agapé accepts the other in spite of resistance. It suffers and forgives. It seeks the personal fulfilment of the other. *Caritas* is the Latin translation

of *agapé*; from it comes the English word “charity,” which has deteriorated to the level of ‘charitable enterprises.’ But, even in this dubious meaning, it points to the *agapé* type of love which seeks the other because of the ultimate unity of being with being within the divine ground. (*Systematic* 1:280-81)

Throughout her novels, Evans gives examples of deeper *caritas* and shows examples of this level of charity. To be sure, many of her examples fit into the category of what Tillich refers to as “charitable enterprises,” but each of these enterprises is based upon the *caritas* that Evans presents her protagonists as showing for their fellow human beings. Furthermore, many such examples go above and beyond what many would deem as basic “charitable enterprises.”

Of all of Evans’s characters, the one who most naturally exhibits *caritas* toward others is Irene Huntingdon of *Macaria*. In her search for meaning beyond what her social status affords her, Irene turns to others for spiritual guidance, first to Mrs. Aubrey, and then to Harvey Young, the brother of a schoolmate. Together, the two instill in Irene’s open and humble heart a sense of charitable love that puts others ahead of herself. First, Mrs. Aubrey advises Irene to keep her “heart free from all selfish or ignoble feelings,” and to “pray to God for guidance,” asserting that the breakdown of charity is at fault for church divisions that led to multiple denominations (52, 53). Irene follows Mrs. Aubrey’s advice to remain selfless and begins to seek out additional spiritual counsel when the environment at her boarding school begins to produce bitterness and pride within her heart. Turning to Harvey when a severe ankle injury forces her to spend several weeks in the Young home, Irene receives greater instruction regarding selfishness and charity.

Before he leaves for the west for ministry, Harvey advises Irene to “cultivate enlarged views of life, suppress selfishness, and remember that charity is the key-stone of Christianity” (109). Later, Irene becomes disillusioned due to her association with those who emphasize wealth and social status above all else; she expresses her “desire...to

expend the fortune that I supposed belonged to me in alleviating suffering and want” but that she was beginning to see such lofty ideals as a childhood fantasy (236). However, despite her discouragement, Irene ultimately remains steadfast in her passion for serving others. Carrying Harvey’s words about charity with her, Irene exemplifies Christian charity throughout the remainder of the novel. From her early concern for Mrs. Aubrey’s ocular degeneration to her taking care of impoverished patients during a typhus outbreak to serving as a nurse during the Civil War, Irene displays a heart for caring for others, stating that her primary goal in life is “to be useful—to feel that [she has] gladdened some hearts, strengthened some desponding spirits, carried balm to some hearth-stones” (316). Beyond her physical care for the invalid and downtrodden, Irene is also a model of ideal Christian stewardship and seeks to use her resources not for her own material gain but to help others.

Despite Irene’s numerous charitable acts and goals, one particular example of stewardship stands out above all others. Upon discovering of a plot of land for sale, Irene determines that the land would be the perfect location for an orphanage, and she asks her father for five thousand dollars in order to purchase the lot. Her materialistic father, however, refuses her request and instead gifts to her an ornate diamond necklace that cost seven thousand dollars, the equivalent of several hundred thousand dollars in the twenty-first century. When explaining to her father her preference of a piece of land on which to build an orphanage over an extravagant necklace, Irene explains,

I love the smiles of happy children more than the radiance of these costly gems...When I think of the better use to which this money might be applied, the incalculable good it would effect, I shrink from hoarding it up on my person to dazzle the eyes of my associates, to incite some to imitate the lavish expenditure, and to awaken in others envious discontent at their inability to cover themselves with similar splendor.
(284)

In other words, Irene forsakes the ostentatious symbol of wealth and privilege, opting to use her resources to help others rather than to display her fortunes in an immodest show of her class status. Through Irene, Evans depicts wealth as a means to provide for those in poverty rather than as an end unto itself to be sought after solely for purposes of showing oneself to be wealthy. In short, Evans denounces the selfish individual who uses wealth to build up her own status and, instead promotes the Christian ideal of stewardship, in which the sole purpose of acquiring wealth is to assist those who are in financial need. Although Irene's dispute with her father over the expensive necklace is a grand example of her *caritas* and Evans's depiction of Christian stewardship, the novel as a whole favors the use of financial resources for helping others as opposed to acquiring material wealth for the sake of luxury and excess.

Similar to Irene, Beulah Benton displays such *caritas* in her later association with the Grayson family. Following her banishment from contact with her sister and Lilly's subsequent death, Beulah maintains a bitter attitude toward the Grayson family, Mrs. Grayson in particular. As years pass, her loathing for the Graysons intensifies as Claudia becomes a socialite who looks down upon Beulah despite their identical origins. However, following Beulah's reconversion to Christianity, her response to the Graysons takes a dramatic turn. When Mr. Grayson commits suicide after a succession of failed speculative investments, Mrs. Grayson and Claudia are scorned by the society they embraced, losing their social status along with their home. Beulah, however, rather than scoffing at her antagonists' misfortune greets Claudia warmly, "as if nothing had ever occurred to mar their intercourse" (404). Moreover, Beulah goes far beyond general compassion for the Graysons and astonishes her friends by exemplifying *caritas* through giving the Graysons nine thousand dollars that she had inherited from Cornelia so that they could resume their previous standard of living. To put this amount in perspective, it

is two thousand dollars more than the cost of the necklace Irene sells in *Macaria* in order to purchase land for and build a design school. Ultimately, it is this act of *caritas* and forgiveness that outwardly shows Beulah's internal transition of returning to her faith.

Thus, Evans calls upon her readers, not just of *Beulah*, but of all of her novels to act not as Mrs. Grayson, who professed Christianity but ignored an orphan's pleas, but as Beulah or Irene (or any of her heroines, for that matter) and make their belief known by the fruit of their actions in helping those in need. Specifically, Beulah and Irene both heed the words of James 1:27; they show "pure religion" by "visit[ing] the fatherless and widows in their affliction." In examining similarities between Marxism and Christianity, Luke Ferretter argues,

The value of the Marxist critique of religion for Christian theology, therefore, is that it constitutes a continual reminder to the latter of its historical tendency to subordinate the radical challenge of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven and of the commandment of love, with their inescapably social relevance, to an identification with political structures which guarantee material prosperity to churches and to Christians who benefit from these structures, but which deny such prosperity to large numbers of their fellow men and women. (57)

Although she opposes what she sees as the Marxist goal, particularly regarding the methods of the system's practitioners, Evans offers such a critique against the practice of Christian individuals and churches to seek first their own prosperity while oppressing those whom they perceive as standing in the way of said prosperity or ignoring those less prosperous.

To be sure, Evans does not endorse Nona Dane's proposed "workers and drones" model of forced equality, but she does advocate for the elimination of a social hierarchy based on wealth and privilege rather than virtue and character. Slavoj Žižek writes that "[i]t is precisely in order to emphasize this suspension of the social hierarchy that Christ ... address[es] in particular those who belong to the very bottom of the social hierarchy" (123). Through their own actions, Evans's protagonists remove themselves

from the social hierarchy Žižek discusses, instead using their own prosperity to help those left destitute, regardless of the reason for that destitution. As discussed previously, Evans creates a body of work that emphasizes Christ-like selflessness in all areas of life. Through numerous examples of characters applying this selflessness to financial issues—as well as examples of the societal and individual damage caused through financial greed and selfishness—Evans challenges her readers to display their Christian faith not simply through acts such as going to church but through how they use their God-given resources to care for others.

To underscore her association of charitable stewardship and Christ-likeness, Evans provides two very specific examples to indicate characters' charitable growth. As mentioned above, Irene's first charitable act in *Macaria* is to procure funding for Amy Aubrey's surgery to prevent her blindness. Similarly, in *St. Elmo*, St. Elmo's turn from rakishness to repentance is marked by his paying for a blind girl's eye surgery. Although the surgery is successful only in *St. Elmo*—a point likely made in *Macaria* to help show Irene's perseverance in the face of discouragement—the fact that Evans selects charitable acts that would medically perform one of the tell-tale miracles of Christ (Isaiah 35:5⁶; Matthew 11:5⁷) highlights Evans's primary message of the importance of being Christ-like. Ultimately, it is this message of Christ-likeness over unfettered individualism that Evans emphasizes throughout her body of work, applying this ideal to each of the issues that she addresses.

⁶ Isaiah 35:4-5: Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. ⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

⁷ Matthew 11:2-5: Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, ³And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? ⁴Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: ⁵The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

Chapter 6

Coda

In *St. Elmo*, Edna's New York employer reports to his wife a friend's take on Edna's writing: "I can trust my girls' character to her training, for she is a true woman; and if she errs at all in any direction, it is the right one, only a little too rigidly followed" (335). The praise heaped upon Edna is the same praise that Augusta Jane Evans sought for her writing. Evans used her novels to provide her mostly female audience with instruction regarding Christian virtue in the face of a world that presented many challenges to that worldview. From agnostic philosophies to the women's movement to slavery to class warfare, Evans addressed rising social issues all with the same underlying attitude of humility. Time and time again throughout her novels, Augusta Jane Evans emphasizes the value of Christ-like selflessness to her readers. To give but a few examples, Beulah Benton gives nine thousand dollars to the now-destitute woman who forbade her from seeing her dying sister; St. Elmo Murray pays for a surgery that restores a young girl's sight; Irene Huntingdon founds both an orphanage and a design school to assist widows and orphans of the Civil War; Beryl Brentano cares for fellow prison inmates during a diphtheria outbreak.

As a woman writer who wrote about women, Evans's work naturally has garnered a good deal of attention from feminist critics, many of whom disagree on whether Evans's novels attempt to subvert patriarchal society or to derail the burgeoning women's rights movement. However, as this dissertation has shown, failing to consider Evans's Christian beliefs and purpose yields a limited reading of her work. Reading Evans through the lens of her Christian faith offers insight to her work that cannot be seen when that Christian lens is removed. As discussed, Evans approaches faith, philosophy, virtue, gender roles, slavery, and wealth and poverty from a Christian point of

view. However, these are not the only issues that Evans covers. Other issues such as capital punishment, parent-child relationships, and Darwinism each receive treatment from Evans in at least one of her novels (but often multiple novels), with each approached from the same Biblical perspective as the issues discussed in this dissertation. The scope of this dissertation extends only to the most notable topics of Evans's work, but each of these others certainly would be worthy of inclusion and further investigation.

To touch on only one of these issues, the entirety of Evans's final novel *Devota* takes place at a dinner party wherein the hosts have enlisted the aid of their friend Devota Lindsay in convincing the governor—to whom she was once engaged—to commute the death sentence of an acquaintance's husband. Although the novel does include romantic tension between Devota and the governor as well as mentioning an unspecified scandal that drove them apart, Evans's main point of discussion is the ethics of capital punishment and justice. When Devota raises the point that the man's execution will leave his wife a widow and his children orphans, the governor points out that the murderer did the same to the man whom he killed, creating an ethical quandary (88). Evans's heroine then argues that "capital punishment is merely revengeful, judicial murder" and "avails nothing as requital for the destruction of the first victim" (93). Here Evans starkly voices the view she alluded to decades earlier in *Macaria* when Irene questions a judicial system that would allow dueling yet sentence Mr. Aubrey to hang for manslaughter. In addition to *Devota* and *Macaria*, Evans deals with issues of murder, justice, and repentance in several novels. In *St. Elmo*, Evans again raises the issue of legalized dueling through Edna's early exposure to the practice and her later discovery that St. Elmo killed a man in duel. Additionally, in *At the Mercy of Tiberius*, heroine Beryl Brentano is wrongly convicted of her grandfather's murder and uses her time in prison to

spread the Gospel to those guilty of the murders for which they were convicted. Each of these stands as an example of Evans's arguing against a judicial system that allows unrepentant murder but is harshest on repentant killers, whom Evans presents as finding repentance. This is but one example and a brief overview of an additional aspect of Evans's novels that is worthy of further study, especially regarding the conjunction of her views on justice with her Christian faith.

Beyond this additional avenue of study regarding Evans's application of her faith to social issues, many of Evans's novels also invite a psychoanalytical interpretation related to her heroines and their fathers, their much older suitors, or, in some cases, both. Evans herself had a conflicted relationship with her father and married a man twenty-eight years her senior, and these relationships seem to form the models for many of the relationships in her novels. Each of Evans's heroines either has a father who is deceased prior to the opening of the novel (e.g., Inez, Mary, Beulah, Electra, Edna, Salome, and Beryl, as well as Russell Aubrey), does not know her father (e.g., Regina), or has a father with whom she becomes estranged during the course of the novel (e.g., Irene and Eglah). Furthermore, Evans's heroines who marry not only marry significantly older men but the romantic interests often first meet and take an interest in one another when the girl is a young teenager, if not younger. For example, in *A Speckled Bird*, Eglah Kent first meets future husband Noel Herriott when she is only ten years old and he has already developed a successful career as an anthropological researcher, a plot point that would quickly call Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* to the mind of the modern reader. To add to the unusualness of their relationship, not only does ten-year-old Eglah instantly fall in love with the much older Noel, but he reciprocates her feelings. Beulah Benton, Edna Earl, and Regina Orme also all eventually marry men whom they first meet at only twelve or thirteen years of age, when the men in question were all in their mid-thirties. To top

things off, Beulah and Regina each take husbands—Guy Hartwell and Erle Palma, respectively—who once served as their respective guardians (with Hartwell even offering to adopt Beulah at one point), meaning that these two heroines marry men with whom their original relationship was more like a father and daughter than like that of two would-be lovers, thus giving an additional layer of meaning to these relationships, one that certainly could be discussed at greater length.

Many critics have argued with varying degrees of severity that Augusta Jane Evans is a flawed novelist. However, a good deal of this criticism seems to be as much a criticism of popular conventions of the day as they do of Evans's novels. Given that Evans sought to reach the widest possible audience with her message, it stands to reason that she would make use of the literary conventions that most readers sought at the time. Even the much-maligned pedantry of her classical references serve Evans's purpose in writing. David Bordelon reports several instances of contemporary reviewers who praised the fact that Evans "kept [them] running to the Dictionary or to an encyclopedia" to expand their own knowledge through researching Evans's ornamental vocabulary or obscure references (198). In several of her books, Evans argues for an expansion of women's education into the classics often reserved for men, and, based on Bordelon's description, it would appear that her books played no small part in providing that education, thus indicating that Evans achieved her primary purpose in writing.

To focus on any perceived flaws or to approach Evans from only one perspective limits her successes and disregards Evans's intellectual and critical acumen, especially considering that she sought to write influential, didactic novels and succeeded in doing so. In short, Evans placed her greatest emphasis on the messages that she attempted to convey and the critical thought that she applied to those messages. With that end in mind, designing novels that fell in line with the bestselling genre of the period makes

sense, logically speaking. Focusing on Evans's aim in writing and elevating her Christian perspective to the forefront of critical examination shows that Evans, although not a theologian or minister by trade, used her novels to express theological arguments about issues that she deemed important for her Christian audience. Keeping in mind this emphasis on theological discourse, as well as the other complexities Evans raises, to discount her as merely a writer of sentimental fiction or, as some critics have attempted, to label her either a feminist or anti-feminist writer—or, for that matter, only as a Christian writer—is to ignore a writer who used popular genre conventions to offer in-depth commentary on issues facing readers of the time. Furthermore, limiting Evans as only a writer of her time—which, to be sure, can be argued concerning her views on slavery and women in the electorate—ignores the fact that many of her ideas, especially her theological ideas, anticipate those of many notable theologians—such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, or Reinhold Niebuhr—who not only wrote almost a century after Evans but who are widely read in the twenty-first century. Additionally, Evans entered into many doctrinal or philosophical debates that still rage today, such as Mary's refutation of Catholicism in *Inez*. With this in mind, many of Evans's ideas—again, especially her theological perspectives—not only shed light on Christian values of her era but continue to have value today.

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Biographical Information

Jeff King graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1997 with a B.A. in European Studies, focusing on Russian Culture and Society and writing his senior thesis on the work of Soviet dissident writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He continued to hone his research skills in the field of exercise science, earning an M.A. in 2001. Jeff King resumed his literary studies in 2005 and received an M.A. in English from East Tennessee State University in 2008, completing his Master's thesis on the role that the novels of Jack Kerouac played in bridging the gap between nineteenth century authors such as Herman Melville and Fyodor Dostoevsky and postmodern writers such as Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo. Jeff began working toward his Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Arlington in 2008 and will complete his degree in May 2016.

Most of Jeff King's research has explored the connections between authors of different periods, authors to their historical climate, and the religious, philosophical, and metaphysical nature of literature. He plans to further pursue these topics with authors ranging from Johann von Goethe to Marilynne Robinson. Additionally, he plans to integrate his personal penchant for digital archiving into his academic repertoire.