The Revolt of the Women: An Investigation of the Links Between Victorian Prostitutes and the British Women's Suffrage Movement

Rachel Holm

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with Honors in History

Southwestern University
2017

Approved

24 April 2017
Melissa Byrnes
Honors Advisor
Department of History

Jessica L. Hower 24 April 2017
Jessica Hower
Committee Member
Department of History

24 April 17
Alison Kafer
Committee Member
Department of Feminist Studies

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Southwestern History Department for granting my proposal to study this fascinating corner of history. Each of your classes armed me with the skills necessary to tackle this project: to think critically and holistically, to communicate clearly and plainly, and to wring everything possible out of my sources. I credit each one of you for the completion of this paper.

Thank you to Dr. Alison Kafer for agreeing to serve on my committee. My Feminist Studies minor proved quite valuable in reading my source material and analyzing historical gender roles. But it was the guidance you have given me as a student activist that indeed inspired this project in the first place. Thank you for encouraging me in all my endeavors here at SU, and thank you for your thoughtful and challenging commentary on earlier versions of this paper.

It takes a special kind of person to agree to take on something unknown. Thank you to Dr. Melissa Byrnes for agreeing to take on me, an unknown student studying material outside your field. Getting to know you over the past year has been fabulous. Thank you for all of your questions, suggestions, and reassurances over the course of this project. Even as I doubted, backtracked, and changed course many times over, your confidence and interest never wavered. Thank you so much for everything you have done for me.

Thank you to Dr. Jessica Hower, who is the reason I became a history major in the first place. It would be impossible for me to list all the ways that I owe this project to you. I am so grateful that I was in class with you my first semester of college. Over my four years here, you have challenged me to become a more thoughtful writer and thinker. My first-year self could have never imagined completing an honors project, but through your enthusiasm and kindness you have pushed me to achieve something I never thought possible. I've had so much fun doing this research and I am so happy that you were able to serve on my committee. Thank you for, even on your sabbatical, taking the time to look over early versions of this paper. Thank you for your helpful (and thorough!) commentary every step of the way. I am so grateful for everything you've done to support me over the past four years.

And finally, thank you to my family, who have always encouraged me to read, to learn, to doubt.

Introduction

In the 1860s the British Parliament gave police the authority to jail any woman that they considered to be a prostitute. Several groups formed in opposition to these policies, known as the Contagious Diseases Acts. One, the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, or the LNA, had this to say:

> "We have been taught that no English subject can be arrested, subjected to outrage, or imprisoned either with or without their consent, on a mere suspicion without proof, or on mere hearsay evidence, without any public trial...We maintain the police inspector is, under these Acts, the prosecutor, not the witness...We have been taught that it is the glory of English justice that it never throws the onus of disproof on the accused, that it holds every accused person innocent till he is proved guilty. All these things we have been taught to regard as the securities of English liberty, long fought for, dearly bought, and most jealously guarded; we find that all these are repealed, so far as women are concerned, by these Acts. We wish to know what English women have done that they are deprived of a protection freely accorded to the vilest criminals, if only they happen to be men."[1]

The middle class members of the LNA, who more likely than not would never be personally affected by the acts, nevertheless recognized that the acts infringed on the constitutional rights of all English women, not just prostitutes. Those in favor of the acts were confused by the sentiments of the LNA. These respectable ladies, they reasoned, had nothing in common with the "vicious" prostitutes spreading diseases in garrison towns and so had nothing to worry about. Some MPs expected women to be grateful that the acts protected them from disease. But by making sex a public issue, Parliament had inspired the LNA to reexamine women's treatment by the state. What they found, over the course of the repeal movement, was that women's lack of political rights made it easier to justify harsh restrictions on their access to public spaces.

---

[1] "Ladies National Appeal and Protest," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic, Vol. 2*, ed. Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp (New York: Routledge, 2003), 55.

The story of the Ladies Appeal and Protest I think neatly highlights the focus of this paper. The controversy surrounding the CD acts generated a much broader debate about women's status in English law and society. The repeal movement, specifically, the opposition of middle and upper class women to the regulation of (mostly lower class) prostitute's bodies built the necessary activist infrastructure to facilitate the British women's suffrage movement. Opposition publications often called the acts unconstitutional.[2] The repealers argued that the CD acts violated women's civil rights, thus pointing out the limits of women's legal status in England. Some of the women repealers, frustrated about the limits to their political agency, wrote about the need for women's suffrage. Much has been written about Victorian prostitution and about the British women's suffrage movement, but I think a more explicit connection can be drawn between the two.

The CD acts and their repeal movement present historians with tremendous material for study. The legislation of sexual behavior made formerly private matters the subject of public debate; where source material about prostitution is thin before the nineteenth century, the acts generated quite a bit of written material. This blurring of lines between public and private allows for inquiries into Victorian gender roles and provides insight into the effect that debates about prostitution had on the formation of class consciousness among women. In this paper I examine the scientific debate that preceded the adoption of the CD acts, the text of the acts themselves, and the rhetoric of the subsequent repeal movement. I find much in common between the literature of the repeal movement and two distinct moments of women's suffrage activism. The

---

[2] "Ladies National Appeal and Protest," and Harriet Martineau, "Letters to the *Daily News*," both in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*; Joseph Edmondson, "An Enquiry into the Causes of the Great Sanitary Failure of the State Regulation of Social Vice (1897)," in *The History of Sexuality in Europe: A Sourcebook and Reader*, ed. Anna Clark (New York: Routledge, 2011), 176-181.

first moment came in 1866, before the repeal movement, and the second one after, in the 1890s and into the twentieth century. The second was successful where the first was not, not only in women getting the vote, but in stimulating debate about women in the public sphere. In the intervening half-century, a mass of work reevaluating gender roles and a woman's place in society was published, a significant portion relating to prostitution and the CD acts. Although no historical event occurs without many disparate causes, it is significant that by the time the CD acts were repealed in 1886 many members of the LNA had explicitly called for the need for women's suffrage.

During the course of this project, several voices came to the fore. The most significant was that of Josephine Butler (1828-1906). As the head of the LNA, she became the most recognizable repealer. In touring through Europe making speeches about her position,[3] she garnered support at home and abroad. In many of her writings about prostitution and the CD acts she based her arguments on the belief that men and women should be treated equally by the state. Her rhetoric departed from most around the acts at the time: often she refused to propose methods of controlling disease and instead attacked the oppressive ways prostitution was being governed in England. Often she recounted the personal stories of prostitutes she had befriended. Her interactions with prostitutes led her to believe that women generally needed better access to education and "legitimate" employment.

But Butler's activism was not limited to prostitution reform, and as I progressed it became clear how relevant her writings on women's education and employment were to the repeal debate, and how similar her language was to suffrage literature. Studying Butler's writings

---

[3] Josephine Butler, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes* Vol I, ed. Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp (New York: Routledge, 2003), 130.

about women's place within the state thus forms an important part of this paper. Although Butler is not meant to represent the opinions of every repealer, her status as the most well known repealer charges her words with their own special weight.

Another significant voice in the reevaluation of women's place within the state was John Stuart Mill's (1806-1873). Like Butler, he argued that women should be admitted to the workforce at the same rate as men, although his arguments focused on the position of upper-class women and he was perhaps a little tone deaf to the educational and employment limits of lower-class women. He was an early advocate of women's suffrage, and I use the pro-suffrage petition he presented to Parliament in 1866 as an indication of significant interest in women's suffrage that predates by several decades the conventional starting point for the suffrage movement. While women's suffrage would not become *the* topic of political conversation until later in the century, Mill expressed a similar understanding of women's oppression to what Butler and the LNA identified in the repeal movement. And so while the suffrage movement would not be successful until the first decades of the twentieth century, I have found that the ideas proposed by Mill became more palatable after the repeal of the CD acts in 1886. While women's suffrage and the CD acts have been thoroughly studied, there is a more explicit connection that can be made between Mill's mid-century writings on suffrage and the rhetoric used by the LNA in the repeal movement. In particular, these writings show gender historians the intimate links between the humanizing of prostitutes and the more abstract theorizing about a more equitable social contract between men and women. Both of these ideas were heavily based on Victorian ideas of women's gender and sexuality, and studying prostitution in conjunction

with suffrage more effectively illustrates the ways that the later Victorians were revising and rejecting the conceit of the public and private spheres.

I compare the position of the LNA with Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), who, although a repealer did not share Butler's sympathy with prostitutes. Her early objection to the acts as an endorsement of "vice" did not succeed in changing the position of Parliament, and her inability to consider the welfare of prostitutes made her unable to work with the LNA. Her objection to "vice" and appeals to morality were not enough to see the acts repealed, so studying her methods in conjunction with Butler's has demonstrated the effectiveness of Butler's strategy of humanizing the prostitute.

William Acton (1812/3-1875) is another well known actor in the study of Victorian prostitution and the CD acts. A scientist, he envisioned the state regulation of prostitution as the way to cure venereal disease, which admittedly was rampant among the British navy. His 1857 work, *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects*, is one of the most widely referenced in the study of Victorian prostitution. Butler and the LNA considered him to be responsible for the passage of the acts. As a scientist, Acton lent a legitimacy to politicians who used the control of venereal disease as an excuse to police women's entrance into public spaces. Because of the influence of his proposals on public policy, he constitutes a major section of this study.

The study of Victorian prostitution owes a great deal to Judith Walkowitz's 1980 *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.[4] Her social history also focused on the CD acts and their repeal, specifically on case studies of several subjected port towns. Her groundbreaking work

[4] Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

paved the way for Lucy Bland, in *Banishing the Beast* and Susan Kingsley Kent, in *Sex and Suffrage in Britain* to explore the role of sexuality in the British women's suffrage movement and first-wave feminism.[5] So although work has been done to identify the role of sexuality in suffrage, there is a more explicit connection to be made between the nineteenth century conversations about prostitution and suffrage. By studying the political rhetoric of the LNA and the two suffrage movements within the context of Victorian gender and sexuality I construct a history of Victorian political thought that incorporates gender history, Marxist history, the history of activist literature, and the history of science. In the pages that follow I demonstrate how debates about gender and sexuality evolved alongside debates about women's legal and social place within Victorian society.

John Stuart Mill and mid-nineteenth century suffrage

In 1866, philosopher and MP John Stuart Mill presented a petition for women's suffrage in the House of Commons.[6] The measure was unsuccessful, but the incident speaks to the changing ideas about women's treatment by the state that would circulate in the decade to follow. In a speech to the House of Commons, Mill, an unapologetic advocate for women's equality, argued in favor of women's suffrage on the grounds of precedent. Women had already been granted the right to their own property, Mill reminded his audience. As "the English representative

[5] Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Sexuality and the Early Feminists*. (New York: New Press, 1995); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1987). First-wave feminism refers to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which saw political advances for women in Western countries. Because during the Victorian period (as well as today) the term "feminist" was used so inconsistently I try to avoid using it when referring to this time period.

[6] Josephine Butler was among the 1500 female signatories.

system...represents not persons but property," those women who owned property were being denied the right to control it.[7] Moreover, women were already in the public sphere, as "many Englishwomen [were] already something else besides wives and mothers."[8] Thus, the counterargument that women would be unsuitable for the public sphere was dulled.

Mill also took up the notion of citizenship, arguing that if English men could claim property based on birthright then so could English women.[9] A widow, he pointed out, could be guaranteed that her property would not be seized and given to a male relative; to do so would be "Oriental," or not only un-English but backwards and barbaric.[10] Yet the same widow would have no political avenue to voice her opinion about taxes levied on that property. Based on Britain's established legal system, Parliament owed women the right to vote.

To Mill, England was ready for women's suffrage. Civilization was only improved through human intervention, and female suffrage would be a mark of English superiority. Not every society was sufficiently advanced to allow for women's political equality, subscribing to the Whiggish view of history, Mill believed that civilizations progressed on a linear course to eventually achieve a kind of utopic state. That women's suffrage was being discussed at the Parliamentary level as early as the mid-nineteenth century runs counter to the common narrative about first-wave feminism;[11] the British women's suffrage movement is most often associated with the early twentieth century.[12] The petition presented by Mill indicates that although the

---

[7] John Stuart Mill, "Petition Presented to the House of Commons by Mr. J. Stuart Mill, June 7, 1866," in *A Feminist Reader: Feminist Thought From Sappho to Satrapi, Vol. 2*, eds. Sharon M. Harris and Linda K. Hughes (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 199.
[8] Mill, "Petition Presented to the House of Commons," in *Feminist Reader*, 201.
[9] Mill, "Petition Presented to the House of Commons," in *Feminist Reader*, 201-2.
[10] Mill, "Petition Presented to the House of Commons," in *Feminist Reader*, 196.
[11] See footnote 5.
[12] Maureen Wright, *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement: The Biography of an Insurgent Woman* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 1.

women's suffrage movement would morph into something more resonant in the intervening sixty years, women's place in the state was already being reconsidered by politicians and philosophers.

The next step in the progression of English society was women's suffrage, but women's place in society and the state would not be solved solely by gaining the vote. Women as a class were kept in a cycle of oppression by men as a result of their sex. Mill argued in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) that the "legal subordination of one sex to another" was not only wrong in itself but also one of the "chief hindrances to human improvement."[13] As a liberal philosopher, Mill's vision for English society was a progression of great achievements that ultimately resulted in a kind of oasis and the completion of the perfect society. Mill and other philosophers like him considered great human achievements to be part of the long arc of history moving towards this ideal society. This progressive vision, although appreciative of the contributions of the past, would not be constrained by conventions Mill considered useless or harmful to society. This put him at odds with more traditional Victorians who were busy writing housekeeping manuals aimed at women in the private sphere. Society would have to be reorganized to make room for women in the public sphere. And, as Josephine Butler was arguing at the same time, women would need to be better educated in order to take on public sphere responsibilities such as voting and skilled jobs.

Butler's 1868 pamphlet *Education and the Employment of Women* advocated for improving the education of Britain's governesses. The undervaluation of women's work kept women below men on the social hierarchy. Butler argued that by educating women equally to

[13] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *J.S. Mill: On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 119. Originally published 1869.

men, women could provide for themselves without having to resort to prostitution. Of course in this imagined social landscape women would have little need of men, especially if they were able to vote for their own representatives. Additionally, the education system Butler proposed would eventually eradicate the institution of prostitution in Britain, something which even many advocates of the Contagious Diseases Acts did not want to see happen. Below I will more fully examine the rhetoric in *Education* and its role in developing Butler's ideas about prostitution and women's place in the public sphere.

Those who argued that a woman's place was in the home cited what they considered a fundamental truth of human existence: that women were physically weaker than men and so from the beginning of civilization had to be protected. And, in more "primitive" societies, Mill contended, it might have been the case that society as a whole benefited from women being sheltered in the home, but this "system of force," in which the strong controlled the weak absolutely, was no longer legitimate under "[the English] system of law."[14] Mill, taking stock of the world around him, was poking holes in the idea that women naturally belonged in the private sphere. Men, he argued, could not know where women best belonged because, since the beginning of civilization, women had been forcibly relegated to the private sphere by their male captors. If traditionalists truly wanted to defend their argument they would have to allow a period of experimentation in which men were subjected to women's rule in an inversion of the current status quo. Taking this line of thought to its logical endpoint, nothing could be lost by allowing women to try their hand at anything they desired in the public sphere. Nothing inherent in their gender would prohibit them from participation in public life.

---

[14] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 127.

England, although an initial beneficiary of the Atlantic slave trade, was one of the first countries to outlaw the keeping of slaves in 1833.[15] Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Mill was careful to draw explicit connections between the cruel injustice of keeping slaves and the social status of women. Men, even the poor without many resources, were responsible for perpetuating this system of slavery. To ensure that women remained happily submissive to them, men had to "enslave their minds." Men, controlling everything including the education of girls (future women), were able to teach girls from the beginning that a woman's duty was to "live for others," in particular "the men with whom they [were] connected."[16] Considering that women were brought up knowing that "resignation of all individual will into the hands of a man" was "an essential part of sexual attractiveness," it left women little choice besides marriage. When they passed those values on to their daughters, the system would perpetuate itself. But that self-perpetuation did not mean that the values were *natural*, Mill carefully pointed out. Slaves, he asserted, were not born but created. That men had enslaved women so effectively was merely a testament to man's power to shape his social and political environment. Women were enslaved as a result of their gender and sexuality, meaning that even upper class women with access to relatively more resources than poor women were victims of this system. This class consciousness would be useful in the coming repeal and suffrage movements. Mill analyzed sexuality as a component of contemporary marriage relationships and recognized, as Butler would, that the reduction of women to the sexual complement of men was a key reason for their lack of political agency.

---

[15] Jane Jordan, *Josephine Butler* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2001), 11.
[16] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 132.

Marriage, being the primary male-female relationship in English society, was cited as a significant site of oppression. The current marriage relationship granted significant power to the man over the woman, leaving her almost no formal power over her situation. Again comparing the marriage relationship to slavery, Mill noted that the husband literally was a "sovereign lord" over his wife, he was in charge of her as a despotic government could be over its subjects.[17] Like the slave she had no property or rights of her own, and it was up to the discretion of her husband to bestow those things upon her. Like the slavemaster, he was at perfect liberty to withhold property and rights. He could, almost without consequence, control her physically, even to the point of murdering her, and go unpunished. She could hope for little legal recourse: only recently had women been able to seek a divorce, and even then this option was only available to those "of the higher ranks."[18] A divorced woman could not be sure of ever seeing her children again, as she had no legal claim to them. Her husband then controlled her completely, both formally and informally. "Though she [the wife] may know that he hates her...he can...enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her own inclinations," in other words, he was entitled to rape her.[19] Sexual violence was an important method for controlling women. Because a woman's identity could be completely reduced to her sexuality, violent husbands could demonstrate their power over their wives through rape. And because a wife belonged to her husband as property, the legal concept of marital rape was nonexistent.

---

[17] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 147.
[18] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 149.
[19] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 148.

For Mill, the marriage relationship, in which a man had complete power over his submissive wife, was not something inherently "natural." Women were conditioned to their selfless behavior, "universally taught that they are born and created for self-sacrifice" for the sake of their husband and children.[20] That women were left with few options outside marriage ensured that most would enter into it during their lives; this maintained the social and political oppression of women as a class. Women were no more obedient "by nature" than men. This virtue of female obedience was a something akin to the "declining portions" of humanity, "Islamism and Brahminism."[21] The obedience that the Christian church demanded from women was at odds with the progressivism the English claimed for themselves. The treatment of women by men was intimately connected to Mill's image of Britain as the leader of the Western nations. Until the institution of marriage was made safe for women, the British could not claim to be a truly progressive people.

Men as a class would have to give up some of their rights in order to make marriage an equal partnership. Mill provided an outline of how a more equitable partnership could be realized and modeled en masse. Men must learn to be more considerate of their partners: they needed to "no longer be taught to worship their own will as such a grand thing that it is actually the law for another rational being," namely, their wives.[22] Since there was "nothing men learn more easily than self-worship," it would take a large-scale realignment of gender values to bring about the

---

[20] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 158.
[21] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 162. For what it is worth, it could be pointed out that at the time of Mill's writing the British army had a controlling presence in India, a country with a Hindu majority and a substantial Muslim minority. It was in India that many British soldiers began contracting venereal disease from their affairs with local prostitutes. For further reading on the British and prostitution in India, see Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* and Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*.
[22] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 158.

kind of change Mill envisioned. Acknowledging the artificiality of gender construction is not something for which first-wave feminism is known (and I am not sure that Mill would have self-identified as a feminist), but Mill's analysis in *The Subjection of Women* indicates that this early feminist thinker thought of women as a class. His contemporary, Josephine Butler, came to a similar understanding of gender. We can see it inform their writing and activism as they advocated for a general advancement in women's position in society.

Women's potential in society was unlimited by any natural characteristic.[23] Here Mill departed quite a bit from the contemporary notion of separate spheres, arguing that already women performed many essential public roles. Society would only be improved by women's full entrance into public life. This would not stop at voting; women would become equal to men in their ability to educate and provide for themselves.

The English image of a woman was no more "natural" than that of any other society. All constructions of gender were artificial, social norms rather than natural truths. English society "[had] ordered things" such that women were expected to be the caretakers.[24] This did not mean that women were inherently gifted at caring for the needs of their husbands and children; men possessed the same "consideration [for their] fellow creatures" as women.[25] When the English gentleman exclaimed that women were more moral than men, it was an "empty compliment," given that women were prohibited from voting and from so many "manly" professions.[26] I doubt even Butler, who enthusiastically advocated for advancements in women's education and

[23] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 167.
[24] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 192.
[25] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 192.
[26] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 192.

employment opportunities, would have fully agreed with Mill's conclusions about the artificiality of gender.

As uncompromising as his rhetoric was, Mill avoided emotional vignettes of women with wasted potential, agreeing that there was "never any want of women who complain of ill usage by their husbands."[27] Instead he used a rhetorical tactic that nearly removed humanity from the debate altogether. Whether this was intended to diffuse hot tempers we cannot know, but it oriented his audience away from the personal "home and hearth" to the more abstract, emotionless language of nation building. His argument in both his speech before Parliament and in *Subjection of Women* was focused on proving that women deserved to be full partners in public life because of the advancement of English society. His colleagues in Parliament, and his audience at the upper echelons of British society, would likely be more receptive to an argument based on a congratulatory view of British law and civilization. Indeed he anticipated one of the most enduring arguments against expanding roles for women, that "mass of feeling to be contended against."[28] The reflex to "protect old institutions and customs" would be what prevented his vision from being realized. Nevertheless, the suffrage petition, while not immediately fruitful was an important step in the direction of women's equal treatment by the state.

William Acton and scientific interest in prostitution reform

[27] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 132.
[28] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, in *On Liberty*, 121.

Mill's ideas did not germinate in a vacuum. Darwin's theory of evolution and the coining of the new term "social Darwinism" had introduced a scientific dimension into the ways that women were oppressed by society and the state.[29] Researchers sought to understand human sexuality in scientific terms. Darwinism, and its social implications particularly, were seductive to those seeking to rationalize their rule over whole masses of people. Men's sexual appetite, no longer a sin, was an (albeit unfortunate) biological fact of their species. William Acton was a British medical doctor[30] who in 1836 studied venereology in Paris and then returned home to work at St. Bartholomew's hospital in London in 1840.[31] Considered an expert in his field, he became known for his books *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1857) and *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects* (1857). The former dealt with anatomy and was targeted to a medically knowledgeable audience; the latter was a more general discourse on the social ramifications of prostitution.[32] *Prostitution* was widely read, and Acton's ideas contributed to the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts.[33] To contemporaries Acton was a progressive, even radical in his interest in prostitution and the sociology of sex.[34] By the

---

[29] Social Darwinism was a contemporary term that appropriated Darwin's theory of evolution to explain an individual's relative success in society. See Lesley Hall, "Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity, and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Gender & History* 16, no. 1 (April 2004): 36-56. Accessed 16 February 2016.

[30] M. Jeanne Peterson notes in "Dr. Acton's Enemy" that Acton never actually earned an M.D., which was not uncommon among "medical men" of the time. Peterson, "Dr. Acton's Enemy," *Victorian Studies* 29, no. 4 (Summer 1986), 570.

[31] Lesley A. Hall, "Acton, William John (1812/13–1875)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39445, accessed 3 March 2017]

[32] Hall, "Acton, William John," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

[33] Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*, 4. Marcus identifies Acton as one of the primary "agitators" for the Contagious Diseases Act of 1866.

[34] Marcus, *The Other Victorians*.

later decades of the nineteenth century, his mode of thinking would be considered deeply unfair towards prostitutes and a chauvinistic endorsement of infidelity.[35]

As the nineteenth century wore on, the British were increasingly interested in using science to explain the world around them. The field of medicine in particular still had many practices that were holdovers from a more "superstitious" time. Medical men like Acton sought to explain the body and its proper care in clinical, scientific terms. Acton thought that venereal disease could and should be cured, putting him at odds with religious readers who might argue that disease was a necessary punishment from God for illicit sex. To the religious, making prostitution "safe" i.e., lessening the risk of disease, effectively disincentivized the institution of marriage and would lead to a degeneration of society. Perhaps, thought Acton, but doctors were compelled to treat everyone, regardless of their moral status. This marked a shift from eighteenth century thought, which had held that illicit sex was a moral sin, but had not fully understood the mechanics of disease transmission. Although the discovery of the microbes that caused venereal disease was still a ways off,[36] Acton operated under the contemporary assumption that prostitution was naturally diseased.[37] As the British became more interested in science generally, they turned increasingly to scientific explanations for the phenomena they experienced.

---

[35] "Ladies National Appeal and Protest," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2.* Nightingale, *Florence Nightingale on Women*.

[36] As Lynn McDonald notes in *Florence Nightingale on Women, Medicine, Midwifery, and Prostitution*, the microbe responsible for gonorrhea was not discovered until 1879; syphilis in 1905. Medical science, to say nothing of common knowledge, had not accepted microbes as responsible for the transmission of disease. McDonald, *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 412.

[37] The conventional wisdom assumed that sex involving a prostitute was inherently more dirty than other kinds of sex, both literally and morally. Although the connection between dirt and disease was fuzzy during this time, Victorians understood the importance of being physically clean.

Prostitution was described by Acton as the first exhaustive inquiry into the "great social evil"[38] of prostitution and his own recommendations for how to mitigate the spread of venereal disease. In it, he argued that the government needed to take on more responsibility for the prevention of venereal disease. Acton did not want to outlaw prostitution, believing it to be an "inevitable" part of society.[39] Commonly it was argued that prostitution was a necessary evil based on biologically determined differences in sex drive between the sexes.[40] Nor did he want a "continental" system, despite having studied prostitution in Paris.[41] Appealing to the liberalism of the age, Acton argued that prostitution should remain as private as possible while the government managed the spread of venereal disease.

Of course, that management would be one-sided. In *Prostitution* Acton assumed that the woman would be the target of any legislation, writing that the state had to be careful of infringing upon "her rights" to "make profit of her own person." He believed that it was she who must be rehabilitated from her life of sin, never considering the man an equal partner in the perpetuation of the institution. Acton divided his study into several disciplines. Some chapters are entirely devoted to a study of the amount of venereal disease in London hospitals and in branches of the military. In these he took a disinterested approach, aggregating data to find that the rate of venereal disease was actually in decline over the studied period (from about

---

[38] William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities: with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils* (London: J Churchill and Sons, 1870), 170. Accessed online.
[39] Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, 4.
[40] Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 2-3.
[41] Briefly, the Continental system for prostitution involved arduous government oversight of public brothels, something the English considered morally reprehensible.

1849-1859). Still, he argued, the government was obligated to address the epidemic because the "very healthy metropolis of [London]" was seeing rates at around 50% of all hospital patients.[42]

Acton understood a woman's sexuality and reproductive capacity to bear a major influence on her personality. Because so much of an adult woman's time was expected to be used for the bearing and raising of children, they were considered to be the naturally more nurturing sex. In a proper woman, this drive to care for others was entirely innocent. "A majority of women (happily for them) are not troubled by sexual feelings of any kind," Acton wrote in *Functions and Disorders*. Whereas some would say that a woman's biblical lustfulness drove her to prostitution, Acton identified the real cause of a woman's fall: "they yield to desires in which they do not share, from a weak generosity which cannot refuse anything to the passionate entreaties of the man they love."[43] Women, for the most part, did not feel any sexual desire, and those who considered women's innate lust as reason for prostitution were mistaken. Later in the passage Acton makes the confusing assertion that a man's sexual desire is based on his wife's. This seems to contradict his view of men as the more naturally sexual beings, but Acton is basing this idea on the belief that women are responsible for the sexuality of not just their husbands, but of any man with whom they come into contact. Here was another reason that prostitution was necessary for the functioning of society. Acton identified the cause of a woman's fall (the first time she had sex) as the result of her (chaste) love for her partner, which made her almost a disciple of his. This distinction of women as the gentler sex was an extension of the ideal of the "angel in the home." Even at their worst, women were held apart from men as something needing sympathetic intervention and guidance from doctors like Acton. Michel Foucault's

[42] Acton, *Prostitution Considered*, 35.
[43] Acton, *Prostitution Considered*, 20.

argument that the Victorians were a sexually progressive people falters here.[44] Although there was a new scientific interest in sexuality, these ideas percolated only at the highest levels of academia and would not make it into popular discourse for several decades. The robust sexual discourse that Foucault identified was considered wildly inappropriate for women. The sexual passivity that women were expected to possess precluded them from this largely academic discourse, and so diminishes Foucault's argument that the Victorians were sexually progressive.[45]

A woman's lack of sexual feeling, which she shared with most of her gender, influenced other parts of her personality, namely, making her a passive participant not just in her sexual relationship with her husband, but in every part. If we follow Acton's logic, prostitutes who worked to provide for their families were not fundamentally different than women who did not have to resort to sex work. The prostitute was a passive participant in the relationship with her male client, and had merely supplanted romantic love with economic necessity. Even across class lines, women had more in common with each other than with the men in their lives due to a similar sexuality. Any potential social policy targeting disease would have to take these truths into account.

Acton identified class as an integral component of the spread of venereal disease. Reviewing interviews conducted by his colleagues, Acton found that without a financial motivation most women would have never turned to prostitution.[46] Especially in the poor neighborhoods of London women could not make a living in factories, and were forced to

---

[44] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
[45] Hera Cook discusses Foucault's overlooking of Victorian women and reevaluates the Victorian's progressive credentials in "The Long Sexual Revolution," in *The History of Sexuality in Europe*, 118-130.
[46] Acton, *Prostitution Considered*, 28.

supplement their income. Many "fallen women" claimed that they were glad to have lost children because it meant one less mouth to feed. The children who survived, Acton noted, were likely to become prostitutes in their own time anyway; observing that "idleness and vanity are hereditary," ironically failing to realize his role in the perpetuation of respectability politics even among the lower classes.[47] And although prostitutes were not exclusively of the lower classes, Acton and his peers considered the lower class prostitutes who had more access to common sailors the most worrisome source of venereal disease. The threat of women's sexuality to Britain's naval power provides a possible reason for the passage of such regulations.

His sixth chapter, "The Modern Harlot's Progress," is Acton's own imagined vision of the modern prostitute. Rather than being in desperate circumstances as the interviews he quoted in earlier chapters would suggest, the modern prostitute, he wrote, was in a "transitory state."[48] Most, he claimed, were out of the trade after four years. They moved on to legitimate careers, and may have married "an Englishman" and borne "English children."[49] Here, he was basing his belief in the reclaimability of prostitutes on his anxiety about the future of the empire. His emphasis on the Englishness of the children shows his hand. Due to mathematical necessity, women who left prostitution must be eligible to produce new English citizens, or else white Britons would find themselves outnumbered by those born in the periphery of the empire. The fear of race-suicide, or that the birth rate among whites would not keep pace with other races

---

[47] Acton, *Prostitution Considered*, 32. In *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, Mason argues that sexual respectability was a trend that the working class enthusiastically adopted. While it is true that the working class mirrored the behaviors of the middle classes, Mason's argument gives too much agency to the working class. Sexual respectability was something imposed on the lower classes by scientists like Acton and reformers like Nightingale, rather than something they chose for themselves or even fully understood.

[48] Acton, *Prostitution Considered,* 73.

[49] Acton, *Prostitution Considered*, 73.

informed the interest in eugenics that would crest around the turn of the twentieth century.[50] The reproductive capacity of white women suddenly became a matter of national anxiety.

Simply because of the magnitude of the problem, Parliament was obligated to lead the charge against venereal disease and thus, prostitution. Rather than endorsing adultery, Acton argued, regulating prostitution would prevent the spread of venereal disease among civilians and soldiers. Acton did not want prostitution to be outlawed, writing that "virtue and vice...are no subjects for enactment."[51] Specifically, he wanted to legislate against the spread of venereal disease. This razor thin distinction between vice as private and disease as public forms the basis for the regulations he proposed. Acton recommended that predatory brothels, who kept their business by keeping prostitutes in debt, be more strictly regulated to allow women to escape their landlords. He also suggested that the more "disruptive" clusters of prostitutes be tracked by uniformed policemen in order to discourage business.[52] Based on this version of public and private spheres, prostitutes were to be regulated only when their transgressions threatened the physical safety of English society at large.

Even though Acton did not want to outlaw prostitution outright, his proposed regulations inarguably targeted women as the source of venereal disease. Women's illicit sex meant more to society. Men, it was quietly understood, were naturally inclined to satiate their appetite outside marriage. Women, on the other hand, were allowed no such appetite. These non-reproductive unions, then, threatened the feminine ideal of the "angel of the home."[53] Acton's regulations

---

[50] *The Victorian Studies Reader*, ed. Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4, 253, 288.
[51] Acton, *Prostitution Considered*, 73.
[52] Acton, *Prostitution Considered*, 123.
[53] For more information on women's roles in the private sphere, see Martha Vicinus, "Introduction: the Perfect Lady," in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972).

proposed a remedy whose obvious one-sidedness sought to punish these women appropriately for their transgressions. Central to his proposals for prostitution was his understanding of human sexuality, namely that men's inherent sexual appetite would make prostitution a necessity forever. The existence of prostitution and the idea that women must indulge men sexually because of natural law meant that women would never be able to achieve equal status under the law. Butler and the repeal movement rejected such a neat discrepancy in sexuality and identified prostitution as a major site of oppression.

The first Contagious Diseases Act was passed in 1864. It was a temporary measure intended to reduce the spread of venereal disease among the military stationed in port towns. It had a limited jurisdiction to those port towns within the empire, but Britain was not included. The second act was passed in 1866 after the earlier one expired. It extended the scope of the first act, adding the towns of Chatham and Windsor. The text of the Contagious Diseases Acts themselves makes clear the amount of discretion left up to the police in determining who was a prostitute and to the medical staff in determining who would be detained in a lock hospital. The 1866 Act expanded the power of the police officer who provided "good cause to believe that a woman...is a common prostitute" to inform a Justice of the Peace within their jurisdiction. The acts did not provide an explicit definition of "prostitute," leaving it to the discretion of individual policemen. As Butler and the LNA would note, this intentional vagueness allowed the police to arrest any woman walking in a subjugated area. This JP then determined whether to issue the woman a notice, which compelled her to receive a series of medical examinations from a navy surgeon. If found to be "affected with a contagious disease" she would be issued a certificate naming the hospital to which she was to report for treatment. If she did not voluntarily "place

herself for treatment" she was to be "apprehended by a constable" who would "convey her with all practicable speed" to the hospital named on her certificate. After a period of three months, the woman could be released if the chief medical officer considered her to be cured. Otherwise, she would be detained for three more months with the understanding that "any woman be not detained...for a longer time in whole than six months." If she wished to petition her imprisonment she could be "conveyed before a justice" who would hear evidence to decide whether she was free of disease and could then discharge her at his discretion.[54]

Proponents of prostitution reform were concerned about the data they were seeing. Scientists like William Acton issued comparative studies of foreign militaries and found that Britain's military had more than twice the incidence of venereal disease as countries like America.[55] Naturally, they thought, prostitution was to blame. If diseased prostitutes could be cured, the military could recover from these embarrassing reports. Acton, writing in 1851, "saw no improvement [in the incidence of syphilis], nor that we are much freer from the disease than our ancestors, who lived three centuries ago."[56] Even more worrisome was the fact that hospitals often refused to take patients if they appeared to be suffering from syphilis for "fear of encouraging vice."[57] This, argued Acton, was unacceptable and would fatally impede any attempts to eradicate syphilis from the population.[58] Hospitals should be duty bound to accept

---

[54] It is not clear if any prostitutes did petition their imprisonment, but one wonders how this would be possible given that many prostitutes could not read or write and did not have the resources to hire a lawyer.
[55] In 1857 Acton estimated that twenty percent of soldiers had been treated for some kind of venereal disease, compared with five percent of American soldiers, from Acton, *Prostitution Considered*, 66.
[56] William Acton, "Prostitution in Relation to Public Health," in *The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*, 51. Originally published in 1851 as *The Second Edition of the Treatise on Syphilis*.
[57] Acton, "Prostitution in Relation to Public Health," in *The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*, 56.
[58] Acton, "Prostitution in Relation to Public Health," in *The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*, 56.

these patients. Taking this into account, the provision in the 1866 Act compelling any hospital to potentially be responsible for the curing of a prostitute was a major shift.

The 1866 Act allowed the Secretary of State for War to certify any hospital or part of any hospital as a lock hospital. It allowed a policeman walking down the street to arrest any woman he came upon whether she was a prostitute or not, in fact, the acts never defined the word "prostitute," arguably making it easier for law enforcement to claim reasonable deniability in the event of mix ups. It allowed a Justice of the Peace, who had no medical training, to adjudicate the health of a prostitute. And it provided no avenue for determining the health of a man who visited a prostitute, or for forcing him into a prison for medical treatment. Although the medical sciences of the time did not have a complete understanding of the modes of disease transmission, the acts ignored contemporary medical practice in order to excuse men's sexual promiscuity. The regulation of prostitutes made women's bodies a public matter. While Parliament may not have wanted to endorse vice, the CD acts removed women's legal rights in order to subsidize the supposedly inevitable sexual needs of men.

For the opinion writers of publications like the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*, prostitution was without exception a source of moral and physical disease that needed attention from reformers. Although venereal disease was mostly considered a problem of the lower classes, the outsize effect it was having on the navy was troubling. Additionally, the unsavory aesthetic produced by prostitution was becoming untenable for men of conscience. In the November 7, 1857 issue of the *Lancet*, an anonymous author characterized prostitution as an unfortunate reality of city life. The "typical pater-familias" who lived in a "grand house near the park" could not bear to look out his window in the morning for fear of seeing "the flaunting

daughters of sin" on the pavement.[59] This editorial deviated somewhat from the majority of medical thought by rejecting the idea that men needed more sexual outlets than women, but it also placed all the blame on the "unchaste looks, loose gesture, and foul talk" of the prostitute for the weakening of the man's resolve. Another contemporary editorial took a slightly more forgiving position, writing that prostitutes of the lower classes were trapped in their job by an economic system that permitted such a thing. "Prostitution: Its Medical Aspects," written in 1858, recognized that to limit prostitution would be injurious to "society as it [was] presently constituted," but advocated for legislation anyway.[60] *Lancet* proposed a series of "endowments" for each British hospital to set aside beds for the treatment of venereal disease.[61] This was to be done in the interest of public health, and not as an endorsement of vice. Providing for more hospital beds was a middle road between the inadequate infrastructure of the day and the compulsory attendance at a lock hospital.[62] This preoccupation with venereal disease was something the repeal movement would ignore completely. The LNA focused entirely on the humanity of the prostitutes themselves. Instead of threat of venereal disease to the army, Butler and the LNA would emphasize the cruelty of the coerced examinations and the imprisonment in lock hospitals. By focusing on the prostitutes, and not venereal disease, the LNA was able to shift the conversation to women's treatment by the state.

---

[59] "Prostitution: the Need for its Reform," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 1*, 67. Originally published in the *Lancet*, 7 November 1857, pp. 478-9.
[60] "Prostitution: its Medical Aspects," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 1*, 71. Originally published in *Lancet*, 13 February 1858, pp. 173-4.
[61] "Prostitution: its Medical Aspects," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 1*, 71.
[62] Although "lock" suggests prison, the term comes from an old word for leper. Lock hospitals as a place for prostitutes to recover from venereal disease predate the CD acts; Florence Nightingale makes numerous references to them in her correspondence during the early 1860s, from *Florence Nightingale on Women, Medicine, Midwifery, and Prostitution*, ed. Lynn McDonald (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 411-515.

In 1869, a third act was passed that extended the CD acts to apply to eighteen towns within the British Isles.[63] Many believed that Parliament intended to extend the acts over the entire civil population, and for good reason: the Hareivan Medical Society of London had endorsed such an extension, as had the medical journal *Lancet*.[64] In 1870 the *British Medical Journal* published its regrets that "Miss Nightingale and her coadjutors...thought it desirable to take any side at all."[65] The *Journal* was not sympathetic to the concerns of the repealers, and in 1870 considered Florence Nightingale the head of the repeal movement. Before discussing Nightingale and the early opposition to the acts, I will go over Josephine Butler's early life and activism and show how her experience in prostitution led her to become the leader of the repeal movement.

Josephine Butler's early activism

Josephine Butler's public life would not have been possible without a supportive private life. Much in her background, but in particular her childhood and her marriage, are relevant to the kind of activism she practiced. She was raised in a prominent politically active family. Her father's cousin, Earl Grey, was Prime Minister from 1830-1834. Her father, John Grey, was

---

[63] The act of 1869 extended the jurisdiction to: Aldershot, Canterbury, Chatham, Colchester, Dover, Gravesend, Plymouth and Davenport, Portsmouth, Sheerness, Shorncliffe, Southampton, Winchester, Windsor, Woolwich, Curragh, Cork, Queenstown. Chatham and Windsor had been subjected under the 1866 act as well. *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 28-9.
[64] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 108.
[65] "Control of Prostitution," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 1*, 80. Originally published in *British Medical Journal*, 29 January 1870, pp. 112-3.

"connected with great public movements of the day" such as the Reform Bill[66], Irish home rule, and the abolition of slavery.[67] As her biographer Jane Jordan has noted, Butler was born into a family of strong women. John's sister, her aunt, once snuck into the House of Commons dressed as a man in order to hear a debate.[68] John tried to encourage similar political interest in his wife and daughters. For a woman to be interested in politics and public life was an oddity. Her father's encouragement gave her a rare confidence in her opinions and her voice.

Her parents educated her and her siblings about the horrors of slavery. As she remembers, her father imparted into her his "fiery hatred of all injustice."[69] John Grey remarked that "true progress [in the cause of abolition] would only come from a regard for the true welfare of our fellow creatures and a ready spirit of self sacrifice towards that end."[70] This emphasis on helping the whole person instead of the problem would become a theme of Butler's activism. As a teenager she heard the story of an enslaved woman whose four children, each a product of rape by her owner, were sold off or killed by their owner and father. This story made an impression on Butler not only because of the brutality of slavery but because of the "injustice *to women* through this conspiracy of greed and gold."[71] This story illuminates the layers to Butler's objections to human rights violations: not only were the poor taken advantage of by the wealthy, it was often women who were mistreated in systems created and controlled by men. The cruelty "of man on woman" was something that affected her at a spiritual level and inspired her, she

---

[66] The Reform Bill of 1832 expanded voting rights to the middle class. Boyd and McWilliam, "Rethinking the Victorians," in *The Victorian Studies Reader*, 27; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
[67] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 5.
[68] Jordan, *Josephine Butler,* 6.
[69] Butler,. *An Autobiographical Memoir*, eds. George W. and Lucy A. Johnson (London: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1909), 13-14. Accessed online.
[70] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 11.
[71] Butler, *Autobiographical Memoir,* 14. My emphasis.

wrote, to "take her place by the side of the woman in the city which was a sinner."[72] And so although Butler never personally experienced the cruelty that men could display towards women (at least not until she became a public figure), she identified on some level with the personal stories of women abused by male power structures.

The middle-class Victorian marriage was an interesting animal. Although there was much excitement about love-matches and romance, marriages were not an equal partnership. Rather, husbands and wives had complementary responsibilities. The man was tasked with providing for the wife and family economically; the wife, with maintaining the home, overseeing the servants, and raising the children.[73] Studying the Butlers' marriage with this context in mind has been a source of insight into Josephine's view of a woman's place in society more generally. The equal partnership that she had with her husband George was a reflection of her and her husband's belief that men and women had equal capacity for participation in public life.

Her marriage to George Butler was quite a happy one. From her writings, it is clear that she adored him:

> "In the springtime of life, men dream, speak, write and sing of love - of love's gracious birth and beautiful youth. But it is not in the springtime of life that love's deepest depths can be fathomed, its vastness measured, and its endurance tested. There is a love which surmounts all trial and discipline, all the petty vexations and worries, as well as the sorrows and storms of life, and which flows on in an ever deepening tenderness, enhanced by memories of the past and hopes of the future--of the eternal life towards which it is tending."[74]

---

[72] Butler, *Autobiographical Memoir*, 12. Although Butler never uses the word, here she is referring to prostitutes.
[73] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, "Separate Spheres," in *The Victorian Studies Reader*, 307-317.
[74] Butler, *Autobiographical Memoir*, 40.

The pair met between 1849-1850 and formed a connection.[75] Because he was nine years her senior, Josephine was understandably unsure about their relationship. George was obviously more educated and more accomplished. What was he getting out of the match? After their engagement, she reached out to several of her married older sisters. She copied large portions of her and George's correspondence, in which he had recommended books to her in a tone more similar to a father than a husband. She felt obligated to follow his instructions until he made clear that their relationship was to be absolutely equal. Although she was in her early twenties and he already a professor at Oxford, he was not interested in overseeing her life: "I am more content to leave you to walk by yourself in the path you shall choose."[76] The match was as Mill had imagined in *The Subjection of Women*: Josephine retained her individuality even in marriage. They married on 8 January 1852.

In her memoirs, Butler remembered her husband as soft spoken and modest, yet with an inborn sense of justice. He "never needed convincing" that there should be equality between the sexes.[77] Their marriage was a "perfectly equal union" that allowed each of them "absolute freedom on both sides for personal initiative."[78] Even though they eventually had four children, Josephine was at least as free as George to pursue her political goals, and he happily helped her in her many campaigns. So while she lamented the dangers awaiting women in marriage, she and her husband had a relationship based on a mutual respect for the other's autonomy and dignity.

---

[75] Although primary sources do not confirm the couple's early courtship, biographer Jane Jordan estimates that the pair met while Josephine's brother Charles was attending Durham University in the late 1840s. George had recently begun teaching Classics at the institution.
[76] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 25.
[77] Butler, *Autobiographical Memoir,* 34.
[78] Butler, *Autobiographical Memoir*, 20.

This partnership no doubt informed Butler's belief that even prostitutes could be rehabilitated and become productive members of society.

After their honeymoon, the Butlers moved to Oxford as George had recently become a professor there. Their first son George Grey Butler was born in November 1852 and George Sr. became ordained shortly thereafter. Butler did not like her life as a faculty member's wife. She referred to the masculine environment as "a society of celibates,"[79] but what she really chafed against was the hardhearted chauvinism she encountered there. Again, being young created a false expectation: Butler assumed that her husband's colleagues, some of the brightest men in the world, would be similarly enlightened about women's issues. Butler learned that her marriage was unusual even in her social circle, where women generally were able to be more discerning than lower class women in choosing a husband. She recalled a gathering of her husband's colleagues from Oxford at which she was the only woman. The men were discussing *Ruth*, a new novel by Elizabeth Gaskell.[80] The novel, which Butler had read and loved, discussed the plight of a poor woman who became pregnant by a "gentleman" whose mother advised him to abandon his "vicious companion."[81] One man criticized *Ruth* by saying that "a pure woman...should be absolutely ignorant of certain evils." This interaction left Butler feeling discouraged and rebellious. She and Gaskell both sympathized with Ruth's treatment at the hands of male power structures. How could these wise men, she asked her husband, be so morally outraged at these evils reaching the ears of a "pure" woman when "those evils bore with murderous cruelty on other women?"[82] "They know no better, poor fellows," responded her husband. This was a

[79] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 45.
[80] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 45. *Ruth* was published in 1853.
[81] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 46.
[82] Butler, *Autobiographical Memoir*, 31.

breakthrough moment for the young bride, who had never considered that these academic leaders could be wrong about anything. Her sympathy for women like the fictional Ruth would later inspire her to befriend prostitutes within her community. To Butler, a woman's place in society could not be reduced to her sex.

Her faith had a major bearing on her political interest and activism.[83] Throughout her life, she credited her inspiration to activism to God. Her faith was quite personal to her but it is possible to glean some of her thoughts from her memoir. She was "not of the Church of England and never was...I was brought up a Wesleyan...I imbibed from childhood the widest ideas of vital Christianity, only it *was* Christianity. I have not much sympathy with the *Church*."[84] She drew the distinction between the Church of England and what she called "Christianity" throughout her whole life, later encouraging her sons to skip church in the hopes that it would bring them closer to God. Her belief in her own version of Christianity, instead of one dictated to her by society, was a part of her personality that would transcend spiritual life to her political activism. Particularly, her preference for individual autonomy instead of established power structures. Although George was an ordained minister, they never pressured any former prostitutes to convert or to repent in any way. Those women were not agents of the devil; they were victims of a social system in which women were valued less than men.

Josephine had her last child, Eva, in 1859. She was thirty-one. All of her adult life to that point had been concerned with building George's career and raising their children. Although she

---

[83] Josephine's mother Hannah Grey was descended from a line of French Huguenots. It was a family legend that as a baby Hannah had been blessed by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. While untrue, this anecdote indicates the level of interest that the family had in the spiritual upbringing of its children. Josephine credited her mother for the "strong moral education" she received as a child. From Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 8.

[84] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 16, quoting Butler's letter to a Miss Priestman, 17 January 1883. Priestman and her sisters were some of the first members of the LNA.

and George found some time for recreational intellectual projects, for their first decade of marriage Josephine spent her time building a household. When her daughter died in 1864 after falling from a banister, however, the family's grief pushed Josephine out of the house. Witnessing her husband's heartbreak, she wrote that she "became possessed with an irresistible desire to go forth and find some pain keener than my own-to meet with people more unhappy than myself (for I knew there were thousands of such)."[85] Specifically, she felt the pain of "the victims and slaves of lust in our own land, the poor women who are driven as sheep to the slaughter into the slave market of London."[86] In prostitutes she could see something of her own daughter, chastising polite society for allowing such a "destruction of innocence…[and] denial of purity to children."[87] Her activism then was deeply personal to her, coming from an emotional, mothering place. Unlike supporters of the CD acts who considered prostitutes a class apart from "true" women, Butler recognized similarities in the way all women were treated by society, always based on their sexuality and mothering potential.

From her writings, Butler's position on prostitution as an abstract concept is hard to elucidate. She did not devote much time to moralizing on the subject, but instead focused on improving the lives of the poor women she met in her community. She considered prostitution merely a symptom of the gender hierarchy. In formulating her arguments about the Contagious Diseases Acts, Butler spent a great deal of time interviewing prostitutes firsthand. In 1867, she took in Mary, a sick prostitute on her deathbed. In a letter to her niece, Butler wrote that Mary had escaped a predatory brothel and was living on the streets when Butler found her.[88] She was

[85] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 66.
[86] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 65.
[87] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 65.
[88] Butler, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, 86.

"to live as [Butler's] daughter" and died three months after coming into her home. Butler managed to find Mary's father, who was anxious to find and forgive his daughter for her sins.[89] In Mary's story it is easy to see the ghost of Butler's lost daughter Eva. By taking in this defenseless girl, she was able to act as a mother to a young woman who had nowhere else to turn. Although she loved her sons, one could imagine that her grief at losing her only daughter was particularly painful. Having these girls to act as surrogate daughters must have been a productive distraction that helped her work out her feelings for Eva.

After Eva's death the family moved to Liverpool, and it was there that Josephine sought out those "victims of lust" for whom she had prayed after burying her daughter. She approached a poor women's workhouse and began to befriend many of the women.[90] The matron, whose predecessor had been beaten to death by some of the workers, was shocked. Josephine, who thought nothing of assisting the women in their work, inspired such loyalty and affection that they formed personal friendships. The Butlers took in many more women like Mary. George never complained, but remarked that the house was "very nearly fill[ed]...with the dears."[91] The girls who lived in the Butlers' home formed friendships with each other but also with the Butler boys. The youngest, Charlie, spent time with Mary, editing her poetry.[92] George would make sure to be home each evening to pray with the women who wanted a prayer.[93] That Josephine felt comfortable bringing "fallen women" of the lower classes into her house was quite unusual. By crossing the threshold, prostitutes crossed the impassable gulf between upper-class activist and

---

[89] Butler, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness*, 86.
[90] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 65.
[91] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 71, quoting a letter to Fanny Smyttan, 12 February 1867.
[92] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 70.
[93] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 70.

lower-class subject of said activism. As biographer Jane Jordan comments, when Josephine buried Mary beside her recently deceased niece, also named Josephine, she was symbolically aligning herself with the "cause of the poor."[94] And as she was careful to make clear, "human kindness" to these needy poor was the most important thing, even more than spiritual instruction. [95] As Josephine's father had remarked in the battles over slavery, attention to the problem was not enough. Prostitutes needed to be understood as whole women in order to fully comprehend their situation.

Eventually even her husband's encouragement was not enough to accommodate all the sick poor women in Liverpool. In 1867 the Butlers purchased a property near their home that was to serve as a hospital for sick prostitutes. After receiving small donations from the community, Josephine's "House of Rest" was able to hold up to 40 women.[96] Here Josephine encountered a new problem: what to do with women who became healthy? She came to realize that former prostitutes needed something besides degrading and demoralizing work in the workhouse or they would return to prostitution. The British economy simply was not set up to allow lower class women to provide for themselves. Her "Industrial Home," which was part residence and part workhouse, allowed lodgers to make clothes for a small amount of pay. The workers were so successful that they began to take in laundry from the community and even established an envelope factory inside the Home. In the Industrial Home we can see Butler's solution to prostitution as a symptom of gendered poverty. The poor lodgers were able to live without prostituting themselves while learning skills that enabled their independence from

[94] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 84.
[95] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 84.
[96] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 76-7.

prostitution. By addressing prostitution as not just a women's issue, but a poor women's issue, Butler more effectively intervened into the lives of prostitutes.

Butler interviewed and got to know many more prostitutes in her work on the repeal movement. She often invoked these personal stories in her public speeches[97] as a way to make familiar the unknown. These kinds of personal interactions indicate how Butler thought of prostitution: as something which women were forced into by circumstance and for which they nevertheless bore complete blame. She did not want to outlaw prostitution so much as make the consequences for pre-marital sex equally severe for men as they were for women. She realized that these consequences, poverty and disease,[98] were the result of systemic exclusion of women from the workforce and higher education. In 1868 she became involved in a number of formal political causes. Her membership on the Married Women's Property Committee[99] coincided with the Married Women's Property Bill being considered in Parliament.[100] This bill proposed that married women would have the same property rights as unmarried women.[101] She also became involved in the Northumberland Higher Education Council, which sought to secure rights to higher education for women.[102] Higher education for women briefly became Butler's major cause. In her 1868 pamphlet *Education and Employment of Women*, she argued that allowing women to obtain a college education would improve the quality of the country's governesses.

---

[97] I discuss Butler's speeches about the CD acts more fully below.
[98] Not venereal disease, but rather diseases such as consumption, which killed her first houseguest Mary.
[99] Lydia Becker and Elizabeth Wolstenholme were members of the committee; both women were prominent suffragettes.
[100] The Married Women's Property Bill of 1868 was authored by Mr Richard Pankhurst, who in 1879 would become the husband of eventual suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. The couple's daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, would assist their mother in her activism.
[101] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 88-89.
[102] It was on this council that she met a future editor of her autobiography, James Stuart. Stuart and others on the council provided university-level lectures to women in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Sheffield. From Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 86-7.

She quoted many women who were undereducated and thus unsuited for the jobs they held. She noted job postings offering salaries as low as £20 per year.[103] This undervaluation of a woman's work could only lead her into prostitution. A formal education would increase a woman's professional status and value to society.

The work cites many such statistics. Using data from the 1861 census, Butler showed that of the nearly six million adult English women, 3.4 million reported "work[ing] for their own subsistence." This study, broken into three categories, indicated that although spinsters worked at the highest rate, widows and wives also worked outside their homes.[104] Even married women then could have "no certainty of support" by their husbands, who might die or be unable to fully support them. No matter what the "conspiracy of silence" would have folks believe, more than half of all adult Englishwomen were working to provide for themselves. These Englishwomen would need institutions like the Industrial Home to teach them skills if they were to avoid prostitution. And although not every woman working outside the home was equally vulnerable to becoming a prostitute, the systematic improvement of education and job training for women would ensure that fewer women would have to resort to prostitution.

And yet, women were constantly meeting with prejudice that kept them from all but a narrow sliver of the jobs available. Middle class women generally found employment as governesses, but inferior education made sure that their students would not receive education equal to boys. There was no certification for governesses, while schoolmasters for boys had to receive a degree/certificate. Butler contended that the lack of interest in educating girls was an

---

[103] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 92.
[104] Butler, *Education and Employment of Women*, in *Feminist Reader*, 207.

extension of ensuring women's economic independence.[105] Women were not content to remain ignorant. Perhaps remembering those uncomfortable evenings from George's Oxford days, Josephine confessed that "always have my own ignorance and helplessness been the hindrances to that for which I would have freely given my life."[106]

Education and employment were matters of political representation. Butler detailed the story of French telegraph clerks, who, as in England, were generally women. Pay for a female clerk had fallen from a high of eight shillings (with the possibility of being increased to fourteen shillings) to just five shillings a week, which was basically unlivable.[107] The French telegraph industry was a cautionary tale: once the telegraph companies had been nationalized the government had dismissed the female workers "because they had no votes to bestow on the government candidates."[108] English women had no more right to the vote than did French women, thus their jobs were more vulnerable than men's jobs. Because the "interests of the unrepresented always tend to be overlooked," women would need access to the vote in order to protect their educational and economic rights.[109] Obviously, men could not be counted on to provide equal opportunities to women. Like Mill, Butler argued that the undereducation and underemployment of women was the result of a gender hierarchy that maintained that women were only suitable for work in the private sphere. Although not exactly part of the private sphere, prostitution was an extension of the same belief that men had a fundamental right to women's sexuality. Butler's comment about the French telegraph workers illustrates her growing

---

[105] Butler, *Education and Employment of Women*, in *Feminist Reader*, 212-3.
[106] Butler, *Education and Employment of Women*, in *Feminist Reader*, 212.
[107] Butler, *Education and Employment of Women*, in *Feminist Reader*, 208.
[108] Butler, *Education and Employment of Women*, in *Feminist Reader*, 208.
[109] Butler, *Education and Employment of Women*, in *Feminist Reader*, 215.

understanding of the situation of women within society. Prostitutes and telegraph workers had something in common with Butler: their womanness. This class consciousness pointed the way to the solution: not only expanded educational opportunities for rich as well as poor women, but also the right to vote.

Education and Employment of Women was the subject of emphatic backlash from upper-class men. There were familiar complaints about a woman's proper place in society and the maintenance of domestic harmony, which in their turn were rooted in a woman's identity stemming from her sexuality.[110] One such critic, writing in a blistering letter to Butler, lamented that "domestic goddesses" should be made to work or even "have the means of working," meaning higher education or instruction in a trade.[111] This philosophy that women were destined solely for marriage was the reason that prostitution had become so insidious, according to Butler. [112] This position was in conflict with the mainstream understanding that prostitution was a natural (and necessary) result of men's sexual need (beliefs maintained by doctors like William Acton). By forcing women to depend on men as their sole means of survival, women had to choose between marriage or prostitution. Some women, such as widows, were overlooked by such generalizations. Based on simple mathematics, there were not enough single men who would be able to support an unemployed wife and her children. Thus, women were faced with "polygamy or well organized prostitution," their whole future again reliant on the man's terms. Butler exasperatedly countered that "sensible women" reject the confining "worship [as]

---

[110] Jordan, Josephine Butler, 92.
[111] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 92-93, Butler references Frederick Harrison in a letter dated 9 May 1868. Harrison was a Positivist; this school of thought was progressive save for its theories about women. Positivists considered women to be vanguards of purity, and taught that they should renounce their property and remain in the home, so as to better oversee their children's moral education.
[112] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 92-93.

domestic goddesses" that was in fact based on "shallow and cruel" theories about women.[113] Butler considered the arguments in favor of prostitution to be wrong, and therefore the reasoning that women could not be educated or employed was similarly faulty. Once it was widely accepted that women had the potential to be something other than wives or prostitutes, they could move into the public sphere and become politically equal to men.

Butler's pamphlet was published just months before John Stuart Mill's *On the Subjection of Women*. The two authors corresponded at length about their works. The major difference between their publications was a matter of focus. As discussed above, Mill grounded his vision of a more progressive and just society in a workforce of women doctors and MPs, while Butler's attention remained with the lower class women for whom such aspirations were unrealistic. Butler's attention to the lower classes aided in developing a broader class consciousness among politically active women. Both Mill and Butler agreed that marriage as currently constituted was an inherently perilous situation for women because of their lack of formal legal rights. The only way for women to improve their situation was to become financially independent of men. Working outside the home would make women members of public society and thus confer upon them a status more equal to men's. And although Butler did not explicitly make the link to suffrage in *Education*, the inclusion of women in the workplace would only bolster the arguments for women's suffrage.

The Northumberland Council on Higher Education established several rotating lectures in northern England, but Butler wanted to do more. She reached out to Queen Victoria's daughters, Crown Princess Victoria of Prussia and Louise, Duchess of Argyll, for their advice about

---

[113] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 92-93.

improving women's education across Europe.[114] She became interested in Russia's education of women and made contacts there, hoping to establish a periodical about European developments in women's higher education.[115] It is not clear whether the first issue made it to print, but does indicate that Butler was not satisfied by setting up the north England lecture series alone.

Though Butler cared deeply about higher education for women, she felt compelled to return to the issue of prostitution. Surely all the time she had spent getting to know prostitutes in Liverpool gave her the feeling that she had a firm handle on the issues. Her expertise in the issues that prostitutes were facing was more valuable than her contributions to the less-controversial higher education debate. As she put it, poor women in danger of prostitution might have no other advocate than her. Women's higher education was important to her, but Butler felt that the needs of lower class women would be neglected unless she returned to her work on prostitution.[116]

Butler's concerns were well-founded, because even those who opposed the acts believed that "you cannot reclaim prostitutes."[117] Florence Nightingale, who at the time was already a well known figure within the medical community, feared that any regulation of prostitution, other than a complete ban, was a state endorsement of vice. Before the passage of the first act, Nightingale spoke out against the state administration of lock hospitals. She opposed them on the grounds of morality and instead wanted to see extant laws about brothels enforced to more effectively end prostitution altogether.[118] Nightingale lamented the fact that the "honest poor

---

[114] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 101.
[115] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 103.
[116] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 104.
[117] Florence Nightingale in a letter to Douglas Galton dated 25 June 1861, *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 422.
[118] McDonald, *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 412.

sick" in hospitals were being attended to in the same space as diseased prostitutes.[119] She did not believe that prostitutes could be reclaimed, and suspected (as did many in the medical community) that the immorality of prostitution was literally disease causing.[120] Although her nursing work put her into contact with terminally ill prostitutes, she did not feel the same sympathy with them as did Butler.

Nightingale's opposition to the acts was based on a different understanding of gender roles than Butler's. Although she "always advocated for women's education," Nightingale held more conservative views about a woman's potential in society. She considered a woman's career incompatible with marriage; though she championed the nursing profession in particular, she felt that women would do best to choose either marriage or a career.[121] Her concern about the health of wives over prostitutes provides further insight into her conception of gender roles: "And what does government do for the sick *wives* and children of soldiers and the *wives* and children of sailors? Why, they take more care of the prostitutes than they do of the honest wives."[122] The women who truly mattered were wives. Nightingale was similarly disgusted with the government who would place men's sexual needs above the liberty of women but unlike Butler was not interested in advocating for the rights of prostitutes. Her opposition to the acts was grounded in opposition to adultery more generally.

Nightingale was exclusively interested in the prevention of prostitution as the way to end "vice." In her letters she expressed the wish for an option of "leave to marry" within the army,

---

[119] Nightingale in a letter to Douglas Galton dated 25 June 1861, in *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 421.
[120] McDonald, *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 412.
[121] McDonald, *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 87.
[122] Nightingale, in a letter to Douglas Galton, dated 25 June 1861, in *Florence Nightingale on Women,* 421. My emphasis.

and thus endorses the contemporary view of men's sexual promiscuity as inevitable.[123] By allowing soldiers to marry and bring their wives with them when they traveled in the empire, Nightingale argued, men would no longer be interested in visiting prostitutes who were the source of venereal disease. To Nightingale, women would still be responsible for the sexual needs of men.

Repeal movement activism- the LNA and others

In September of 1869 the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was formed. Women were excluded from the Association, and Butler, along with Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, formed an auxiliary campaign called the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, or the LNA.[124] The existence of their group surprised many members of Parliament who believed that these upper-class ladies would support the acts. By punishing the prostitute, lawmakers assumed they were protecting the dignity of proper ladies. Butler recognized that while class did play a role in a woman's becoming a prostitute, the identity of "woman" transcended those class boundaries. Her personal involvement with prostitutes in building the House of Rest, inspired by her sympathy with female "slaves," led her to the radical belief that no woman should have her civil rights violated.

I should emphasize that Butler's outspoken sympathy with prostitutes was uncommon even among those who wished the acts repealed. Nightingale refused to equivocate on the moral

[123] Nightingale, in a letter to Sidney Herbert dated 1 February 1861, in *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 419.
[124] Jordan, *Josephine Butler,* 110.

status of prostitutes, writing simply that they "cannot [be reclaimed.]"[125] This put her at odds with Butler, who wrote an entire book entitled *The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes* (discussed further below). More interestingly, this position put Nightingale at odds even with reform advocates like Acton. His studies on English prostitutes had found that most prostitutes were in the trade for an average of four years, and that many went on to marry and have children. He applauded this, while Nightingale drew a hard line between the morally "vicious" prostitutes and the "honest" wives of sailors.[126] Acton and others in the pro-CD acts camp considered the curing of venereal disease among the navy to be worth doing; moral conservatives like Nightingale considered venereal disease to be an appropriate punishment for vice, and the health of the prostitutes not worth saving. Her unrealistic vision for a moral utopia in which all men would wait to have sex until marriage, thereby eliminating venereal disease, prevented her from fully participating in the LNA.[127]

In 1870 Butler approached Nightingale about taking on a leadership role in the LNA. Although Nightingale acknowledged that there was "scarcely a tittle of evidence in favour of [the acts] doing what [they] promise[d]," she was put off by the "vulgar" tactics of Butler and the LNA, probably a reference to the explicit speeches Butler made in front of crowds of men.[128] No direct correspondence between the pair survived, and given that Nightingale "suffered too much from Mrs. Butler," I doubt that they were close.[129] Nightingale's correspondence does not go into

---

[125] Nightingale in a letter to Douglas Galton dated 25 June 1861, in *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 422.
[126] Nightingale, in a letter to Douglas Galton, dated 25 June 1861, in *Florence Nightingale on Women,* 421.
[127] Around the time of the repeal of the CD acts, Nightingale was active in the White Cross organization, which "stressed sexual abstinence to men before marriage as the best means of preventing sexually transmitted diseases," McDonald, *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 496.
[128] Nightingale in a letter to Dr. Sutherland dated 22 August 1870, in *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 475.
[129] Nightingale in a letter to Dr. Sutherland dated 12 September 1870, in *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 476.

great detail about the qualms she had with the LNA, but I think her comments about the association's "vulgarity" indicate that she took issue with the distribution of explicit material about the acts, particularly given that the material was written by women.[130] Although Nightingale considered herself to "have a stronger conviction than anyone against the CD acts," she declined the offer to be the Vice President of the LNA.[131] Her unwillingness to compromise about the repeal movement on the basis of her hatred of prostitution prevented her from contributing anything substantive to the LNA. Because she could not conceive of prostitutes as whole women, and thus reclaimable, her version of the repeal campaign would have likely been much more focused on criminalizing prostitutes instead of advocating for their civil rights.

Late in 1869, the *Daily News* published four letters written by Harriet Martineau in opposition to the acts.[132] Regulation of prostitution had long been a political concern; Martineau noted that at the death of King William IV, the "French system" of officially sanctioned brothels, along with registered prostitutes, had been considered. When Victoria, only eighteen years old and unmarried, came to the throne in 1837 the plan had been temporarily abandoned. That "our country, supreme in its privilege of personal liberty" could come so close to this systematic destruction of liberty was troubling. As it stood, the 1869 act did more than enough to violate the rights of "our countrywomen...under sanction of law" in order to protect "the worst

---

[130] In a letter to Dr. Sutherland Nightingale references a case before Parliament involving the LNA and "Lord Campbell's Act," which was a statute used to prosecute the distribution of indecent material, likely involving the LNA's graphic descriptions of gynecological examinations. Nothing came of the case. McDonald, *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 476. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates* 31 July 1871, 354-55.
[131] Nightingale in a letter to Elizabeth Blackwell dated 13 October 1870, in *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 477.
[132] Martineau was a member of the LNA as well as an acquaintance of Nightingale. *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 420.

consequences of [soldiers] license" to sexual vice.[133] And as Nightingale had argued, the execution of the acts would not be effective in preventing the spread of venereal disease.[134]

The LNA agreed that the acts were not having the intended effect, and in the "Ladies' Appeal and Protest," challenged pro-CD act legislators to extend the acts to apply to men as well as women.[135] While scientists like Acton might be legitimately interested in improving the legislation, politicians and law enforcement showed their true colors in refusing to backtrack on the acts. The LNA knew that the initial supporters, who had pushed the legislation through Parliament very quietly, would never alter the acts because they were designed to target women as the source of a man's disease.[136]

The LNA pointed out that any woman walking in a subjected area could be forced to submit to a gynecological exam. They quoted Acton, who, observing the implications of the acts he had helped create, remarked that prostitution must be counted upon "wherever the sexes mix," meaning that because of their sexuality, no woman could ever be free to move alone in a public space.[137] The fact that men supposedly could not help themselves from engaging in sexual encounters out of wedlock meant that the freedom of all women must be limited. The LNA countered that this was unconstitutional under the English justice system, echoing Mill in its assertion that "no English subject can be arrested...imprisoned...on hearsay evidence, without a

---

[133] Harriet Martineau, "Letters to the *Daily News*," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic, Vol. 2, The Ladies Appeal and Protest*, ed. Jordan and Sharp, 33-44. Originally published in the *Daily News*, Dec 1869 & Jan 1870.
[134] Martineau, "Letters to the Daily News," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, Vol. 2, 44.
[135] "Ladies' National Appeal and Protest," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, Vol. 2, 56-7. Nightingale and Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy signed the document as well as Butler. Originally published 14 March 1870 in *Shield*, pp. 9-13.
[136] "Ladies' National Appeal and Protest," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, *Vol. 2*, 56-7.
[137] "Ladies' National Appeal and Protest," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, *Vol. 2,* 51.

public trial."[138] The acts could never be extended to apply equally to men, because men would never stand for such an infringement upon their rights and were uniquely capable of voting those legislators from office. But the fact that women could not vote did not mean that they deserved to have their "civil liberty" and "personal security" compromised: the "Ladies' Appeal and Protest" indicates that the LNA considered women to be full citizens, save for a few technicalities.[139] As citizens equal to men, prostitution as Acton knew it could no longer be tacitly endorsed by the state. Women were no longer defined by their relationships to men.

On behalf of the movement, Butler began making public speeches denouncing the acts. Remarkably, she made many speeches to all-male, often working class audiences.[140] Her speeches were often full of details about the specific provisions of the acts.[141] To authenticate her testimony, Butler had interviewed prostitutes about their experience with the exams. She often heard that after an exam, women had "not been able to sleep for pain" and had trouble walking. [142] Over and over, she referred to this violation as "instrumental rape," echoing the words of the prostitutes she had interviewed.[143] This kind of detail about the acts, although not exactly hidden, was not common knowledge to men or women who were not directly affected by the acts. Butler knew this, and argued that by keeping women in the dark about these methods men were able to

---

[138] "Ladies' National Appeal and Protest," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, *Vol. 2*, 55.
[139] "Ladies' National Appeal and Protest," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns*, *Vol. 2*, 46.
[140] Butler, "Great Meeting of Working Men," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 67-79. Speech given in Richmond Hall, Liverpool on 18 March 1870, published in *Shield* 28 March 1870. Walkowitz highlights this alliance between middle class repealers and working class men as particularly important to the success of the movement.
[141] Butler, "Painfully Interesting Details of the Working of the Acts," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 80-97. Originally published in *Shield* April-May 1870.
[142] Butler, "Painfully Interesting Details of the Working of the Acts," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 83.
[143] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 116.

enact regulations that favored themselves at the expense of any woman in a subjected area.[144] No woman, she argued, would have come up with such a system for combating disease and as such, women, not disease, were the real targets of the acts. Just like Mary had convinced Butler of the humanity of prostitutes, she used sympathetic stories to convince her audience of the injustice of the acts. This audience of working class men was particularly valuable. Just recently granted the right to vote, their opinion could put pressure on lawmakers to repeal the acts.

There was undeniably a class element in the implementation and repeal of the CD acts. Prostitutes in subjected areas reported to Butler that the policemen assigned to watch for them, "spies," would routinely ignore the higher class "mistresses" of navy officers and instead target the poor "sweethearts" of working class sailors.[145] Often the girls were not prostitutes, but would have trouble convincing law enforcement of that fact. Once their husband or sweetheart appeared, however, the police would stop.[146] Unfortunately, women were powerless to stop these invasions of privacy. Butler remarked to her working class audiences that "self-legislation [was] life," a lesson the working class had recently come to appreciate.[147] It was necessary that women get the vote in order that they may have a more equal role in the legislation that affected them. Butler believed that men and women deserved to be treated equally by the law and that the treatment of prostitutes was an accurate measure of the inequality between the genders.[148] She also believed that it was the duty of all women to fight for the repeal of the acts, no matter their

---

[144] Butler, "Painfully Interesting Details of the Working of the Acts," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 83.
[145] Butler, "Painfully Interesting Details of the Working of the Acts," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 82.
[146] Butler, "Painfully Interesting Details of the Working of the Acts," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 83.
[147] Butler, "Great Meeting of Working Men," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 74.
[148] Butler, *The Constitution Violated*, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 211-303. Originally published 1871.

class, or the men around them would not understand the grander struggle for women's rights.[149] However, the morality argument, about the inherent unfairness in a system that allowed men their indiscretion while punishing women, would only reach so many people. The acts would never be repealed on their immorality alone; she needed to convince the right people that the acts infringed on constitutional rights.

For all the interest men like Acton had in the subject, Butler rarely mentioned venereal disease in her writings about prostitution. To her, venereal disease was not the ultimate consequence of prostitution.[150] She recognized that prostitution kept women in a cycle from which there was no escape, a cycle that was perpetuated by men in power who were content to maintain prostitution as a legal institution in society because of medical beliefs about the sexual needs of men outside of their marriages. This inequality was something that was being legally enforced by the state and would be the reason for prostitution until it was dismantled.[151]

In December 1870, a Royal Commission was established in Parliament to debate the validity and efficacy of the acts. Nightingale was not convinced that the acts were having the intended effect, but was concerned that the commission would not investigate the acts rigorously and impartially.[152] Butler was called to testify in March 1871. In a letter she wrote to her husband after her testimony, she made clear that the commission was not interested in investigating the acts honestly. The interrogators had "reports of all [her] addresses" and Butler was convinced they intended to "damage her in examination."[153] Some MPs viewed her testimony favorably, but

---

[149] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 125.
[150] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 125-6.
[151] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 125-6.
[152] Nightingale in a letter to Elizabeth Blackwell dated 7 February 1860, in *Florence Nightingale on Women*, 473-4.
[153] Butler, in a letter to her husband George Butler, reprinted in *Josephine Butler,* 128.

it was not enough to change the minds of the commissioners. They found that the exams had reduced rates of venereal disease among the target population, so, just as Nightingale feared, Parliament could see no reason to repeal the acts. Although many could sympathize with the repealers' morality concerns, their conclusion that the acts had worked as intended was too compelling to prompt any momentum towards repeal.[154]

As was common with nineteenth century British social reformers, Butler referenced her faith in her writings. In "The Lovers of the Lost," she wrote that since Jesus had "manifested a peculiar compassion for lepers...the poor...and fallen women," each devout Christian was duty bound to follow his lead. And, she noted, while care for the sick and for the poor was considered by the church "an especial charge," the rehabilitation of fallen women was being neglected. Instead the church opted to "thunder at her that above all other sinners she has sinned."[155] Here Butler points out the hypocritical treatment of fallen women by men who have often broken their marital vows with a prostitute, yet were free of the stigma of adultery. This hypocrisy was something often mentioned in her interviews with prostitutes and together with religious obligation, became one of her central arguments.

In the 1870s one of her primary tasks was convincing people of the "moral reclaimability" of prostitutes. As referenced above, even Nightingale, with her interest in both the repeal movement and in social reform, could not be convinced of their moral reclaimability. In a speech at a repeal conference Butler decried the fact "that there are persons who doubt the reclaimability of the fallen"[156] and argued that men were the "unbelievers" whose minds must be

---

[154] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 128-131.
[155] Butler, "The Lovers of the Lost," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 1*, 95-6.
[156] Butler, "The Lovers of the Lost," in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 1*, 121.

changed. From her work with prostitutes in the House of Rest, Butler knew that prostitutes could be rehabilitated and trained for jobs to support themselves. Here again we can see the theme of hypocrisy and unequal power relations as a central reason for the perpetuation of prostitution in English society. Butler went on a speaking tour of other European countries to publicize her message. She described the execution of the acts in detail for her international audiences as she had the working class British men.

Butler recognized a powerful ally in the working class, and continued to reach out to them in other ways. She and the LNA realized that arguing against the brutal execution of the acts would never be enough to convince Parliament to repeal. As Jordan notes, Parliament considered prostitutes "sewers to be kept clean."[157] By arguing that the constitutional rights of all women had been violated by the acts, Butler aimed to inspire those not directly affected by the acts. Even someone who considered the acts necessary to the prevention of venereal disease could potentially be convinced of their illegality. In an examination of the legality of the acts, Butler aligned herself with "the working men and working women of England" against the lawyers and MPs who had passed the legislation.[158] Not only did the acts wage "an unequal war...against the weaker sex only," they targeted working-class women who did not experience the same privilege as the "ladies in the carriages."[159] These tactics proved largely effective, and public outrage mounted until the LNA was able to field candidates for Parliament in areas where the incumbent had proven hostile to repeal.[160]

---

[157] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 125.
[158] Butler, *The Constitution Violated*, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 213.
[159] Butler, *The Constitution Violated*, in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns, Vol. 2*, 222.
[160] Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, 125.

A suffrage movement resurges

The CD acts were repealed in 1886, although they had not been widely enforced for several years before that. Over the course of the repeal campaign, more than two million Britons had registered their disapproval of the acts.[161] Although many men and women inside and outside of the repeal movement had recognized the need for women's suffrage before the acts were repealed, it would be a long, arduous campaign. Women would not be fully granted the Parliamentary vote until 1928, although a partial victory in 1918 extended the franchise to married women over the age of 30.

The repeal of the CD acts had not magically evaporated every anti-woman sentiment in British society. Rather, the activism of Butler and the LNA provided a distinct target for anti-suffragists. Opposition to suffrage crystallized around the discomfort with outspoken women like Butler and Christabel Pankhurst, who in 1913 linked the "great scourge" of venereal disease with women's inability to vote.[162] Pankhurst, a prominent suffragette, did not share Butler's sympathy for the conditions of prostitutes. Like Nightingale, her sympathy was reserved for the wives whose husband's infected them after a tryst with a prostitute. The threat of venereal disease made prostitutes and wives natural enemies, and for a time the suffragettes adopted the slogan "Votes for Women, Chastity for Men" that Pankhurst had coined in her book. While perhaps hyperbolic, the slogan relied on a gender theory more similar to Nightingale and Acton's than Mill's and Butler's. Neither side had a monopoly on essentialist theories of gender.

---

[161] E.J. Sigsworth, etc.
[162] Christabel Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge and How to End It* (London: E Pankhurst, 1913).

One scholar in particular has noted the use of gendered language in the suffrage movement. Susan Kingsley Kent, in *Sex and Suffrage in Britain*, corrects the scholarship on women's suffrage that considers the movement a purely political one. Suffragettes fought back against the conventional sex roles prescribed to them, especially arguments such as Jeremy Bentham's, who wrote that a woman's subservience in marriage indicated that she did not need political enfranchisement.[163]

The anti-suffrage camp leaned heavily on gender stereotypes.[164] Marriage values influenced many within the opposition. Even many politically active women objected to getting the vote. In "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," 104 women spelled out their objections to being granted the vote.[165] First, they invoked the undeniable physical differences between men and women, i.e. a woman's potential for procreation. These physical differences, they insisted, meant that men and women could never have the same kinds of responsibilities towards the state. The authors did not object to granting some rights to women; they lauded the expansion of education for women in particular. More education, they agreed, could help women become even better at what they were naturally called to do: "the care of the sick and the insane; the treatment of the poor; the education of children,"[166] all the things that took place in the private sphere and centered on a woman's inherent maternal instinct. This education would not look like the

---

[163] "Women's Suffrage: A Reply," in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, 48. Originally published in *Fortnightly Review* 52, 1 July 1889, 123-31. See Jeremy Bentham, *On Marriage*, in *Free and Ennobled: Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism*, eds. Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979), 47. In 1843 Bentham defended the idea that women should be submissive to their husbands. He referenced Roman law to make his point that a woman's position was naturally below her husband's. That this was something worth defending indicates that the institution of marriage was being reevaluated by society.

[164] H. B. Samuels, *Woman Suffrage: Its Dangers and Delusions* (1910), in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England,* ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 53.

[165] "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage (1889)," in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*.

[166] "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, 26.

university lectures organized by the Northumberland Council; they would be more in line with Nightingale's understanding of women as uniquely suited for caring professions. Butler and Mill, on the other hand, argued that not only were women capable of other types of work but that women must work to free themselves from the rule of men. Anti-suffragists argued when it came to the public sphere and to potentially voting on matters of "foreign or colonial policy," women were woefully out of their depth.[167] More insidious than ignorance of foreign policy, gaining suffrage would put women in "direct and hasty conflict with men" over matters of policy that would transcend politics and damage the very fabric of society.[168] "Hot tempers" would make women more partisan than men, and the inability to reconcile would put not only marriages at risk, but the birthrate.[169] Women who were busy testifying in Parliament would be too busy to raise their children. Then was the question of which women would be eligible to vote, married or unmarried? Either option was a critique of the current marriage system: if unmarried women could vote they would be reluctant to give up their right when they married, and if married women could vote their gain would undermine their husband's authority. Their position reflected the conservative marriage values that informed the passage of the CD acts, namely, that fundamental differences between men and women dictated their different purposes within society.

Women's suffrage continued to be met with other counterarguments. After the first decade of the twentieth century, opponents could no longer claim that the movement was the

[167] "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, 26-7.
[168] "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, 26-7.
[169] "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, 27.

"ridiculous"[170] hobby of rich women with a "false sense of superiority."[171] The suffrage movement had benefited from leaders like Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and the socially disruptive and violent tactics that the suffragettes came to embrace. It became the "question on everybody's lip" and anti-suffrage groups organized in opposition, ironically demonstrating that the movement was succeeding, and indicating a shift in marriage norms among some Britons. These norms were still being invoked among the opposition. Men, one author conceded, would not accomplish their public duties without the support of women, but "history is a record of the actions of men and the influence of women,"[172] their influence presumably happening at home. Anti-suffragists argued that this informal influence ought to be enough for women. The suffragettes, characterized as hostile, sexless, and demonic, were only seeking the vote because they "[had] no desire or capacity to do anything useful," namely, to have children. It is implied that these women were lacking an essential part of their womanness, and so were acting out some biological deficiency. Mid-century, the same arguments had been made about prostitutes. No "natural" woman could ever want the vote: she was too busy having children and looking after her husband's home. Indeed "woman is wholly superfluous to the State except as a bearer of children and nursing mother." Since it couldn't be argued that women would add something currently missing from the existing government, there could be no reason to grant them the vote. And like prostitutes before them, suffragettes were reduced to their sexuality as a way to diminish their power within the public sphere.

---

[170] T. Dundas Pillans, from *Plain Truths About Woman Suffrage* (1909), in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign,* 51.
[171] H. B. Samuels, from *Woman Suffrage: Its Dangers and Delusions* (1910), in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign*, 53.
[172] Pillans, from *Plain Truths about Woman Suffrage*, in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, 51.

Conclusion

This study has been limited to the voices of elite scientific and political thinkers. Although I believe Butler attempted to represent the stories of prostitutes honestly, there is no source material that directly documents the experiences of the women subjected to the CD acts. Her body of work necessarily made use of the most horrific stories in service of a political agenda. Both Acton and Mill were some of the most radical in their respective fields and as such do not represent the majority of Victorian society. I have chosen to feature their works because their mid-century writings voiced new and noteworthy ideas about gender, sexuality, and the state administration of gender roles. Nightingale, while articulating many commonly held moral arguments against prostitution, is another exceptional figure because of the influence she had in society. Her arguments against the CD acts represent a major current of Victorian thought which was very much preoccupied with so-called "vice" and the proper way to discourage men from pre-marital or extra-marital sex. I have also chosen to focus on England as opposed to Britain and the British empire more broadly. The CD acts were first imposed on non-citizen prostitutes in the British colonies, and it was only after a period of two years that the acts were extended to England itself. This was no accident, but rather a conscious choice by authorities that displayed the relative value of non-white women to their white counterparts. The acts had to be effectively "tested" on non-white subjects before they could be extended to England. Even among prostitutes, race dictated their treatment by the state. Butler and the LNA, however, only became interested in repeal after the extension of the acts to England, and so that is where I have chosen

to focus. Additionally, Mill's argument for suffrage draws on notions of Englishness, him and Butler together reevaluating the ways that the private sphere was being questioned specifically at home.

Even though the CD acts were eventually repealed and the suffrage movement eventually succeeded, I do not mean to suggest that women suddenly became equal to men in society. Nor do I wish to suggest that the repeal movement was the sole reason for the resurgence of suffrage. Emphasizing the success of the two movements gives them an air of inevitability, which they certainly did not have. British women were not equal to men after they gained the right to vote. Notably, prostitutes continued to be harassed by police in the British empire, particularly in India.[173] The same concerns about men's access to disease free prostitutes prompted regulation similar to the CD acts in areas where sailors frequently interacted with prostitutes. Even lower class women who managed to escape prostitution faced further struggles for equality. Poor women did not have the same access to education that allowed elite ladies like Butler to agitate for their rights. Although the right to vote was an important advancement for women, it could not solve the intersecting struggles that poor women faced, something that some repealers and suffragettes recognized.[174] However, the repeal campaign and the suffrage movement were both significant moments that contributed to evolving theories of gender and sexuality and to a decentralized "women's movement." Putting the two movements in conversation with each other

---

[173] For more on prostitution in British India, see Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History* and Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics.*

[174] In 1888 Emmeline Pankhurst, suffragette and mother of Christabel Pankhurst, wrote that "women [would] still only be serfs and slaves when they have votes...twenty generations of social prejudice have to be removed...the true social relations of the sexes still have to be discovered," echoing the class consciousness that the LNA had helped bring about. Emmeline Pankhurst, "The Emancipation of Women," *The Cambrian News* (29 June 1888). Accessed 7 February 2017.

allows us a more complete understanding of the state of Victorian gender theory and first-wave feminism.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Acton, William. *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities: With Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils.* London: J. Churchill & Sons, 1870. Electronic.

Acton, William. "Prostitution in Relation to Public Health," or *The Second Edition of the Treatise on Syphilis* (1851). In *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 1, The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 43-65. New York: Routledge, 2003.

"An Appeal Against Female Suffrage (1889)," in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*. Edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson, 19. Ontario: Broadview Press: 2004.

Bentham, Jeremy. *On Marriage* (1843). *Free and Ennobled: Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism*. Edited by Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt, 47. New York: Pergamon Press, 1979.

Butler, Josephine. *The Constitution Violated* (1871). In *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 2, The Ladies Appeal and Protest*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 211-303. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Butler, Josephine. *Education and Employment of Women* (1868). In *A Feminist Reader: Feminist Thought From Sappho to Satrapi, Vol. 2*. Edited by Sharon M. Harris and Linda K. Hughes, 206-229. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Butler, Josephine. "Great Meeting of Working Men (1870)," In *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 2, The Ladies Appeal and Protest*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 67-79. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Butler, Josephine. *Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir*. Edited by George W. and Lucy A. Johnson. Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1909. Electronic.

Butler, Josephine. "Painfully Interesting Details of the Working of the Acts (1870)." In *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 2, The Ladies Appeal and Protest*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 80-97. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Butler, Josephine. "The Lovers of the Lost (1870)." In *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 1, The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 93-120. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Butler, Josephine. *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness,* or *Une Voix dans le Desert* (1874). Translated by Osmund Airy. In *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 1, The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 128-155. New York: Routledge, 2003.

"Control of Prostitution (1870)." *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 1, The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 79-81. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Edmondson, Joseph. "An Enquiry into the Causes of the Great Sanitary Failure of the State Regulation of Social Vice (1897)." In *The History of Sexuality in Europe: A Sourcebook and Reader*. Edited by Anna Clark, 176-181. New York: Routledge, 2011.

"Ladies National Appeal and Protest (1870)." In *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 2, The Ladies Appeal and Protest*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 45-58. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Martineau, Harriet. "Letters to the *Daily News* (1869-1870)" in *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic, Vol. 2, The Ladies Appeal and Protest*, Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 33-44. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Mill, John Stuart. "Petition Presented to the House of Commons by Mr. J. Stuart Mill, 7 June 1866." In *A Feminist Reader: Feminist Thought From Sappho to Satrapi, Vol. 2*. Edited by Sharon M. Harris and Linda K. Hughes, 230-257. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women*, in *J.S. Mill: On Liberty and Other Writings*. Edited by Stefan Collini, 117-218. Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Florence Nightingale on Women, Medicine, Midwifery and Prostitution: Collected Works of Florence Nightingale, Volume 5. Edited by Lynn McDonald. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005.

Pankhurst, Christabel. *The Great Scourge and How to End It*. London: E Pankhurst, 1913. Electronic.

Pankhurst, Emmeline. "The Emancipation of Women." In *The Cambrian News*, 29 June 1888. Accessed 7 February 2017.

Pankhurst, Emmeline. *The Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement 1905-1910*. London: Sturgis and Walton Company, 1911.

Pillans, T. Dundas. *Plain Truths About Woman Suffrage* (1909). In *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign.* Edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson, 51-52. Ontario: Broadview Press: 2004.

"Prostitution: the Need for its Reform (1857)." *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 1, The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 66-69. New York: Routledge, 2003.

"Prostitution: its Medical Aspects (1858)." *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic Volume 1, The Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes*. Edited by Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, 70-74. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Samuels, H.B. *Woman Suffrage: Its Dangers and Delusions* (1910). In *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England,* Edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson, 53-54. Ontario: Broadview Press: 2004.

"Women's Suffrage: A Reply (1889)." in *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*. Edited by Carolyn Christensen Nelson, 48. Ontario: Broadview Press: 2004.

Secondary sources

Bartley, Paula. *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Bland, Lucy. *Banishing the Beast: Sexuality and the Early Feminists*. New York: New Press, 1995.

Burton, Antoinette. *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Cannadine, David. *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

Clark, Anna. *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995.

Clark, Anna, ed. *The History of Sexuality in Europe: A Sourcebook and Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Cook, Hera. "The Long Sexual Revolution." In *The History of Sexuality in Europe: A Sourcebook and Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2011, 118-130.

Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. "Separate Spheres." In *The Victorian Studies Reader*. Edited by Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam, 307-317. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

Hall, Lesley. "Acton, William John (1812/13–1875)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39445, accessed 3 March 2017].

Hall, Lesley. "Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity, and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Gender & History* 16, no. 1 (April 2004): 36-56. Accessed 16 February 2016.

Jordan, Jane. *Josephine Butler* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2001).

Kent, Susan Kingsley. *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Levine, Philippa. *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990.

Levine, Philippa. *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Marcus, Steven. *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornongraphy in Mid-Nineteenth Century England.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1964.

Mason, Michael. *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Mason, Michael. *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Mason, Michael. "Working-Class Sexuality." In *The Victorian Studies Reader*. Edited by Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Peterson, M. Jeanne. "Dr. Acton's Enemy: Medicine, Sex and Society in Victorian England." *Victorian Studies* 29, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 569-590.

Purvis, June. *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Sigsworth, E.M. and T.J. Wyke. "A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal Disease," in *Suffer and Be Still*. Edited by Martha Vicinus. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973.

Vicinus, Martha, ed. *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977.

Vicinus, Martha, ed. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972.

Walkowitz, Judith. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Wright, Maureen. *Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement: A Biography of an Insurgent Woman*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.