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Articles

*Guarding the British Bible from Rousseau:
Sarah Trimmer, William Godwin,
and the Pedagogical Periodical*

Donelle Ruwe

Sarah Kirby Trimmer produced biblical and historical prints, educational tracts, children's books, textbooks, religious commentaries, numerous best-selling editions of the Bible, a spiritual autobiography, and two magazines.¹ She founded Sunday schools and an industrial school. Her still-popular fable of Robin Redbreast defined the genre of the children's animal allegory and became the text with which all other animal fables contended. She knew Johnson, Hogarth, and Gainsborough² and was among the privileged few to be mocked by Byron and damned by Charles Lamb. Always she wrote with an extraordinary self-confidence and even, at times, with what appears to be overconfidence. For example, included in the two-volume memoirs of her life is the following letter to "Mrs. S—":

During my early years I relied upon the judgment, and took up the opinions of a parent, who had made Polemic Divinity his particular study, and who cautioned me against following his example in that particular, as he said it had at times greatly disturbed and perplexed his mind, though it ended at last in a firm belief of the doctrines of the Established Church. . . . Convinced that he had chosen the right way, [I] resolved to obey his injunctions, by avoiding those publications which he warned me against; and when I came to years of maturity, instead of giving up my mind to researches into the various opinions of human beings, [I] set myself seriously to examine the principles in which I had been edu-

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cated, by the Word of God. This I have repeatedly done with the most perfect satisfaction; and having no doubts, why should I seek to raise them? I have, it is true, read many books of divinity; but very few, that I can recollect, of a controversial nature. If I found it necessary to read one side of the argument, I should think it incumbent upon me to read the other; but surely what is requisite in merely worldly affairs, ought not to be extended to a subject in which we have an infallible guide—the word of God; on that word then, I choose to build my faith, in preference to any human authority whatever. (*Some Account* 1.91–92)

This letter is indeed uncomfortable reading. Perhaps it, and countless other similar examples from Trimmer's writings, explains why scholars of British romanticism as well as feminists working to recuperate women writers have, in large measure, avoided Trimmer. It is difficult to praise Trimmer's scholarship and the theological rigor of her writings when she publicly professes never to have questioned her own beliefs. For feminists who dedicate limited time, energy, and other resources to the ongoing project of recovering women authors, there are more appealing women writers to recuperate. Indeed, in terms of our project of creating women's literary history, Trimmer can be read as a useful figure who allows us to examine the limits of our recovery efforts. As Margaret Ezell reminds us, Anglo-American feminism celebrates the authors who represent contemporary feminist values and overlooks others who are difficult to fit into our paradigms for reading women's texts.³

At the same time, Trimmer has fared little better in the historiography of children's literature: as Mirzi Myers and William McCarthy have compellingly documented, the story of how children's literature developed has been a "story almost Manichaean in its need to dichotomize, and then to extol or damn its dichotomized terms" (McCarthy 198). Authors who "instruct" children are aligned with an oppressive hegemony in contrast to an ongoing celebration of texts considered imaginative, pleasurable, delightful, or playful. In other words, fairy tales and nonsense rhymes are superior to textbooks no matter how innovative the textbook and how derivative the tale. Myers argues that this genre dichotomizing is also explicitly gendered. She traces the ongoing excoriation of pedagogical writings (and women pedagogues) to a reinscription of the romantic myth of the child of nature into our constructions of children's literature. The child, "trailing clouds

of glory," comes from God into nature but is gradually corrupted by a feminized and feminizing culture. Subsequently, when the history of romanticism or of children's literature is constructed, authors such as Trimmer (I could add Hannah More, Anna Barbauld, and Maria Edgeworth) who openly educate children into this feminizing culture are criticized, demonized, belittled, or ignored.

My project here, however, is not to explore why Trimmer has been neglected within women's literary histories or within histories of children's literature. Rather, my aim is to examine what happens to our constructions of British romanticism when we consider Trimmer as a participant in its formal practices, thematic content, and ideological positions. Rather than challenge the limitations of our received understandings of what constitutes romanticism—what we might call the romantic ideology—I find it a useful aesthetic category for which we have a history of literary criticism and by which we can read texts such as Trimmer's as engaged in a shared body of concerns: an engagement with political, social, and poetic revolutions; a questioning into the nature of genius and the creative imagination; an increased attention to the specific and local as opposed to the general; the use of nature imagery; a renewed focus on the growth of the poet's own mind; an intense subjectivity; and a masculine colonization of feminine genres, sensibilities, and subject matter. In order to place Trimmer within British romanticism, I scrutinize a group of texts from the conservative Trimmer and the radical Godwin (writing under the pseudonym of William Scoble), untangling the complicated intertextuality of Trimmer's and Godwin's debates about the nature of the imagination and its place within pedagogy and the growth of a child into an adult.

By the confluence of political, historical, and pedagogical events at the turn of the century, a woman such as Trimmer was able to gain a greater visibility in the realm of public letters than was perhaps typical before or after.⁴ Oxford and Cambridge Universities had reacted to the French Revolution by shutting down dialogue on all controversial subjects—even replacing oral exams with written exams. In the absence of academic dialogue, intellectuals developed and disseminated ideas through journals, political clubs, and professional organizations. Coleridge, for example, created *The Friend* in 1800. Trimmer created *The Guardian of Education* in 1802.⁵ In the first volume of this work, Trimmer lambastes a children's text that contemporary scholars have only recently attributed to William Godwin.⁶

For two authors who write from opposing ends of the political spectrum, the radical Godwin and the conservative Trimmer share a surprisingly extensive intertextual history. Godwin's two-volume *Fables, Ancient and Modern. Adapted for the Use of Children* (1805, under the pseudonym of Edward Baldwin, Esq.) was modeled after Trimmer's popular *Ladder to Learning: A Collection of Fables Consisting of Words of One, Two, and Three Syllables, with Original Morals* and would have been in direct competition with this text and her popular *Fabulous Histories* (1786). Certainly Godwin's reputation as a radical ensured that he would run afoul of influential critical organs such as Trimmer's *Guardian of Education*. Forced to write under a variety of pseudonyms and struggling financially, Godwin enhanced the marketability of his own texts through a gendered form of criticism that attacked the feminine status of his competitors, treating their works as obviously of lesser value. In particular, the preface to his 1802 *Bible Stories*, written under the pseudonym William Scolfield, is a polemic against other moral improvers who are overwhelmingly female or, if male, feminized.

Godwin's preface to *Bible Stories* is a useful place for my analysis to begin, for it contains much that we, as contemporary critics, have come to associate with British romanticism: an intermixing of Rousseau's *Emile*, associationist philosophy, and Adam Smith's version of the sympathetic imagination:

these modern improvers have left out of their system that most essential branch of human nature the imagination. . . . Every thing is studied and attended to, except those things which open the heart, which insensibly initiate the learner in the relations and generous offices of society, and enable him to put himself in imagination into the place of his neighbour, to feel his feelings and to wish his wishes.

Imagination is the ground-plot upon which the edifice of a sound morality must be erected. Without imagination we may have a certain cold and arid circle of principles, but we cannot have sentiments: . . . we can neither ourselves love, nor be fitted to excite the love of others.

Imagination is the characteristic of man. (ii-iii)

Godwin/Scolfield presents the familiar ideal of the sympathetic imagination and connects this imagination to charitable emotion. As in Rousseau's *Emile*, Godwin emphasizes age-appropriate learning and is concerned that children are too frequently given Bibles that contain

moralizing commentary beyond their comprehension level. Godwin's *Bible Stories* does not provide commentary and prints only narratives that had "most forcibly seized upon his youthful imagination . . . before he was but seven years of age" (vii). Godwin's introduction also builds on associationist philosophy—he suggests that his text presents the Bible as a "posy of sweet-smelling flowers, without one shrub of evil scent," and thus the child will have "none but pleasing recollections associated with the sacred volume" (v). Such early recollections, Godwin insists, are the foundation of a "sincere and manly sentiment of religion" (vi). For the same associationist reasons, *Bible Stories* follows the original King James translation (with one exception that I discuss later). Godwin contends that to alter the original phrasings for the child's understanding will eventually cause pain to the child-as-adult: these alterations will be unpleasantly jarring to the reader's positive associations with the original language and will cause a "painful and injurious sensation" in the mind (vi).

Trimmer's review of Godwin's *Bible Stories* accurately outlines her crucial objections to his text—that this edition is the product of Rousseau-influenced and Deist-based modern philosophy and leads children away from religion. This twenty-page review of *Bible Stories* is by far the longest of all of her *Guardian* reviews in the running feature "Examination of Books for Children"; the typical length of these reviews runs from a third of a page to four pages. Clearly, she uses this review to establish the principles by which children's books should be evaluated, principles she has delineated in her periodical's opening essay: "Introduction: Containing Observations on the Instruction of Children and Youth from the Time of the Reformation; and a Short Account of the Present Work." Found in the first installment of her journal, this lead article is a political-historical discussion in which Trimmer spells out her version of the history of religious education and religious writers.

In her discussion of Christian education, Trimmer carefully defines her moment in history as a moment of crisis in which Christianity is under siege: a "CONSPIRACY against the CHRISTIAN RELIGION (to which we shall have frequent occasion to allude) was first organized by three persons; namely, VOLTAIRE, the chief; FREDERICK the second, *King of Prussia*, the protector; D'ALEMBERT, the agent; to whom was afterwards added Diderot" (9). These writers, in combination with earlier British writers who had attempted to establish Deism on the ruins of true religion, had developed a "concerted plan to propagate their

abominable principles, the French ENCYCLOPEDIA, which mixed their abominable principles with doctrines of truth and caused a general taste for metaphysical studies" (10). Although this abominable philosophy is fed by the "seducing pen of *Voltaire*," the greatest injury of all is "*Rousseau's* system given to us by *Emilius*, an imaginary pupil educated in a new principle from which Christianity [is] banished" (11). Rousseau's *Emile*, Trimmer contends, works in concert with Diderot's *Encyclopedia* to weaken religion, propagate modern philosophy, and undermine British morality.

In *Bible Stories*, Trimmer discovers a clear example of French-inspired modern philosophy and shows her readers how to discover for themselves the Deism that permeates his biblical text. She reprints all of Godwin's preface and, in a smart pedagogical strategy for emphasizing her key points, italicizes or capitalizes every word that comes from the "language of *modern philosophy*." Trimmer's typographical aggression and her insistence that Godwin has mutilated the Bible indicate a sophisticated aesthetic maneuvering. She understands what is at stake in Godwin's text: children's first introduction to the foundational text of Christianity and Western society. Her review lists the dangerous gaps in Godwin's good-parts version while simultaneously engaging in a romantic gesture of doing violence to Godwin's words.

What Trimmer excoriates in Godwin's *Bible Stories* is precisely what Godwin suggests is the positive effect of his book: that, by inspiring young children's passions and imaginations, he would be encouraging them to read, remember, and be inspired by the Bible. By contrast, Trimmer suggests that his good-parts version of the Bible fosters the false sympathy of the imagination that gives rise "to the *fictitious virtues philanthropy, mental energy, and sensibility*" while destroying habits of "charity, reverence and attachment. *Liberty and equality* [are] the ultimatum of modern philosophy" (249). In short, Godwin's Bible fosters antigovernment sentiment and espouses liberty and equality for all. Because she condemns the sympathetic imagination and sensibility, Trimmer raises questions for contemporary critics who have associated the rise of sensibility with the rise of the domestic novel and women's literary authority. Trimmer argues against sensibility—the creation of sympathetic bonds between humans through human interaction—by revealing its solipsistic nature. Trimmer argues that all forms of morality based on human faculties such as the imagination are wrongly hubristic: to rely on empathy and fellow feeling for morality is ultimately human and not God-centered. One must care

for other humans whether or not one is able to sympathize with them. In her opposition to the sympathetic imagination, Trimmer diverges from the paradigm of a female romanticism established by critics such as Anne Mellor. In identifying the markers of a feminine romanticism, Mellor links women writers to the sympathetic imagination, which, she notes, is strikingly similar to Carol Gilligan's ethic of care. Trimmer, however, finds such human-centered concepts of morality dangerously hubristic. In fact, Trimmer's stance ultimately implies that all secular theories of morality including Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiments are implicitly flawed.⁷ The great humanitarian strength of Trimmer's Christianity is its inflexibility: one must be moral whether one feels like it or not.

Trimmer locates irrefutable proof of Godwin's anti-God, antigovernment stance in his one alteration of the language of the King James translation: he replaces "The Lord" with "Jehovah." Godwin's explanation for this substitution is that he is giving parents the freedom to present Jehovah as just another mythic character like Zeus or Diana. If they wish to insist on God's supreme authority, Godwin suggests that parents may tell their child that Jehovah means the all-powerful Lord. Trimmer insists that this removal of "The Lord" is openly subversive, for it places "the SUPREME BEING on a level with the idols of heathen nations" and denies the presence of God as the sole instigator of the text. Trimmer then notes that Godwin's *Bible Stories* does not begin with the creation story, in which God acts as an omnipotent progenitor, but instead begins with the human stories of Abraham and Sara. She next responds, point by point, to Godwin's premises, explaining how his apparently moral ideas are in fact seductively immoral. Ultimately, her review teaches parents to read between the lines, to detect French-inspired "modern philosophy," even when disguised within the Bible. In an interesting sidenote to the story of Trimmer and Godwin, ten years after Trimmer's attack on Godwin's pedagogy, Godwin's subversive writings for children became the focus of a special investigation by the Privy Council in 1813. They, though ambivalent, chose not to take action.

To read Trimmer's twenty-page review of *Bible Stories* as merely a reactionary rejection of the sympathetic imagination or religious dogmatism is to misread Trimmer's complicated argument. Trimmer herself produced numerous imaginative works such as *Fabulous Histories, Designed for the Instruction of Children, Respecting Their Treatment of Animals* (which was later known and loved as "The History of the Robins")

Dicky, Flapsy, Pecky, and Robin Redbreast). Trimmer refused to enter to this wildly popular tale by any other name than "fabulous history," for she wished to be clear that she was not writing history but rather was writing an imaginative fabrication. In other words, she does not deny imagination but merely refuses to mislead audiences by mixing genres. As she insists, both works of "accurate fact" and works of "acknowledged fiction" are worthwhile so long as "truth and fable may be kept separate and distinct in the mind." Trimmer's insistence that "The History of the Robins" be referred to under its original title, *Fabulous Histories*, illuminates an additional motivation behind her response to Godwin's text—the full title of Godwin's book is *Bible Stories, Extracted from the Original Histories for the Use of Children*.

It is not the imagination per se to which Trimmer objects in *Bible Stories* but the extrication of the story from the sacred text, the intermixing of human imagination with the word of God. Trimmer wishes to keep distinct the different types of inspired works—those inspired by God and those inspired by human fancy. To reconstruct the Bible imaginatively is a sacrilege of a particularly insidious order, and, further, Godwin claims the authority not of divine inspiration but of a secular, human-centered imagination. Trimmer discovers that

the *ingenuity and contrivance* [of *Bible Stories*] consisted, not in *concoction and uniformity*, but in *detachment and incoherence*; in an *outline*, (if such it may be called) *irregular, twisted, and broken*, as might best answer the purpose of the compiler, by destroying the effect of that SACRED VOLUME, in which there is such perfect harmony, and agreement in all its parts, though written by different hands, and at different periods of time as prove its Divine origin beyond a doubt, to the unprejudiced mind. (254)

Godwin's "extractions" not only break the narrative coherence of the Bible but also leave gaps in the text that the imagination rushes to fill. Trimmer fears that visionary imaginations mislead rather than lead the individual. Those in need of spiritual guidance, who seek a way of grounding their "warm imaginations," will be led, all unconsciously, back into the dangerous realm of the imagination and, even worse, into the realm of modern metaphysical speculation. In short, the "impressionable minds" of children will fabricate false stories. For Trimmer, human passions and human imaginations are not a sufficient foundation for a system of morality or a rewriting of religious history,

and there are substantive differences between fabulous (secular) histories and the divinely inspired Bible.

Trimmer's critique of Godwin's project anticipates contemporary readings of Godwin's use of historical writing to transform political culture. In his recent examination of Godwin's *Enquirer* from 1797, Jon Klancher reminds us that Godwin contrasts two versions of history—Enlightenment universal history (which depends on abstract generalizations about periods and movements to create a patriotic version of British nationhood) versus a history that follows the "arduous, the enthusiastic, and the sublime license of imagination" (Godwin, in Klancher 147). Godwin, of course, desired a history that was imaginative. In a particularly telling phrase, Godwin, who turns to the writers of ancient history for inspiration and a prototype of intellectual agency, writes that ancient history is not "a species of fable" but a "genuine praxis upon the nature of man," for "all history bears too near a resemblance to fable" (Klancher 158). Godwin's *Bible Stories*, "extracted from the original historians" and introduced by a preface in praise of the imagination, is (to use Godwin's own terminology) a type of fabulous rather than enlightenment history.

In reviewing *Bibles*, Trimmer was speaking not just as a devoutly religious woman but as her era's greatest living expert on children's Bibles. She was a published pedagogue, a mother, a Sunday school administrator, education advisor to Princess Sophia, and a woman who had spent much of her life in the center of literary and cultural activity. When Trimmer refuses to accept that the creative imagination is an adequate source of Christian sentiment and social morality, she is making a carefully considered aesthetic and epistemological choice. She acts not as a reactionary but as a leading authority responding to a dangerously misleading text. Long before Godwin's *Bible Stories* was published, Trimmer had suggested that most exemplary histories and improving books were too difficult for young children and argued for a developmental approach to religious education. Like the rationalists (and even Rousseau), she suggested that a Christian education begins with the child's own curiosities about the natural world. Wrongly grouped with the catechists, Trimmer in fact worried that children might learn Scripture by rote. For example, in *An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature, and Reading the Holy Scriptures (Adapted to the capacities of children)* (1780), she writes that children should first be introduced to nature and only then to "scientific accounts" and religious study.⁸ Trimmer advocates an interactive approach to the read-

ing of the Bible in which a mother reads the Bible along with her children and interprets and explains the text after several chapters have been read. Children, writes Trimmer in the preface to *An Easy Introduction*, must learn to read "the Volume of Nature, in order to discover [God's] *Wisdom* and *Goodness*, a desire of doing his Will might from thence be excited in their minds, before they were permitted to read the *Holy Scriptures*, which they should not begin till they had been previously taught, that they contain the Revelation which he has vouchsafed to make" (viii).

One of Trimmer's most popular books, *An Easy Introduction* reveals her concern with women's roles as active spiritual leaders by dramatizing women and girls as teachers and students of biblical knowledge. The first two-thirds of the text presents long monologues in which a mother talks to her children during daily nature walks, teaching them how to marvel at God's manifold creations. Significantly, the two children taught by Trimmer's mother-figure are of different genders: Henry, a young boy who has just gone into breeches but has "a great many Things . . . to learn yet, [that the mother] shall be happy to teach" (3), and Charlotte, an older daughter who is the primary focus of the mother's biblical instruction. By contrast, Rousseau's contention in *Emile* is that little girls must memorize by rote scriptural and religious knowledge as soon as possible, for, as adult women, they would be incapable of mature theological reasoning. For Emile (unlike Rousseau's Sophy) formal religious training is the capstone of his education. Not unlike Trimmer's Henry and Charlotte, Emile learns first from nature through his tutor's manipulations of his natural curiosity. Unlike the tutor, however, who has an almost sinister ability to educate Emile through anticipating his questions and controlling his environment, Trimmer's mother is direct in her instructions, and her interpretations are explicit rather than manipulative. It is a marvelous corrective to Rousseau's explicit misogyny that, in Trimmer's woman-centered narrative, little Henry is the one incapable of comprehending the Bible. He can participate in the nature walks, but only his sister is mature enough for theological and biblical lessons: "I suppose Henry thinks himself slighted by being excluded from our party, but we will take him a walking this Afternoon to make him amends.—I despair'd of fixing his attention, and besides the Subject was above his Years" (262). Admittedly, what Charlotte learns is not particularly enlightened by today's standards: Satan tempts Eve and not Adam because Eve "was inferior to her husband in point of reason" (247). But

that a mother (rather than a father, a tutor, or an established church authority) imparts to her children the proper interpretation of the Bible is a significant and empowering act for all mothers who purchased her popular and continually reprinted text.⁹

Arguably, Trimmer's most powerful political act is in her editing of annotated editions of the Bible and study guides for specialized audiences of Bible readers such as working-class readers or children as in *Easy Introduction*. She was one of the forerunners in the production of British children's Bibles, and, as her private letters indicate, was fully aware that she was breaking into a patriarchy—the holy text of the supreme patriarch. Always a smart marketer, she skillfully rode a wave of anti-Jacobin sentiment (the French had had, for some time, state-of-the-art vernacular Bibles) and anti-Catholic sentiment (the only eighteenth-century British Bibles for children were from Catholic presses)—and became one of the most famous and widely published women in England. Trimmer's *Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature, And Reading the Holy Scriptures* (1780) was later enlarged to the six-volume *Sacred History* (1782–84). The six volumes were edited down to two and renamed *Abridgement of Old Testament History and Abridgement of New Testament History*, which the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge put on its list in 1793. And there they remained for seventy-seven years, selling more than 750,000 copies.¹⁰

Ruth Bottigheimer's award-winning history of children's Bibles acknowledges the crucial role played by Trimmer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and examines the social, historical, and hegemonic force wielded by these editions. Children's Bibles consist of the story sections of the Bible to which commentary, verses, summaries, questions and answers, and history are sometimes added. All children's Bibles were produced by men until the late eighteenth century and tended to emphasize stories in which girls die (not boys), and in which fathers retain full power over their children's lives. Children's Bibles are neither merely simplified retellings of Bible stories nor the "good parts" versions. Rather, the extensive editing and redaction of the Bible necessary to fit the Bible to an audience of children allows editors to shape Scripture for their own ideological agendas. As Bottigheimer notes, these texts therefore are gender- and class-specific social commentary rendered in a godly context that makes the author's espoused ideology virtually unassailable. Bottigheimer reminds us that children's Bibles frequently delete sexually graphic material (Amnon's incest, Dinah's rape in Genesis, the entire Song

of Solomon) while simultaneously adding socially stanted commentary. For example, Trimmer's *Help to the Unlearned in the Study of the Holy Scriptures Adapted According to the Opinion of Approved Commentators* (1805) was intended to teach poor children an ethic of work through the study of the Bible—Sodom and Gomorrah fell because people weren't working, and David covered Bathsheba because he had too much time on his hands. Class-specific children's Bibles became so popular in this era, notes Bottigheimer, that in practical terms it was a two-tiered genre—Bibles for the poor and Bibles for the upper and middle classes.¹¹

Thus, when Trimmer attacks Godwin's excerpted and simplified Bible story selections, her attack is the result of 150 years of debates about which Bible stories belong in the hands of the poor and the hands of children. It is also the result of twenty-five years of creating her own and commenting on others' Bible editions. When Trimmer's review of Godwin lists, for four pages, the passages, stories, and details that Godwin omits in his *Bible Stories*, and when she describes these omissions, over and over, as "mutilations,"¹² she does so not out of reactionary fervor but out of scholarly energy. Nothing enrages a scholar more than someone else's slipshod editions: Trimmer is all too aware that children's Bibles allow authors to control and transform stories—and that Bible stories express social values and transmit cultural norms from generation to generation.

Although I would never argue that Trimmer is a radical, on the other hand, the social values that Trimmer transmits are not always strictly conservative—particularly in her portrayal of women figures from the Old Testament. It is true that Trimmer's children's Bibles contained commentary that supported the hierarchical relations between the classes, but as Bottigheimer also notes, her Bibles did retain strong women figures that other editors belittled or simply excised from their texts: for example, the story of Jael and Sisera from the Song of Deborah (5 Judges). Deborah is a Hebrew judge who led the host to defeat Canaan—Sisera, the Canaanite leader, was murdered by Jael after she invited him to her tent and drove a tent peg through his temple. In Bottigheimer's research into the history of Jael's story, she learned that this passage had always been a site of contention—early German Lutherans were upset that the King James translation had Jael cut off Sisera's head, but they were even more upset that when Sisera requests milk, Jael brings water. Eventually, both Deborah and Jael are erased from children's Bibles and their vic-

tory over the Canaanites becomes part of Gideon's story—this erasure is still the standard practice in contemporary children's Bibles. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English male authors had only reproach for Jael, but Trimmer justified Jael's act by taking into consideration the circumstances of the Israelites. Although Trimmer admits that women are the weaker instruments, Jael's success proves that women and men are equally indebted to God for strength.

Perhaps the woman-centered version of the Bible that appears within Trimmer's otherwise strict hegemonic text can help explain several other anomalies in what would appear to be Trimmer's seamlessly conservative career. On the political front, Trimmer had already digressed from the conservative party line in unexpected ways. For example, she supported Hannah More in *The Guardian of Education* even at the height of the Blagdon Controversy, praising More as a "pious and justly celebrated author," refusing to be "guilty of blameable omission" by not acknowledging More's pedagogical authority. After reading *The Rights of Woman*, Trimmer confessed that "Miss Woolstonecroft [sic] is a woman of extraordinary abilities" (*Some Account* 1.355).¹³

I'd like to reread the Trimmer letter that I quoted at the opening of this essay—not as a sample of Trimmer's conservative closed-mindedness but as an example of a surprisingly familiar romantic narrative. In this letter, Trimmer explores the growth of her own mind and refuses to bow to "any human authority whatever" but only to the authority of sublime words. She was passionately engaged with the theories and practices of pedagogy, of one's coming into a subjectivity. Like Coleridge, Godwin, Kant, Wollstonecraft, and Rousseau, she was preoccupied with the nature of the creative imagination and its political and emotional effects. She wrote a mixed-genre autobiography of original letters, meditations, prayers, and memories not unlike Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. She likewise published essays on theology and education, many of which appeared posthumously. Although considered conservative, she was, taken from a different perspective, more leveling than Wordsworth. He spoke to the educated about writing in the language of ordinary men—she, however, wrote for the ordinary, for the uneducated, and for those who sought self-education.¹⁴ She specialized in easy-to-read Bible editions and easy-to-follow learning guides to the Bible as well as children's books that are arranged developmentally into age-appropriate language. She created and sponsored whole new genres of literature: the teacher's guide and nursery room educational prints and engravings.

Perhaps one clue as to why Trimmer has been neglected in the history of romanticism is that although her content is frequently identifiably romantic, her attitude rarely is. Trimmer, as in my opening letter, appeared to be without doubt or anxieties about her project, her writing, her understanding, or her place in the world. She registered no Bloomanian anxiety of influence; she showed no desire to project the supernatural onto the natural. She did not evidence, as Margaret Homans, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar once argued of nineteenth-century women writers, any anxiety of authorship or any aesthetic of self-renunciation. She did not embrace the sympathetic imagination or engage in a politics of the beautiful or the sentimental, as Anne Mellor, Isobel Armstrong, and Jerome McGann have argued, respectively, in recent discussions of women romantic poets. She was not outside the "contours of masculine desire," but neither did she fit comfortably within its parameters. She successfully broke into the patriarchal field of Bible scholarship, but she rarely advocated that other women do so. Even so, she served as a role model for other women authors of the romantic and Victorian periods who followed in her footsteps, who published children's books and primers such as *The Footsteps to Mrs. Trimmer's Sacred History* that refer to and capitalize on her successes.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the Boston Public Library and the University of California, Los Angeles Department of Special Collections (Children's Book Collection) for the use of their rare book collections in preparing this research. I would also like to thank the UCLA Special Collections for an Ahmanson Short Term Research Fellowship in the summer of 1999.
2. Trimmer initiated and edited *The Family Magazine* (1778-89) for the serving class and *The Guardian of Education* (1802-6) for the affluent, intending to combat Jacobin influences. Trimmer's *Guardian* "was as much a manual for prospective writers as a guide for parents' selections" and inspired a flood of imitators (Jackson 183). In 1990, Andrea Himmel published an excellent index of the book reviews, essays, extracts, and correspondence published in the *Guardian of Education*.
3. Her father was an architect who was a friend of Hogarth, Reynolds, and Cainsborough (who asked to be buried beside her father and was).
4. Though not in constructions of women's literary history and romanticism, Trimmer is present in a limited fashion in the histories of children's literature and education. See, for example, Mary Jackson's history of children's literature in England or Gillian Avery's history of American children and their books. For discussions of Trimmer as an author of religious books for children, see Patricia Demers's *Heaven upon Earth*; see also Ruth Bortolzheimer's study of the history of children's Bibles. Winner of the 1996 Children's Literature Association Book Award, Bortolzheimer's *The Bible for Children* contains an extensive discussion of Trimmer's innovations in the field of children's and working-

- class Bibles. My comments on the history of children's Bibles are drawn largely from her work. Richardson's study of pedagogy and literature, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*, is unusual in that he addresses Trimmer's writings as a romantic-era literary critic of books for children. He primarily uses Trimmer as a representative figure of the conservative politics of children's literature, however.
4. As Christine Krueger and Anne Mellor have discussed at some length, conservative women such as Hannah More were particularly influential during the latter half of the seventeenth century and not only created new literary genres but, in so doing, also amassed personal fortunes and an international reputation as leading educators and moralists. See Krueger's *Reader's Repentance* and Mellor's presentation, "Hannah More: Agent Provocateur." The classic discussion of the power of the Georgian-era rational woman and teacher is Mitzel Myers's "Impeccable Governesses."
5. I have drawn much of my information on the political situation of journal publishing during the early 1800s from Hewitt's discussion of *The Friend* and the early stages of sociology.
6. For a full discussion of why the pseudonym "Scotfield" is attributed to William Godwin, see William St. Clair's article, "William Godwin as Children's Bookseller." That it was not until 1989 that this book was identified as Godwin's suggests that the dichotomous schema that one is either a good radical and celebrant of the imagination or a bad didacticist and defender of the hegemony is a very compelling paradigm indeed.
7. Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was denounced by many Christian philosophers in the eighteenth century for its secularization of human morality. Smith proposes, in effect, that human morality arises from empirical experience. As humans interact with others they learn that certain behaviors are harmful or hurtful. Through the sympathetic imagination, each person can imagine how his or her behavior will affect others and attempts to behave in ways that are socially acceptable.
8. Trimmer's *Easy Introduction*, as her preface explains, is intended to blend Isaac Watts's *Treatise on Education* with Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (a book that she recommends to her readers, even including the exact address at which the book can be purchased: No. 72, St. Paul's Church Yard). Trimmer quotes Watts's advice to parents: "Teach [children] to observe the various occurrences of Nature and Providence. . . . that the great God made all these," and praises Barbauld's use of an approachable "style of familiar conversation, and free from all formality" (vii, xii). For an excellent discussion of Barbauld's *Inflential Lessons*, see William McCarthy, "Mother of All Discourses." *An Easy Introduction* was first published in 1780, although the Dictionary of National Biography inaccurately dates its first publication in 1782.
9. Trimmer, like other women pedagogical writers from the Georgian period, created mother-teacher figures who are powerful authority figures. For discussions of Wolstoncraft's Mrs. Mason from *Original Stories*, see Myers's "Impeccable Governesses"; of Smith's Mrs. Talbot from *Conversations Introducing Poetry*, see Ruwe's "Benevolent Brothers"; of Barbauld's mother-pedagogue figure, see Myers's "Of Mice and Mothers" and Sarah Robbins's "Lessons for Children."
10. The French had had vernacular children's Bibles for some time (numerous editions copied Nicolas Fontaine's 1670 text, *The History of the Old and the New Testament*). In 1726, the first complete Bible was rewritten for children in English, *A Compendious History of the Old and New Testament* (which borrowed heavily from Fontaine's *History* and its illustrations by Merriam). In the 1780s, two British firms produced Bible stories for Catholic children, setting off a sudden proliferation of Protestant children's Bibles. See Bortolzheimer for a full discussion of children's Bibles during the eighteenth century. *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* lists the publication and circulation figures for Trimmer's Bible editions (1159).
11. In her otherwise complimentary review of Bortolzheimer's *Bible for Children*, Andrea Himmel remarks that, in the interest of creating a survey of children's Bibles, Bortol-

heimer oversimplifies her representations of class: the two-part model of the affluent and the poor is "no longer viable in the light of recent researches on the history of the book, book trade economics, the sociology of readers or the formation of the middle class" (Immel 30).

12. "SOLOMON'S history is dispatched in a few short mutilated lessons," and "the account of David killing Goliath is mutilated" (260).

13. The full quotation discussing Wollstonecraft is as follows: "Of the *Rights of Women*, I can now say nothing more than that I found so much happiness in having a husband to assist me in forming a proper judgment, and in taking upon him the chief labour of providing for a family, that I never wished for a further degree of liberty or consequence than I enjoyed. Miss Woolstonecraft [sic] is a woman of extraordinary abilities, I confess; I cannot help thinking they might be employed to more advantage to society.— But my recent misfortune [the death of her husband of twenty-nine years] has almost obliterated the remembrance of the contents of her book" (*Some Account* 1:355).

14. She was attentive to the lower classes though, as Alan Richardson and Wilfred Keusch note, Trimmer's educational texts are intended to re-educate the lower classes into passivity and to maintain hierarchical power relations (Richardson 65).

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