

**Thinking Back Through our Mother's Magazines:  
Feminism's Inheritance from Nineteenth-Century Magazines for Mothers**

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<1>As I write this in Manchester in early 2010, the City Art Gallery is displaying a newly commissioned portrait of Emmeline Pankhurst, most famous of Manchester's feminist mothers. It is a montage made up of tiny photos sent in by local women, pictures of the women who have inspired them. Looking closely you can see that feminist icons like Virginia Woolf and snaps of "My Mum" are juxtaposed without distinction. "For we think back through our mothers, if we are women," Virginia Woolf famously said (76). But in my Manchester women's group in the 1970s, while, like Woolf, we searched for our feminist foremothers in history and literature, again like Woolf, none of us wanted to be like our own biological mothers. Indeed several of us did not want to be mothers at all. Sisterhood might be powerful but motherhood – well, that was a different matter altogether. When the group eventually stopped meeting, a major fault line which had opened up was between those women involved in mothering and those who were not.

<2>"Motherhood," of course, encompasses a set of highly charged metaphors (mother tongue, motherland, etc.) as well as a particular relationship. It is a biological function mediated through social and cultural norms which differ widely not just over time and between different societies but within and across social groups. It is the argument of this paper that motherhood has occupied an ambiguous and slippery place in feminist discourses and in feminist practice. Both theoretically and existentially, motherhood and feminism have – and had – an uneasy relationship. I want to come at the questions raised by this special issue through an examination of a selection of periodicals addressed to "mothers" in nineteenth-century Britain.

<3>Throughout the nineteenth century many British magazines addressed to women assumed the co-incident of adult femininity with motherhood. This was evident in the very earliest nineteenth-century magazines for women, like *The Lady's Museum* (1798-1832), and persisted into the 1890s, when magazines like *Hearth and Home* (1891-1914) and the *Lady's Realm* (1896-1915) ran articles called "What Shall We Do With Our Daughters?" (Beetham 131-141). Similarly, magazines addressed to "girls" often assumed that mothers were part of their readership as, for example, did the *Girls' Own Paper* (1880-1927) whose sub-title was "A Magazine for Young Women and their Mothers." However, from the 1830s onwards, publications which specifically addressed "mothers" as readers/purchasers emerged. Like advice books on parenting, which were part of a longer publishing tradition, these magazines sought not only to address mothers but also to offer more or less explicitly a normative account of

motherhood. As the slippage in my last sentence shows, they also gendered parenting as exclusively female. There are no analogous magazines addressed to men as fathers, though throughout the period the editors of publications for mothers made occasional – rather fruitless – gestures towards the role of fathers in bringing up their children.<sup>(1)</sup> The difference between these publications and, for example, Hannah Moore's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, is that these were serials and their relationship to readers through time is, I argue, crucial.

<4>In this paper I focus mainly on the earliest periodicals for mothers which circulated in Britain and on the 1840s and early 1850s. However, I conclude by briefly tracing the ways magazines for mothers had developed by the late 1880s and 1890s. It is the continuities and discontinuities across time that interest me; in particular, how far, in their different ways, these papers, which addressed “mothers” as individuals in the home, could in the public space opened up by serial publication recognize, or perhaps create, a community of readers with shared interests. Taking up the terms of this special number, I want to ask how far these periodicals provided a platform on which readers could put into the public domain their own concerns or even intervene in Politics with a capital “P.” What kind of space did they provide for their readers and how was it gendered? Can we discern any kind of proto-feminism here or were these periodicals resolutely conservative? The underlying question which interests me, writing as a woman who is both a mother and a feminist, is how far we can discern through a study of these journals the “thinking back through our mothers” which Woolf suggested was the task of the woman writer (76).

<5>The earliest magazines I have found which circulated in Britain and specifically addressed mothers, *The Mother's Magazine* (1834-1862), *The British Mother's Magazine* (1845-1864), *The Christian Mother's Magazine* (1844-57), and *The Mother's Friend* (1848-1895), appeared within a few years of each other. The efflorescence of this new kind of magazine came at a moment when, historians have argued, new family patterns associated with industrialization had come into being and the periodical press was creating new forms and reaching new audiences.

<6>Though only one of these mother's magazines has the word “Christian” in its title, they shared a common project of instructing Christian, and specifically Evangelical mothers. They also, with the exception of the *Mother's Friend*, which was directed at “mothers in humble life,” assumed their readers were middle class and this was reflected both in their content and in the three pence price of the *British Mother's Magazine* (1842-3, 75).<sup>(2)</sup> The character of the mother, here, is of the moral guardian of the home, committed to bringing her children up to be true Christians, that is, to have a personal faith which went beyond external adherence to forms of church attendance. The front cover of the *British Mother's Magazine* for January 1853, which is preserved in a copy in the British Library, shows a mother with a child on her lap and one at her knee; she is pointing upwards, directing them towards Heaven in a visual representation of the project that these publications shared.

<7>These magazines were monthlies, serious in tone and sober in appearance. They were printed without columns like a book, octavo size with solid blocks of type, and no illustrations. Reading a copy of the *Mother's Magazine* in the bound volumes, which were all I had access to, it is easy at first to see it as another example of the advice manual, Sarah Ellis's widely read *Women of*

*England*, for example. Not only are the covers and end-papers stripped out, as we know was an almost universal practice when periodicals were bound in the nineteenth century, any indication of a break between one number and another, or indeed, any regular pattern to each number is hard to discern in this journal.

<8>However, all these publications were miscellanies with a range of authorial signatures, though – consistently with other publications of the period – many contributions were unsigned. They included a mixture of articles, poetry, stories, homilies, reports of meetings, and letters from correspondents (though not a letters page as such). The mix of genres, however, goes along with a remarkable consistency in tone, which is didactic and serious. This is particularly true of the earliest of these, the *Mother's Magazine*, edited by Mrs. Whittelsey. This was an American publication, reprinted for a British market, a point to which I will return. Like all these publications, it was concerned with how to be a Christian mother in the context of the day-to-day task of bringing up children. This was dealt with, not just through pious generalisations (though there were plenty of these), but also through specific examples and vignettes of family life.

<9>Though much of the writing is turgid and repetitive, these domestic narratives are sometimes lively, deploying novelistic devices. An example of this is the story of Johnny, who stole an orange from his sister and is discovered hiding behind a large vase enjoying his spoils in such a way that “it was impossible to repress a smile.” The model mother in this case engages her son as follows:

‘John, my son, was that your orange which you was (sic) eating?’  
‘No, ma’am,’ said John  
‘Whose was it?’  
‘Caroline’s.’  
‘And did Caroline give you the orange my son?’  
‘No ma’am.’  
‘How did you come to take it?’  
‘I wanted it ma’am.’  
‘But you had no right to it. Had Caroline taken your orange would you have thought it right? . . . you are quite a small boy but you have done wrong and now, tell me my son, do you not feel you have done wrong?’  
 (“A Temptation” 28-9)

And so on.

Though some of the writers advocated beating and physical restraint, the magazine was strongly in favour of educating children by conversation and reading, so that they internalised their mother’s moral and religious teaching.

<10>*The British Mother's Magazine*, launched in 1845 and lasting with some changes of title until 1864, was edited by Mrs. Bakewell, author of pamphlets and books on mothering. She also ran a school that she advertised on the covers of the journal along with a range of books from religious publishing houses. This magazine offered a similar mix of genres as the *Mother's Magazine*. However, it also included practical advice on such matters as cleanliness and nursing

as for example in a series called “Facts for Keepers at Home” (e.g. 5 (1849): 54-55). Unlike the *Mother’s Magazine*, it explicitly allowed some fiction. A representative sample of articles from one number of the *British Mother’s Magazine* for 1849 included an article on “Moral Training” reprinted from the *Edinburgh Review*, a poem “To My Infant Sister in Heaven,” a short extract from the *Medical Gazette* on “The Disinfecting Properties of Coffee,” “A Plea on Behalf of Dress makers’ Assistants and Apprentices” with a quotation from Hood’s famous poem, a brief notice in small font entitled “Prejudice against Colour” condemning the expulsion of Frederick Douglass’s daughter from the Seward Seminary in Rochester New York on grounds of her colour and urging readers to withdraw their daughters from the school. (This must have been reprinted from an American publication as this action was not open to British readers, though they would almost certainly know of Douglass.) A list of recommended books from religious publishers was followed by an article on feeding children, one of a series on the practical care of children, this being one of the few to discuss the role of the governess (5 ([January] 1850: 8-19, 21, 25, 30).(3)

<11>As this brief summary suggests, these journals used the “scissors-and-paste” method of reprinting material from other religious and secular publications. Sometimes these were acknowledged, sometimes not. “The Editor” of the *British Mother’s Magazine* had to apologise to a Mr. George E. Sargent who complained that a piece written by him and published by the Religious Tract Society had been printed without acknowledgement in the volume for 1847. Mrs. Bakewell explained that she had lifted it from an American periodical which gave no acknowledgment, adding, “We most sincerely wish the American editors would be rather more particular in acknowledging the sources from whence they derive their articles,” a charge to which she must herself have pleaded guilty (Bakewell a, 118). The difficulties of ensuring regular publication showed through again in 1853, when Mrs. Bakewell explained somewhat disingenuously that a serial story, called “The Second Marriage or Prejudice Removed,” written by herself, was included in the magazine whenever she was short of copy (Bakewell b). Though the *Mother’s Magazine* did not get into such explicit difficulties, it too gives the feeling of having been put together on the basis of whatever material was to hand – as was almost certainly the case. Both journals deployed actual serials in their mixture of genres and forms. *The Mother’s Magazine* regularly ran series and, though it explicitly condemned fiction it did include serial stories that it claimed were true (e.g. “The Unhappy Marriage” (1843-4): 146-53, 159-64, 173-80). *The British Mother’s Magazine*, as I have already suggested, included some serialised novels, though the editor explained that these always had a moral purpose. In the case of “The Second Marriage,” this was to show that women who married widowers with children should be accepted as mothers and should not be treated with prejudice because they were step-mothers, an interesting take on the question of whether motherhood was essentially a biological category and one pertinent to my larger argument.

<12>As this makes clear, the serial nature of these journals – despite their appearance – was crucial to their existence and their meaning. Seriality meant that they came out over time – quite long periods of time in both cases. The significance of the periodical’s serial quality is too large a topic to expand on here. Suffice it to say, it was because they appeared over time that the magazines were able not only to develop a relationship with their readers but also to represent their readers in a relationship with each other and, crucially, to allow readers space to become writers appearing in public print. Reader contributions were important to both these publications. *The Mother’s Magazine* always included letters from readers and short accounts – apparently

sent in by readers – of their experiences in bringing up children or of coping with the deaths of children, a reminder of the high level of infant mortality which persisted throughout the period.

<13>Despite its condemnation of fiction, these short stories, anecdotes, and accounts of incidents in daily life were a staple of this magazine, permitted because they were framed as autobiographical, or as recounted by reliable sources, and were therefore “true.” Only some of these were signed, but another important form in which the work of readers appeared was almost always signed and that was the letter. The letter was a form of writing which was legitimate for women and which enabled the move from private correspondence to public print. Letters from readers, including those from missionaries around the world, were a regular feature of both magazines.

<14>There are a number of points to make here. First, because so many of the contributions were anonymous or signed with initials it is difficult to know the gender of contributors. However, though many of the signatures were of men, including ordained men, a substantial number had female signatures and claimed to be by mothers. This, and the consistent value placed on the mundane but sanctified experiences of mothering, posited an alternative authority to that of the men – a female authority which drew on the readers’ experience of their own struggles in the day to day business of bringing up children. Though the magazines were aimed at middle-class women (and the occasional mention of domestic servants assumed that readers were mistresses, not servants), readers were assumed to be themselves engaged in the care of their children and it was from their experience as mothers that they derived the authority to “author” themselves into public print. These journals, then, validated the daily domesticity of motherhood and in so doing gave mothers a powerful voice in defining themselves, always, of course, within the bounds of Evangelical Christianity.

<15>Secondly, these journals represented a model of motherhood that transcended the boundaries of time and space. *The Mother’s Magazine*, as I have already said, was an American publication reprinted and circulated in Britain. Most of the material was American. Yet it was assumed that it would be of equal interest to British readers. Indeed I own some bound copies that had been in the lending library of the Mechanics Institute in Levenshulme, which was a village then and is now a working-class area of Manchester. This suggests the penetration of this journal into British life. Generally in these magazines, material was borrowed to and fro across the Atlantic, as in the case of Mr. Sergeant already quoted. Of course, the practice of unacknowledged “borrowing” was endemic in publishing on both sides of the Atlantic before the introduction of international copyright, but in these magazines I read this as something more than desperation for copy. It springs from a sense of connection. This is also enacted in the letters from missionaries, which are a particularly strong feature of *The British Mother’s Magazine*. Missionaries would write to the journal, as did a mother from Cuddupah in India in 1850, acknowledging the “constant and valuable supplies of magazines” and Mrs. Smith of Chatour who had “put them into circulation in Agra” (6 (1850): 118, 163; see also 165, 187, 260-62). Some missionaries described sharing the contents of the journals with the “natives,” as did Mrs Lawrence who read selections from the magazines at her mothers’ meetings, translating into “Hindoo” as she went along (9 (1853): 238). Reading the magazine is thus represented in the

magazine as an activity shared by mothers around the world, who are united both by their reading and by their motherhood.

<16>Despite the stress on individual conversion in Evangelical Christianity, motherhood was thus constructed as a collective, a shared, activity. The community of readers created by the journal overlaps with or, perhaps, even constitutes the community of mothers. Collective reading is constantly mentioned, not only reading within the family circle, but reading within the circle of other mothers and this community of reader/mothers is international.

<17>All periodicals rely to some extent on the creation of “imagined communities,” to deploy Benedict Anderson’s much used and abused formulation. It is an element of their relationship to time that they implicitly or explicitly insert readers into a group that has in common the reading of the periodical. However, for these magazines the material and the imagined communities of readers co-related more precisely than for most, since both were linked to groups of existing mothers through maternal associations – groups of women who came together to read, pray, share their experiences, and support each other in the task of Christian motherhood. They developed in America during the 1820s and 1830s and were an important aspect of American Evangelical Christianity. *The Mother’s Magazine* regularly reported on these American groups but also included some letters from and about British associations (see e.g. 8 (1841-2): 168). In both magazines, reports of these associations were a source of regular copy and possibly their *raison d’être*. *The British Mother’s Magazine*, according to Barbara Leavy, was sponsored by the London Central Maternal Association (12). It not only included reports from local associations, but provided a space in which readers offered each other advice on how to set up such groups and how they should be run.

<18>The reports which were such a regular feature of these magazines always work within the accepted discourses of individual salvation but they show how these groups gave space for women to share concerns about their lives and legitimized women’s voices being raised in the public space of the meeting, even when this seemed to go against their womanly timidity (see e.g. *The Mother’s Magazine* (1841-2): 168). The role of women in public prayer and preaching divided the Evangelical churches and split the Methodist church in Britain, a disagreement which forms the background to George Eliot’s novel, *Adam Bede* (Rendall 92). None of these magazines advocated women preaching but they did encourage women to take a lead role and to speak in the relatively safe space of the mothers’ group.

<19>The way the mixture of voices gave mothers and readers or reader/mothers a voice alongside male authority figures, the validation of a model of knowledge based on domestic experience and one which was collective and shared, the international dimension — all these aspects of the magazines seem to support the argument that these were proto-feminist publications, foremothers of later advances for women. This is the position taken by Jane Rendall in her important and pioneering account of feminism’s roots. For Rendall, Evangelicalism and in particular the maternal associations were an important source of early American feminism (79). However, she also argued that this pattern of women’s meetings never transplanted to England, which is evidently not the case (96).

<20>In making her case, Rendall draws on another important aspect of Evangelical faith and practice in relation to motherhood, namely the commitment to social justice. The belief that all human beings were equal under God led many Evangelicals to become engaged in working for those generally regarded as inferior or even less than human, as was the case with slaves. The brief summary of the contents of one number of the *British Mother's Magazine* which I gave above, with its articles on colour prejudice in schools and the conditions of work of needlewomen, shows this clearly. If motherhood involved bringing children to God, then the task of bringing others of God's children to Him also fell within the purview of motherhood. Surely, one impassioned contributor wrote, blind Chinese children were worth saving as much as the reader's own ("Letter of Mrs. Gutzlaff." *The Mother's Magazine* 1 (1842-3): 127-28). The magazines offered various accounts not only of missionaries overseas but also of work by maternal associations with "mothers in humble life," with teaching uneducated women to read, and with the setting up of Sabbath schools in poor areas. (see e.g. "Report from Maternal Association of New York City, Feb. 23." *The Mother's Magazine* (1842-3):142-3, also 65-67).

<21>However, Evangelical faith and practice was more ambivalent than all this suggests. Certainly the Evangelical stress on a faith which was emotional rather than strictly rational and one which privileged self-giving rather than self-making, feminised religious faith, as contemporaries noted (see e.g. "Why do females constitute the largest number of religious converts?" *The Mother's Magazine* (1840-1): 113-17). Yet women, while spiritually equal to men, were socially inferior and the place of the husband as head of the household was seen to be based not on biology or social convention but on the law of God. As the author of a series of "Hints to Young Ladies" explained, "in some respects woman is man's inferior . . . And this inferiority may . . . indicate her duty. She must be in subjection to her husband . . . [But] in intellectual power, capacity and elevation, she is his equal" (*The Mother's Magazine* (1838-9): 93-94). Central to the Evangelical model of motherhood, therefore, was that tension between spiritual equality and social inferiority (see e.g. Davidoff and Hall 114 ff).

<22>The argument that women were "equal but different" runs throughout these publications, where women's power is constantly defined in terms of their "influence" and their relative powerlessness, economic and social, is accepted even in relation to husbands who are drunkards or confidence tricksters (see e.g. *The Mother's Magazine* (1843-4): 146-53, 159-64, 173-80). In terms of the wider questions about how far these magazines can be read as pointing towards later "feminist politics" the evidence, I would argue, is ambivalent. On one hand, these mothers' magazines offered print spaces in which, as in the maternal associations, women's voices could be heard. Their model of maternity also empowered women to venture out of the home into voluntary and philanthropic work among those defined as the needy, ventures which – however they impacted social injustice – certainly led later in the century to the development of professional work in a range of caring professions (Rendall 28, Prochaska *passim*). The argument that women were "equal but different" continued well into the twentieth century as the basis of a female politics. Even in the 1970s and 1980s, when my women's group was meeting, there were political campaigns predicated on a model of women as essentially maternal and therefore able to bring quite a different set of political skills to debates around weapons of mass destruction and the environment from those put forward in masculine political debate.(4)

<23>However, the stress on women's maternal qualities as the basis for political recognition has been, I would argue, an ambivalent basis for a feminist politics. The assumption of the early mother's magazines that Christian motherhood was normative for femininity meant that those who were not mothers or not Christians (that is those who had not experienced personal conversion) were excluded from the communities, both imagined and material, which the magazines represented and brought into being. This shadow side of Evangelical motherhood is not often visible in the magazines, though there are some hints here and there. An extract from a letter in the *Mother's Magazine* of 1838-9 reports on a woman challenged as to why she still attended meetings when all her children had died and "the Lord had written [her] childless." Her answer, that she could be "more abundantly maternal" than the other women suggests both the difficulties of her position and the way the maternal role could be extended by those confident enough to do so ("Extract" 171-2).

<24>Normative models always exclude and powerful models, such as that of motherhood in these publications, exclude powerfully. I would broadly accept the case that both first- and second-wave feminism sometimes worked with normative models of womanhood which also implicitly excluded certain groups of women, whether on the grounds of race, class, sexuality, or indeed of motherhood. However, I would argue that the model that equates womanhood with maternity put forward so powerfully in these magazines caused and causes particular problems in terms of a progressive politics.

<25>These problems are evident in these magazines and generally in Evangelicalism even in its most radical aspect, that is the commitment to social justice. Concern for marginalised and excluded groups did indeed contribute to important movements for social change, including most famously the anti-slavery campaigns. The mothers' magazines, like their readers, valued the lives of those "others" who were not "Christian mothers," whether they were "coloured people," "mothers in humble life," or the "natives" who listened to the missionary translating the magazine into "Hindoo." However, the model of motherhood with which they worked meant that those "others" for whom the readers were encouraged to care were often represented as children: that is feckless, ignorant, and needing instruction.<sup>(5)</sup> The stress on discipline and the need for moral and spiritual guidance in dealing with one's own children could too easily colour wider social relationships with those outside the circle of mothers. All this complicates the argument about the legacy of these magazines and their models of motherhood.

<26>There was a rather different, though related, strand to these magazines which I have not so far discussed. This was the mother's responsibility for the education of all her children (girls and boys) not only in religion and morality but also in intellectual pursuits. Serious reading for girls as well as boys should encompass much more than the obligatory Bible readings. In *The Christian Mother's Magazine* edited by Mrs. Milner, this aspect of motherhood came to the fore. Rather different from the two magazines so far discussed, in that it had no link with maternal associations, it shared their commitment to Evangelical Christianity. It announced its aims as "to embody Christian principles and to offer family reading" and claimed to "focus on Christian doctrine" while offering "nothing which would tend to deterioration of taste in the young" (1 (1844): 1). Better produced than the others, with wide margins and good type, this publication devoted its pages to substantial articles on the history of the world, natural history, astronomy,

and other intellectual pursuits, as well as reprints of sermons by Dean Milner and others. This belief that women's education should have a solid intellectual basis and should not be only about "accomplishments" arose in the context of attacks on aristocratic models of femininity and had a profound influence on Evangelical ideas about girls' education while at the same time resonating with the arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft, who was abominated by Evangelicals.

<27>Jonathon Topham has argued that religious periodicals, particularly Methodist magazines, were an important source of scientific education in the early Victorian period. *The Christian Mother's Magazine* should also be read as a disseminator of scientific and other knowledge. Clearly mothers had to have this knowledge in order to impart it to their children. This stress on the intellectual education necessary for motherhood is much more explicit in this magazine than the others so far discussed but was consonant with the advice in all these Evangelical publications for mothers (see e.g. "Culpable Neglect of Female Education." *The Mother's Magazine* (1843-4): 10).

<28>In addition, this magazine was unapologetic about its serialised fiction and was in general more tolerant of what the other journals condemned as worldly (e.g. Mrs. Milner's review of Mrs. Bakewell's *The Mother's Practical Guide* in *The Christian Mother's Magazine* 1 (1844): 478-82). Despite differences in emphasis, all three magazines shared a model of Christian motherhood that involved a commitment to the intellectual development of girls as well as boys. Of course, the central concern here was that mothers did not stunt the intellectual development of their sons. It was as mothers of sons educating their children at home that women needed to have read largely. However, the corollary of this was that daughters needed to be educated in order to be good mothers.

<29>In this strand of the Evangelical legacy, we can perhaps detect the roots of the later campaigns for women's access to intellectually demanding schooling and even to higher education. By the 1880s and 1890s the arguments about women's education had moved into the mainstream press but the idea that educated women made better mothers persisted in various guises and continued to be one of the arguments deployed in the campaign for women's access to education. Even those in favour of the "Advanced Woman" of the 1890s usually agreed with Richard le Gallienne when he wrote in the 1894 penny weekly magazine *Woman*, "Let women become senior wranglers, lawyers, doctors, anything they please as long as they remain mothers" (1).

<30>In the last part of this paper I want to examine what happened to the tradition of the mothers' magazines in the late Victorian period, given that all three of the magazines I have discussed so far had ceased publication by then. Writing recently in a collection on *The Future of Gender*, Juliet Mitchell, in a chapter entitled "Procreative mothers (sexual difference) and child-free sisters (gender)," argues for a complex but important relationship between the decline in mothering, especially among the middle classes, and the emergence of feminism at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>(6)</sup> The statistical decline in the size of middle-class families was a cause of anxiety in the late nineteenth century and has been generally accepted by scholars ever since Joseph and Olive Banks's pioneering 1980 study. The creeping success of campaigns for women to have access to middle-class jobs, to universities, and even to public politics at local and

eventually at national levels were simultaneously opening up the possibility of a femininity not confined to motherhood. For working-class mothers, whose poverty began to be researched and set out statistically both by Booth and Rowntree, the difficulties of bringing up healthy children remained for them a constant struggle, for middle-class commentators the cause of anxiety about the future of Britain's armies and navies, dependent as they were on the products of such – apparently inadequate – mothering (Ross *passim*).

<31>In this context, we would expect magazines for mothers to be very different from those early Victorian publications so far discussed. In fact, though the particular titles I have discussed had ceased, the tradition of the religious journal for mothers persisted, particularly in the various publications of the missionary societies and religious groups which produced magazines for their members. For example, the Mothers' Union, an organisation set up by a clergy wife, Mary Sumner, in 1876 and which had developed in main-stream Anglicanism during the 1880s, had two journals associated with it, rather as the earlier journals had been linked to the maternal associations. The first, *The Mother's Union Church Journal*, which lasted from 1888 until 1925, was a quarterly with an annual subscription of four pence and was specifically for Mothers' Union members. Since membership depended on being baptised and married in the Church of England, as well as on being a mother, the principles of exclusion operated very powerfully here. Like the older mothers' magazines in some respects, this magazine worked within a very different theological and ecclesiastical tradition. Like them, however, it maintained the absolute coincidence of Christian motherhood with normative femininity.

<32>The other journal of the Union, *Mothers in Council*, was also a quarterly, but cost sixpence for each number. It was in many ways more like the earlier religious journals both in appearance, it was printed like a book in single columns without illustration, and in the mixture of general articles, poetry, and accounts of talks given at meetings which formed the content. Its project, like that of the earlier journals, was to aid mothers in the "Religious, moral and physical training of children of the educated class" and it specifically excluded fathers since they were obviously not members of the Mothers' Union (1 (January 1891): 5, 10). It looked back to the past both in tone and in format; its one slight concession to the New Journalism being the inclusion of some advertisements on end pages for such things as Mellin's baby foods or Fry's chocolate. However, unlike the earlier magazines, this periodical did not invite true-life accounts from readers, print extensive letters, or reprint material from American publications. Charlotte Yonge, the editor, who had long produced *The Monthly Packet* almost single-handedly, did contribute signed articles and, I suspect, some of the unsigned ones as well, but most articles were obviously commissioned and were usually signed. There was a regular column from Mary Sumner, the founder of the Mother's Union, and articles or reports of talks by various aristocratic ladies who were patrons of the organisation (see e.g. Countess of Airlie's "Women's Power" 1 (January 1891): 11-14, and "Report of a Talk Given to a Conference by Lady Montague" 2 (April 1891): 71-80).

<33>The class basis for the publication was evident not only in the discussions of such matters as whether women should go to university, (it was much better to be educated at home), but above all in the anxiety about potential harm, moral, physical and psychological which could come to children because they were brought up by servants. Horror stories of nurses drugging

babies until they pined away and died, or of children being scarred for life by being told ghost stories were aired, but the argument was never that children should not be brought up by servants but rather that mothers must be eternally vigilant (see e.g. 1. (January 1891): 6, 14-24). In this magazine, the servant who actually cared for, fed, and washed the child and put her/him to bed was not a “mother.”

<34>The task of the mother here was to bring up her children in the faith as understood within the Anglican tradition. There was no stress on personal salvation, but the mother was still seen as the source of children’s moral education, and indeed of the general education of their daughters (boys would obviously go to school and university). This magazine was, therefore, critical of the emergence of childcare “experts,” arguing that mothers knew best what their children needed. In this it looked back to the earlier journals rather than to the contemporary models espoused by the radically new kind of mothers’ magazines which appeared during the 1880s and 1890s, of which the most notable example was *Baby*.

<35>*Baby; The Mother’s Magazine*, subtitled “An Illustrated Monthly Magazine for Mothers and Those who have the care of children” was launched in 1887. The title tells us several important things. First, the child has moved to the centre of the stage. Ada Ballin, the editor of *Baby*, was an advanced woman, an advocate of rational dress (one of the recurrent themes of the journal was rational dress for babies), and an advocate of the ideas of the educator, Friedrich Froebel. Froebel’s stress on what we now call child-centred education had been spread to Britain by his disciples and the idea of the “kindergarten” had been taken up in radical circles and even begun to have an impact on main-stream education. It is in keeping with this philosophy that the magazine is called “Baby” rather than “Mother,” a radical shift from the past. The sub-title also suggests that it sought to be more inclusive of those involved in parenting rather than exclusively addressing mothers. The regular letters page changed its name from “Mother’s Parliament” to “Parent’s Parliament” in the December 1889 issue in a largely unsuccessful attempt to encourage fathers to participate as readers and contributors (3 (December 1889): 1).

<36>However, these are not the most profound differences between this late-Victorian magazine and the earlier ones. Since *Baby* has been the subject of some recent scholarly debate, including in the pages of this journal, I will sketch these briefly.

<37>First, science replaces religious belief as the source of authority. Articles for the magazine are written, not by clergy or by other mothers, but by scientists and doctors. The model of parenting offered may include moral education but explicit instruction in religious belief is notably absent. Sally Shuttleworth has written about the ways in which *Baby* became a site for the development of “Baby Science,” an experimental approach to child rearing which focused on health, defined as physical and psychological but not spiritual. It is significant that in December 1889, when Ada Ballin began to be named as editor, her strap line was “Lecturer to the National Health Society.”

<38>The corollary to this is that this magazine offered its readers access to a range of expert advice. Though the “Mother’s/Parent’s Parliament” offered a regular forum for discussion, there was much less of the detailed accounts of readers’ daily lives which were so significant in the

early mothers' magazines. Mothers, it was assumed should bring up their children and attend to their education, but increasingly there were "experts," mainly medical and scientific, who knew more than they did.

<39>These differences, however, are only evident on close reading. What is immediately striking, in contrast to the earlier journals, is that this is a product of the New Journalism of the 1880s and 1890s. The subtitle pointed up the importance of illustration and this was often made a key feature, as for example in a running series of portraits of children. It is a large format journal, printed in columns, and professionally produced with a regular structure and pattern of ingredients, so that readers know what to expect and where to look for it. Articles were regularly signed and the qualifications of authors, including degrees and memberships in learned societies were spelled out. Whereas the older journals had included a few advertisements for religious books or for the editor's school, and these were confined to the covers and end papers, in *Baby* advertisements occupied a full eight pages out of twenty-eight in the early days and far more in later numbers. They included advertisements for baby food, for medicines, and for convenience foods like Fry's cocoa, part of the new development of nationally recognisable branded products and almost the only element *Baby* had in common with *Mothers in Council* (although there, advertising was minimal). Alongside these, the magazine offered advice to mothers on how to be good consumers, indeed as Amy D'Antonio points out, this was the main thrust of the magazine's advice. The mother is assumed to be an individual with spending power. She is addressed in her own home. The competitions and letters suggested the potential for mothers to share advice but the imagined community of this magazine is shadowy indeed.

<40>The mother implied and addressed by this journal is, therefore, very different from that of the early Victorian religious magazines I have discussed. Though there is an assumption of a shared moral code, this mother is not primarily anxious about her child's religious beliefs or chance of salvation. She is an individual, a consumer, anxious about her child, and seeking expert advice not only on health but on which of the new products to buy. The magazine she buys and reads is also produced by experts, print professionals who deploy the genres of the New Journalism with considerable skill. She can afford a magazine that costs four pence monthly. What is absent here, therefore, is not only the sense of motherhood as a collective enterprise but also any acknowledgment of the mass of working-class mothers struggling to find a few pence to feed their children, who featured in other sections of the press and were a cause of political and social anxiety.

<41>In her interesting discussion of *Baby* in this journal, D'Antonio argues that the "Mothers' Parliament" column demonstrated that mothers were sometimes able to resist the powerful message elsewhere in the magazine that "scientists know best." They did so, she argues, by drawing on "positions of consumer and aesthetic expertise" (2). I cannot here take up in detail her argument. I agree absolutely with her that what *Baby* seeks to do is make its readers into knowledgeable consumers, through both the advice on mothering and on the brand name products beginning to appear in the shops. It does this in part through the advertising but also through the advice and the "advertorials" in which named products are recommended to readers, a practice that had developed in other late-Victorian women's magazines such as *Myra's Journal*. This is an apparent inversion of the spiritual values of the early mothers' magazines. Certainly,

the link between the mother as knowledgeable consumer and the Evangelical faith in individual salvation is not straightforward. When Max Weber argued that Protestantism had led to the emergence of capitalism he focused on production rather than consumption, on how having to keep an account of one's spiritual life led to the keeping accounts of one's business progress. Tracing the model of individual salvation through consumption back to its roots involves a larger debate than I can enter into here. Looking forward, we can see that the model of the mother as consumer, which we see beginning to be adumbrated in this journal, was to become increasingly important in twentieth-century Britain. How far being empowered as an individual consumer leads to women's political empowerment is a moot point and one where I think D'Antonio and I might part company.

<42>On the basis of this brief sample, it would be difficult to argue that ideas of motherhood at the end of the century had "advanced" in any coherent way. The late-Victorian magazines might differ from the early-Victorian but they themselves reflected, or perhaps more accurately promoted, very different models of motherhood. However, certain elements, I would argue, persist. The first is the contradiction that motherhood is simultaneously understood as universal and exclusionary, whether the exclusions work along the lines of religious belief, class position, or access to power – economic, educational, and cultural. The notable absence in all these magazines is the voice of the servant who did the "mothering" in the middle class home and the views of the native Indian women who heard extracts from the *British Mother's Magazine* translated into "Hindoo."

<43>The second is that, though the unproblematic co-occurrence of adult femininity with motherhood was being challenged in the 1890s, parenting was – and, to a great extent, still is – seen as co-incident with motherhood. All these magazines made some gesture towards acknowledging that fathers, too, were parents, but in every case the role of parent was represented almost exclusively as maternal and it was mothers who had the responsibility, not only for bringing children into the world, but for their upbringing and socialisation. In early twenty-first century Britain some shifts in parenting roles have occurred but in practice and in official talk "parents" always slides into meaning "mothers." The corollary of this is that caring, particularly for children, was – and is still – feminised; caring roles, whether in the professions which developed in the late-nineteenth and through the twentieth century or in the home, were almost exclusively undertaken by women, were not highly valued, and were comparatively poorly paid. This inheritance still shapes our society.

<44>It is significant that the periodical involved in the most successful campaign to make a political intervention that would improve the lives of mothers in the early twentieth century arose out of an organisation set up precisely to counter the tradition of the "'mother's meetings' in which ladies of the prosperous classes read aloud from improving books while the workers' wives sat and sewed" (Gordon vii). The Women's Co-operative Guild began as a part of the Co-operative Societies, a national organisation in which, since 1844, working-class families had joined to set up and support shops on a profit-sharing basis. Though open to men and women from the start, it was with difficulty that women co-operators won a place from which their voice could be heard. They did so through the Women's Guild, the organisation for women co-operators, and through the "Woman's Corner" page in the *Co-operative News*, a penny weekly

produced in Manchester. The relationship between the “Women’s Corner” and the Women’s Guild was not straightforward, but in the number for January 11, 1896, after a sharp exchange of views, it was agreed that half the space in the “Women’s Corner” would be given to news from the Guild (90).

<45>These pages and the Guild itself were at the forefront of national campaigns on issues affecting working mothers, particularly the demand for some kind of maternity benefit to be *paid directly to women rather than to men*. It was this demand which, according to Linda Gordon, caused “the most strenuous parliamentary opposition” in discussion of the setting up of a national insurance scheme (ix). The inclusion in Lloyd George’s 1911 National Insurance Act of a maternity benefit paid to mothers was a triumph for the Guild and its campaign of encouraging working-class mothers, who had found their voice in the Guild and the “Women’s Corner,” to write letters about their experiences of mothering. These letters were a central part of the evidence produced in favour of the scheme and still form one of the most powerful accounts of working-class maternity in the modern period (Davies, *passim*).

<46>As I write this article, a bitter election campaign is being fought in Britain, the outcome of which is still unknown as I complete it. Early in the campaign David Cameron, the Conservative party leader, agreed to be asked questions by mothers involved in Mumsnet, an on-line chat room for mothers. This was seen by most political commentators as a deft political move and indeed some have dubbed this “the Mumsnet election.” It is also the election which has been notable for the complete absence of women in the public campaigns. The party leaders are all men. Senior women in all parties have been side-lined. Women have appeared in the media but only as the wives of politicians, scrutinized for their hair styles and shoes. The announcement of her pregnancy by Samantha Cameron, David Cameron’s wife, during the campaign was widely regarded as a coup for the Conservatives (though no one suggested they did it on purpose). Motherhood rules OK in the British media of 2010 but, if this is feminism, it is not as we know it, or perhaps – as Mitchell suggests – the mothers have handed on the benefits they won but not the politics by which they won them (163).

## Endnotes

(1) See the interesting discussion in Leavy.<sup>(^)</sup>

(2) I have not been able to discover a price for the other magazines I discuss here but their implied readers were middle-class women. *The Mother's Friend* cost a penny and had the longest run of any of these.<sup>(^)</sup>

(3) *The Mother's Magazine* was bound so that it is impossible to work out where one number ends and another begins. The bound volumes for this journal run from September to October and therefore are always given in the format 1843-4. Volume numbers are not usually given. For this and the other magazines discussed I have occasionally tried to work out volume numbers from dates or vice versa but there may be some slippage.<sup>(^)</sup>

(4) The Greenham Women's Peace Camp of the 1980s exemplified this politics.<sup>(^)</sup>

(5) See, for example, "The Coloured Settlement" in the *Mother's Magazine* (1842-3): 134-38. However, some readers of this journal did suggest that other cultures were not completely degraded, for example the writer of "Letter from Jaffna" (1839-40): 105-7.<sup>(^)</sup>

(6) I cannot do justice to the complexity of Mitchell's debate here. Her argument against the historic privileging of vertical family relationships (mothers and fathers) against horizontal ones (sisters and brothers) is clearly pertinent to my argument but draws on psychoanalytic theory in ways I do not. Thanks to Janet Batsleer for referring me to this article.<sup>(^)</sup>

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*Baby* (1887-1915)

*The British Mother's Magazine* (1845-55), then *The British Mother's Journal* (1856-1863), then *The British Mother's Family Magazine* (1864)

*The Christian Mother's Magazine* (1844-45), then *The Englishwoman's Magazine and Christian Mother's Miscellany* (1846-1854), then *The Christian Lady's Magazine* (1855-57)

*The Co-operators' News and Journal of Associated Industry* (1871-1955)

*The Mother's Friend* (1848-95)

*The Mother's Magazine* (1834-1862)

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