Breaking Barriers

Sarah Edwards's and Sarah Osborn's Extraordinary Journey in The First Great Awakening

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DOI: 10.53720/JACX5332

Abstract: This study examines the contribution of Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Osborn to the Great Awakening, a religious spiritual awakening, which happened in the Colonies in the eighteenth century. Sarah Pierpont Edward's name was overshadowed by that of his husband, who was a representative theologian during the First Great Awakening period. The second subject of this study, Sarah Osborn, was unknown until Catherine A. Brekus shed light on her contribution to the rise of evangelicalism. Since her presence as a female missionary and former boarding school director is of great importance, this paper will empathetically highlight these aspects of her life as well. In the midst of changes in the church and society, women were experimenting with different ways of voicing their thoughts. As a very significant change in attitude, the Quaker leaders allowed women to preach. Aside from the reaction of the communities of Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Osborn, this study will thoroughly elaborate on their personal lives. Their personal spiritual pilgrimage serves as a cornerstone of the present study. However, as their narratives are one-sided, we have to take into consideration the reception of their memoirs, letters, and diary entries. Amongst others, there were two important male characters in their lives, namely, Jonathan Edwards, the husband of Sarah Pierpont Edwards, and Joseph Fish, a minister, and a spiritual guide of Sarah Osborn, whose reconstructed opinion about the above-mentioned women will be detailed. In the midst of eighteenth-century societal constraints, Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn emerged as groundbreakers, defying traditional gender roles and laying the path for women in religious discourses. This article delves into their spiritual journeys, with a special emphasis on their resilience, intellectual capability, and firm commitment to faith.

Hidden in the annals of history, the pivotal role of women in the eighteenth century's religious revivals and the growth of modern Christian denominations have been largely overlooked. From Martin Luther's courageous companion Katharina von Bora to the unsung heroines of the Great Awakening, countless brave European and American women defied expected societal norms to spread the Gospel. Based on their memoirs, this article sheds light on the lives of two remarkable women, Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Osborn, who challenged expectations and left an undeniable mark on their communities. This article offers a new perspective in understanding of women's religious enthusiasm and experiences in The Great Awakening era, more specifically in the lives of two evangelical women, Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Osborn.

As we delve into their personal narratives, we uncover the sacrifices, resilience, and profound devotion that fuelled their remarkable journeys. Sarah Edwards, an intellectual female and equal partner in religious dialogues, defied societal expectations with her devotion to God. On the contrary, Sarah Osborn, a self-made woman thrust into adversity, exhibited a rare blend of feminine and masculine attributes while supporting her family, her boarding school, and herself. Examining the pre-Great Awakening era and the revolutionary changes it brought, we witness a brief window of opportunity for women to emerge as influential voices in religious experiences—an opportunity previously denied to them. Through their own eyewitness accounts, we gain a glimpse into the profound spiritual changes of their time.

In a society that strictly confined women to prescribed social spheres, these women fought against exclusion and restriction, indirectly challenging the *status quo*. A juxtaposition of the lives and roles of Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn and the influences on their thinking helps in redefining our understanding of the role of women in religious history. However, it is crucial to mention that while Sarah Osborn's memoir is available in its original version, in the case of Sarah Piepront Edwards, her original memoir survives in two altered versions. The first was made by her husband, who rewrote it so that it fits the norms and expectations of their contemporary society. The second, on the other hand, was made a century later, by her great-grandson Sereno Dwight.

Although women were doomed to silence, they were allowed to pray, to read the Bible—if they were literate—and to attend churches. John Calvin viewed women as human beings primarily driven by sexual desires. Puritans can be seen as the equivalents of Calvinism on the American Continent. Protestants encouraged women to marry in order to avoid sexual immorality. As far as we know, Puritans emphasised the importance of personal devotion through reading the Bible, which resulted in a shift in women's roles. As a consequence, the Puritan woman was able to interpret the Bible for herself and to use the knowledge she had already acquired, in due time and with due vocabulary. As a notable instance, we have the mother of Reverend James Hillhouse (1687–1740), a pastor in New England, who was praised for being an honest Puritan woman and who found the time and place to preach to her family and friends. Regardless of their differences in doctrine, the Anglicans, Puritans, Presbyterians, and Dutch Reformed all seemed to agree on their perception of women: based on the well-known letter of Paul to Timothy they disapproved of women speaking.

Both Sarah Osborn and Sarah Edwards lived through the First Great Awakening, which happened in the American Continent, in the Colonies, as they referred to it. Martin E. Marty highlights that The Great Awakening "might be seen as conservative revolution, but a revolution it was" (81). Interestingly, The Great Awakening makes room for two distinct factions within American Protestantism, namely the "New Light" and the "Old Light." These factions emerged during these religious revivals in the eighteenth century. The New Light movement represented the more fervent and emotional side of the Great Awakening. Its proponents embraced the revivalist spirit and believed in experiencing a personal, emotional, and transformative relationship with God. They welcomed the use of emotional expressions during religious gatherings and often supported preachers and evangelists who played a significant role in spreading the revival. The Old Light faction, on the other hand, opposed the intense emotionalism and dramatic conversions associated with the Great Awakening (1730–1740). They were typically more conservative and adhered to traditional religious practices. Old Light ministers believed in maintaining a more structured and hierarchical form of worship and were sceptical of the emotional excesses that characterised the New Light movement. Therefore, these two opposing perspectives on the Great Awakening contributed to the division

within American religious communities during that time, reflecting the broader impact and significance of the revival in shaping the country's religious landscape.

The prospect of women was undoubtedly restricted to domestic spheres in the Great Awakening. They were allowed to contribute to the well-being of their families, and in the case of religious discourses, to the well-being of their religious communities. However, ambiguity concerning the soul was beginning to emerge. Isaac Backus (1724–1806), a churchman, referred to his soul as a "she," like many other evangelicals, which contributed to a new common language, the conversion narrative. Conversion was a figurative rebirth in Christ for both women and men. Despite how the revivals softened gender inequalities, they did not totally abandon them. Although there were resemblances between men's and women's conversions, the narratives vary in minor but significant ways. Two significant alterations should be addressed. Prior to listing the alternations, it is necessary to elaborate on the meaning of conversion narrative. William James referred to conversion as a conscious change in the life of an individual as a result of one's transcendental experience (Stevens 5).

Primarily, the language that women use within historical narratives often offers insights into societal dynamics and perspectives. Female narration tends to use passive and submissive language and predominantly first-person narration. For instance, Mercy Holmes, a commoner wrote that "I was bro't to see yet..."; while Abraham Choate, also a commoner, stated that "the decision to be saved was his own" (qtd. in Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims* 39). Mercy represents herself as a passive recipient, being actively converted by God, meanwhile Choate was an active agent in the process of conversion. The narration highlighted an inherited, conventional role of women as being the bearer of the greater original sin. A frequently quoted passage from the Bible was Isaiah 1:6 in which one female laments upon her sin: "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and purifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." The complexity of this quote from Isaiah leads to the second alternation, which is the negative attributes that women used in their self-expression, such as, "polluted, infectious, leper," or at other certain points as being "poor," "vile," and "worthless." These attributes correlated well with Brekus's idea who further contributed to an understanding of women as both physically and intellectually inferior to men (Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims* 30). This was even further strengthened by one of the most influential theologians in the Great Awakening, Jonathan

Edwards. He wrote about virtuous women in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (Edwards 149). His philosophy was based on biblical foundations; thus, he was sceptical of issues of feminine inferiority and original sin. He referred to women as "frivolous girl" and their conversion left him surprised ("I was surprised with the relation of a young woman, who had been one of the greatest company-keepers in the whole town" [Edwards 149]). As previously stated, Evangelicals assumed that the souls of women are easily swayed by both Christ and the Devil, thus their portrayal of the soul as a "woman" was an allusion to women's physical, spiritual, and intellectual weaknesses. Bathsheba Kingsley is a primary example of this; it was believed that her body and mind were enticed by Satan's schemes, since she was "brawling" from town to town. Finally, the recorded sources indicate that women frequently associate Satan with bodily features such as a roaring lion or a beast, whereas men rarely or never refer to this attack occurring physically, rather, than as a mental attack (Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women* 29). Sarah Osborn frequently used the allusion of "lion" to refer to Satan, as it appears in a diary entry from 1767, "Thou canst rescue them out of the paw of the lion of hell. Regardless of the similarities and differences, at the moment of reversion in Christ, gender is no longer existing" (15).

Were There Any Exceptions at All?

It was a generally acknowledged truth that women in the eighteenth century were prohibited from institutional authority; however, researchers have highlighted the importance of the Quaker community as a counter-example. Quakers granted women the liberty to speak, and to occupy leading positions in their communities, since they thought that in the moment of conversion, gender was not significant. Quakers were a group of religious reformers who sought to blur the lines between *clergy* and *laity* by experimenting with new models of liturgy, worship, and other religious practices (Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims* 29). George Fox (1624–1691), a significant Quaker leader, suggested that religious authority is unnecessary and that one should experience God without mediation, which seemed to be an innovative approach in the eighteenth century. Quaker rituals were different from Anglican and Puritan rituals in various ways; they argued that individuals could experience God on a personal level. However, Puritans refused to embrace God's revelation as the source of inspiration, especially women, who were regarded as a bodily

weaker gender. Their personal experiences would have been unacceptable since they did not have the physical power to countenance the Holy Spirit's presence. Thus, the explanation for the denial of women leaders is simple: Quaker women challenged the patriarchal system's traditional inequity in church roles. A traditional Puritan woman was seen as "intellectually and physically inferior to men" and "they tried to control every facet of their behaviour, not least of their speech" (Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims* 30). Later in her commentary, Brekus refers to historians in this discipline, who found that Puritan doctrines were "irredeemably misogynistic" (30).

These above-mentioned instances revealed that there were substantial disparities in the treatment of female missionaries between Puritan churches and women in Quaker communities. As previously proposed, the evidence demonstrated that women in the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries endured oppression, and those who had the courage to question the traditional inequalities, such as Quaker women, immediately drew the attention of church authorities and were treated with contempt. Thus, only those women who held positions in society received acceptance, after questioning the clergy's unshakable authority. Generally, the right to the freedom of expression was curtailed by authority.

The Agitative Spiritual Journey of Sarah Pierpont Edwards

Sarah Pierpont Edwards's life and transformative journey exemplify an exceptional woman whose devoted dedication and spiritual maturation were deeply intertwined with the prevalent currents of her era. Sarah Pierpont Edwards (1710–1758) emerges as an oasis of inspiration amidst the tumult of the Great Awakening. Her narrative, like those of others, captures the dynamics of gender, commitment, and religious reform.

Sarah Pierpont Edwards's devotion—of all major female missionaries—was amongst the most influential in the early eighteenth century. She was the daughter of a clerical family and the wife of the prominent preacher, Jonathan Edwards. The difficulties of the Great Awakening left significant traces in both Sarah Edwards's and Jonathan Edwards's lives. They confronted the challenges of the new Awakening together. Jonathan Edwards graduated from Yale in 1723, at the age of nineteen, and served as a preacher in New York for a year. He took a position at Yale and moved to New Haven, where Sarah Pierpont lived. It is possible that he met her during his student years when he was around sixteen. She caught

the attention of Jonathan Edwards, which is proven on the cover of a Greek grammar book as follows: "They say there is a young lady in [New Haven] who is loved of that Great Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this Great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight; and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on Him…" (qtd. in Minkema et al. 495).

They married on 28 July 1727, and in the same year, Jonathan became a priest in Northampton, following in his grandfather's footsteps. Their marriage was "an uncommon union,"[1] since they both had an immediate intellectual and spiritual connection. During their lifetime, the Great Awakening spread across the American colonies, which influenced the development of Sarah's character. She was described as a "meek and quiet spirit," who "talked freely and solidly of things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband" (qtd. in Minkema et al. 505) by George Whitefield (1714–1770). Whitefield played a pivotal role in catalysing the religious fervour that characterised the Great Awakening. His spiritual landscape was irrevocably altered by his trip to North America, and his sermons struck a profound chord with people. Given George Whitefield's cross-colonial reach, it is worth investigating whether his teachings had a direct impact on the spiritual development of well-known individuals such as Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn. Whitefield's impassioned sermons captivated diverse audiences, sparking a profound religious fervour that reverberated across the colonies. George Whitefield had a significant influence on the American Great Awakening, influencing the spiritual climate and leaving a lasting mark on colonial culture. Whitefield united different colonial communities, sparked huge conversions and spiritual awakenings, and generated a wave of religious passion that transcended geographical borders through his impassioned preaching style and frequent journeys across the colonies (Smith 81–82).

Sarah herself had an awakening in 1742. According to her spouse, at this point in her life, she possessed "extraordinary views on divine things" and deep "religious affections" (Minkema etl al. 510). Unable to sleep one night, something suddenly changed, she felt cut off from God and experienced an incredible delight, God's immediate presence, as she put it in her diary entry from 1742, which is the primary concern of this article. After a week of intense agony and ecstatic religious experiences, she started to overcome an overwhelming sensation of melancholy.

1 See *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon Union of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards* (2004) by Elisabeth Dodds.

During a week of similar experience, at certain points, she felt sick and was hardly able to stand without assistance. Feeling both "melted" and "overcome" at the same time, Sarah Edwards details it in her memoir entry as follows: "I never felt such an entire emptiness of self-love or any regard to any private selfish interest of my own. It seemed to me, that I had entirely done with myself... The glory of God to be all, and in all, and to swallow up every wish and desire of my heart" (S. Edwards; ch. 2). This "entire emptiness" was a conversion that led from her old identity to a greater blessing, as she referred to it. Essentially, the reason for her transformation was her liberation from anxieties and temptations as she was transforming to a "holy vessel of Christ" (Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims* 43). For that reason, she was able to overcome her concerns about her role in religious gatherings since she was about to lose herself in the process. Mrs. Edwards had contrasting beliefs to the earlier Old Light tradition, which was not concerned with the bodily manifestation of faith as it was present in the new wave. She embraced a heart-centred religion—which might have been influenced by Jonathan Edwards's views on faith—that valued the body's role in revivals, and actively participated in church life, despite societal norms. Her personal life remains enigmatic, but she was praised for her sincere devotion and commitment as a wife.

The memoir of Sarah Edwards covers the challenges of the Great Awakening, her contempt for visiting Ministers, and her daily struggles, as neither the congregation nor the people of Northampton greeted her with open arms. Some parts of her personal narrative had been recently acquired by Kenneth Minkema and his fellow colleagues. Until that point, there were only two manuscripts available: the first was Jonathan Edward's revised version, in which he rewrote her narrative in the third person to protect her from any unpleasant reaction and misunderstanding in the community. The other text was published in the nineteenth century, by Sereno Edwards Dwight, who in *The Works of President Edwards* incorporated the first-person narrative of Sarah Edwards. However, as Jennifer Adams notes in the preface to the 2010 edition of *In Love with Christ*, there are striking differences in "the manner in which the narratives" are presented. The period of the Second Great Awakening (1800–1830) was the time of the second republication and alternation of Sarah's detailed experiences by her grandson Sereno Edwards Dwight, who decided to elevate Sarah Edwards as a representative of genuine female self-sacrifice. Sereno rewrote her experiences from a nineteenth-century perspective, portraying her as a typical nineteenth-century female, appearing as one of the "protectors

of virtue" (Minkema et al. 513). Among slighter alterations, the most significant was the removal of "agitation," although Sarah herself used this expression sixteen times. As suggested by Adams, there are two reasonable explanations for this removal. One possible reason could be the perspectives on female self-sacrifice, which did not allow hesitation in the mind and, therefore, absolutely denied the agitation of the body. The other reason might be that Serano suffered from a chronic illness that left him physically disabled, which may have contributed to his lack of insight into the bodily aspect of experiencing God's presence. Serano notes, however, that Jonathan Edwards might have altered a few details of Sarah's account while copying her manuscripts. Regardless of her numerous spelling errors and irregular style, Sarah was an outstanding female writer, and her writing style did not require extensive proofreading. Her style, along with her spirituality, is characterised by a language of sensation that could refer to her own personal voice or Jonathan's choice, but the latter remains disputed.

As Minkema, Brekus, and Stout assert that identifying Sarah Pierpont Edwards' unique narrative voice is challenging for a variety of reasons. Though Jonathan's narrative skills are well-known, it is difficult to trace them in Sarah Edwards' reworked collections. Nevertheless, his alternations served no other purpose than to remedy spelling and grammatical problems. Such alternations were "lively sense of things" or "clear" (S. Edwards; ch. 4).

Unlike the members of contemporary spiritual movements like The New Light Movement—which was a movement inside the Baptist congregation—she never claimed that she had received direct revelations from God. She highlighted the necessity of analysing the nature of the heart since it is the source of all knowledge. Edwards prioritised experiencing God through the senses—especially the heart. Commentators of the time had strong opinions about female enthusiasm, for instance, an Anglican minister noted that "women, children, servants, and Nigros [were] become (as they phrase[d] it) Exhorters" (qtd. in Minkema et al. 506). As a result of the continuous debates about "enthusiasts" or "exhorters", Jonathan Edwards in the *Faithful Narrative* introduces two women's spiritual experiences from Northampton as examples of true Christian *female piety*. Piety is seen as a strong religious belief manifested in one's lifestyle. According to recent academic discoveries, Sarah Edwards was the *inspiration* for *female piety* that Jonathan Edwards detailed in the *Faithful Narrative*.

In the introduction of *Feminine Spirituality in America*, Amanda Porterfield argues that "Sarah Edwards assumed the fortunes and dilemmas of public virtuosity … In time of spiritual crisis, she explored both the power and the painful contradiction of that role" (39). She later assumes that both Sarah and Jonathan Edwards's narratives provide a genuine insight into the relationship between the ongoing social and religious experiences. Porterfield attributes Sarah Edwards's success as a writer to her ability to withdraw from society occasionally. In her narrative, in 1742, she shed light on the main reason why she preferred solitude over hypocrisy, "how great a part of Christianity lies in the performance of our social and relative duties to one another" (S. Edwards; ch. 2).

As the daughter of a minister, Sarah's perspective on the unity of body, soul, and inherited sin was influenced by the theories of John Calvin, and the Puritans, who considered the body to be evil, but they recognised the importance of incarnation by admitting that the body was the temple of the Holy Spirit. Through these serious agitative periods that Sarah Edwards detailed, she developed a "new sense" or "sense of the heart," as Jonathan refers to it: "divine and supernatural light which gaze the enlightened a spiritual understanding that was deeper than the knowledge that came by merely intellectual cognition" (qtd. in Minkema et al. 496). However, this "new sense" contains several influences that cannot be disregarded.

Interestingly, Sarah transformed her physical body in unity with the divine; in which the divine presence is the Light in her sinful nature. Her physiological agitations were regarded as a source of new religious identity and leadership, and this was described as a metamorphosis by Minkema and his fellow researchers, who referred to it as Quietist "enthusiasm" (502).

Constructing Female Voice: The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Sarah Osborn

Sarah Osborn (1722–1796) had a unique narrative voice that depicted daily obstacles and significant historical events, such as the French and Indian War, from the perspective of a schoolteacher. Her memoir contains insights about her conversion. The first written record from her memoir was a letter written on 5 May 1742 to a Congregational minister, to whom Osborn confessed a sin: she had stolen money from her parents in order to escape with her first husband, at the age of seventeen. Unfortunately, her father died before she could confess this, so instead she confided in her mother (Brekus, Introduction xxvi). At the age of twenty-nine, she

married her second husband, a tailor, Henry Osborn. He was a widower and had three children, while Sarah Osborn was twenty-nine years old and had a son, who was ten years old. Sarah Osborn's memoir consciously or perhaps unconsciously encapsulates different secular and religious trends of her times.

Sarah Osborn, from Newport, was no longer willing to surrender herself to Puritan doctrines; therefore, her narrative chronicles the emergence of evangelicalism through her own experiences in the period of great revivals. At the age of twenty-nine, Osborn began writing her memoir in chronological order. Her challenging life circumstances included a "turbulent childhood," "suicidal crisis," and the loss of loved ones, as well as poverty and chronic illness, all of which contributed to her spiritual enlightenment (Osborn 15). Despite the trials, she never faltered in her faith and was able to attract new "enthusiasts" with her unique style of articulating her religious convictions to the world.

Additionally, she sought to obtain a greater understanding of her own spiritual pilgrimage, which was primarily affected by the ongoing spiritual awakening, and economic problems as well. On the one hand, the spiritual rebirth in the Great Awakening, the convergence of Calvinism and Protestant Reformed doctrines that resulted in evangelicalism had transformed and inspired her to lead a devoted lifestyle. On the other hand, as a teacher with a dozen students, she encountered financial challenges on a regular basis. Consequently, she wrote a memoir to remind herself of the wealth that came from God and to develop her Christian identity through writing. Reading Osborn's memoir is challenging. Even though she was literate, she never used proper punctuation and, at certain points, the text is similar to a stream of consciousness. Osborn made an effort to find significance and connection between ongoing wars, slavery, and God's will. Her testimonies were published both in her lifetime and posthumously in 1755 by Reverend Samuel Hopkins in *The Nature, Evidence, and Certainty of True Christianity* as setting an example of a devoted life. He also published parts of her memoir, and some of the letters written to Miss Susana Anthony.

Among the foremost, Sarah Osborn formed the "Religious Female Society" during the First Awakening decade in the 1740s, which became the cornerstone of Newport's First Church. This group of women sustained Clap's ministry and later served as the centre of the Great Awakening revival in the years 1766 and 1767. Under the name of "Religious Female Society," her organisation welcomed men and women, African Americans, slaves, and Baptists into her home.

Interestingly, in one of Osborn's letters from 1767 to a minister in Connecticut, called Joseph Fish, she defends her public leadership of worship and study groups. In spite of her declining health, groups and individuals continued to gather at Sarah Osborn's house even after she had stopped leading devotional groups and attending church (Hambrick-Stowe 408). In 1758, the first African American woman was baptised in the First Congregational Church, as documented in the Church's archive. The "Religious Female Society"—in those times—was unprecedented and unique. The primary aim of these "gatherings"—as she called them—was to pray and praise God in the community. However, as time passed, Sarah Osborn started to share her thoughts on the Bible. Her house also served as a shelter to people from marginalised members of society, including women, children, black slaves, people from different congregations, youngsters, and adults, fundamentally anyone but white clerical men. In the first part of the memoir, it is evident that Sarah Osborn considered slavery as the will of God, yet she encouraged Afro-American slaves to convert to Christianity. She later recognised that there was something wrong with slavery after seeing Christianity as a representative moral model. She based her views on the biblical story of Moses, who led the Israelites out of captivity to the Promise Land. Citing the words of Paul the Apostle that women must "keep silence in the churches," many disagreed with Osborn's praying groups, since church elders thought that she stepped beyond her position by sharing her own interpretation of the Bible. Even her close friend, Joseph Fish, believed that she "had stepped beyond her line" (Osborn 241).

As it appears, both Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn were subjected to the wrath of their communities because of their activities. In her previously mentioned letter, she eventually asks related questions from Joseph Fish, such as "Would you advise me to shut up my mouth and doors and creep into obscurity?" In these disputes, she seems undecided. "Sometimes I am tempted thus to do, but hitherto I dare not" (241). Another cause for public criticism was that she welcomed persons from practically all social spheres and religious denominations, including Baptists, who advocated for extreme ideals by stating that infant christening is not in biblical law. Soon after, during the British occupation in Newport, Sarah was left alone after the death of her husband Henry. Osborn, in her letters—dictated to someone since Osborn became blind and unable to walk in her last years—to Hopkins and Joseph Fish, close friends of Sarah Osborn, appears as a faithful soldier of God, who believed

that the war was nothing, but God's will. Osborn left her possessions to the First Congregation Church in Newport.

Sarah Osborn's personal narrative details mostly school curriculum, prayers, and all the activities that contributed to her relationship with God. Therefore, it is no wonder that her narrative relies heavily on biblical imagery. These form two major motifs emphasised throughout her memoir. First is *the bride and the groom*, which, according to Northrop Frye, is one of the primary images used to emphasise the unique kinship between Christ and his followers (lecture 5). Second is the *shepherd*, which appears as the protector of her soul. When Osborn uses biblical imagery, her narration abruptly shifts from third to first person, implying a more intimate experience, as it appears in the following excerpt: "And now thou hast in infinite wisdom bereaved me of my shepherd, I would give myself wholly to thee, thou great shepherd and bishop of souls. O, be thou my all" (Osborn 80). Osborn's memoir writing was a process of self-discovery and revelation of God's profundity, with the plotline revolving around the concepts of "sin" and "redemption" (Osborn 5).

She attempted to reconstruct a linear written record of her life; however, her memoir contains several omissions and information that she was ashamed to discuss; for instance, her son's death. Samuel's sudden death at the age of eleven left a significant mark on her life since he was not willing to repent of his sins. Osborn was afraid for his soul since she "could discern no evidence of a work of grace wrought on his soul, for which I did plead from day to day" (Osborn 69). In spite of her bleak mental state, this was the moment when she felt the closest presence of God. Similar to Sarah Edwards, Osborn also gives an insight into a "sense of his goodness to me in a thousand instances" (68). As a soldier of God, she felt compelled to preach the Gospel, but due to her gender, she was unable to do so without incurring the wrath of her community.

Unlike Sarah Edwards, Osborn was a well-known writer during her lifetime. The publication of Sarah Osborn's experiences, as well as her character, was a unique and integral—albeit anonymous—part of the history of female writing and Christian history. Regardless of her position, Sarah Osborn and his husband Henry had serious financial problems, as they could barely pay the bills of the boarding school that they ran together. Osborn referred to herself in their situation in a letter written to Joseph Fish in 1759, as "a poor, overloaded, weak animal crouching under its burden" (165).

Since Osborn believed that women were subordinated to men, she might have consciously tried not to have a male voice. Jonathan Edwards, in *The Miscellanies,* clearly divided the attributes of men and women, "man had been created to be strong in body and mind, with more wisdom, strength and courage," while women were naturally "weaker, more soft and tender, more fearful, and more affectionate, as a fit object of generous protection and defence" (vol. 13). Women were taught that they needed constant protection and were created to seek the help of men. Therefore, it appears that Osborn cultivated a mere "affectionate" female voice under the influence of her fellow friends, Elizabeth Bury and Susana Anthony. They shared a genuine and powerful bond and sent letters to one another. Even their writing reflected the social inequalities between women and men. As female believers, they were limited, as seen by their self-portraits, which included the usage of terms like "weak," "child," and "feeble."

Brush Hindmarsh concludes that the collective conversion experience was transformed into an individual conversion experience; it stood against the Puritan commonwealth (74). The autonomous individual, according to Enlightenment philosophers, had the liberty to choose his own government, seek his own financial interests, and worship as he saw fit, as Sarah Osborn's narrative shows: "I'll tell you truly what God has done for my soul" (Osborn 111), or "God the Father manifested himself to me," or "God made with me an everlasting Covenant" (xxii).

After all, throughout the second part of the eighteenth century, both industry and agriculture, as well as demographics, underwent substantial changes. People began relocating to new areas or abandoning towns in search of new opportunities. In the climax of these changes, humanitarians were the ones who built hospitals for the sick, cared for women and children, and overall, the ones who attempted to make the best out of the worst. Meanwhile, the government turned a blind eye on these issues. Thus, the eighteenth century's first half can be separated into two distinct periods. The first half is defined by an anti-humanitarian attitude, while the second half seeks to restore it, as evidenced by thinkers from many sociological strata, such as churchmen, economists, poets, and writers, who applied a humanitarian approach to jail reforms and slavery (Klingberg 262–263). What the Humanitarians and the Evangelicals had in common was their belief in the essentially good human nature, although it must be noted that evangelicals also considered human nature to be originally sinful. Regardless of the difference, the aim was common: to create a better world to live in. Therefore, Evangelicalism might

have been influenced by the spirit of humanitarianism, though it had a different approach, that is the preaching of the Gospel to people. It placed the major focus from the external to the internal, heart-centred world.

Based on the previously listed influences, one could conclude that Christianity was transformed in numerous ways by Enlightenment ideas, but most notably by liberal Protestantism and Evangelical Protestantism, which focuses heavily on personal experience. These ideas constantly appear in Osborn's memoir by her strong drive to understand and justify the ongoing warfare between the Indians and the French troops, she concluded it as a direct attack on God's Promised Land. Based on the book of Revelations, Osborn and many of her contemporaries saw the Catholic Church as the "beast" who wanted to destroy the continent. Though women were allowed to write epistles, journals of their everyday life, these were merely for the sake of their own amusement. The personal experiences of Sarah Osborn were published both during her lifetime and after her death, which made her break with the constrains of women's writing traditions.

Conclusion

Through hardships, both Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn demonstrated persistence and set models to the forthcoming generations of women. They indeed paved the road for female preaching in America by setting an example. Catherine Brekus states that "historical change always emerges out of the hopes, and strivings of ordinary people" (Preface xi), as it happened both in Sarah Edwards's and Sarah Osborn's life. Fear of the community's judgment motivated Edwards to establish a self that is proper in any social context, parallel to being subjugated by the Holy Spirit. Based on my research and Jonathan Edwards's opinion, that women are naturally weaker, I am convinced that Sarah Edwards broke with the constraints of traditional femininity both intellectually and physically. Without a doubt, both Sarah Osborn and Sarah Edwards were regular people with noble objectives.

Sarah Osborn was an integral part of the "Old Lights," while, based on her experiences, Sarah Edwards was connected to the "New Lights." On the one hand, in Sarah Osborn's case, this split is explicitly discussed in a letter to Joseph Fisch. She regarded the New Lights as "disorderly people" and considered that this new approach would "open its door to disorders and confusion" (Osborn 211). On the other hand, Sarah Pierpont Edwards advocated for a heart-centred religion.

Based on the definition of Catherine A. Brekus, the representatives of the New Light wing of evangelicalism, did not deny logic and rationality; thus, they acknowledged that preaching needed to touch both the heart and the intellect. Based on Brekus's opinion, Sarah Edwards, by prioritising individual religious experiences over religious dogmas, could be associated with the New Lights of evangelicalism. However, their narratives required further investigations; thus, it is crucial to mention the contemporary influences since they had significant roles in their religious devotion.

Based on secondary literature, and on their own narratives, I concluded that the roles of women were mainly restricted to the domestic sphere. However, both Edwards and Osborn went beyond the established constraints of women in the eighteenth century. According to Sarah Edwards's written records, her husband conversed with her on an intellectual level frequently. Therefore, the role of a simple representative of female piety was imposed on an equal partner. In contrast to Sarah Edwards, Sarah Osborn did not get a proper education, but her circumstances and devotion to God moved her toward self-improvement. After her first marriage resulted in her poverty, she started teaching and appeared as an exceptional preacher who—with her love and will to spread the Gospel—attracted to her home lot of people on a weekly basis. On one side, there was a mother, who was desperate to keep her child alive and maintain a family, on the other side, a strong character, who was not fearful of the reception of her actions since she served God. The paper reveals a limited window of time when women took advantage of possibilities to become prominent voices in religious realms by highlighting the complex relationship of gender relations during the era prior to the Great Awakening. The flexibility and adaptation of gender roles in religious contexts is demonstrated by Sarah Osborn's capacity to move between masculine and feminine traits while carrying out responsibilities, such as being the spiritual leader of a religious community and a boarding school.

Since the primary sources were strongly subjective, it was necessary to take into consideration their contemporaries' perspectives about them. As I looked deeper into Sarah Edwards's narrative, I became convinced that she was even stronger than her husband described her. His admiration for Sarah Edwards is excessive and appears to be genuine in his letter to his father. Like Edwards, Osborn also had positive male validation in her life, embodied in her friendship with Reverend Samuel Hopkins, who testified to Osborn's undeniably humble faith in his letters.

The validation of men, in this regard, in the eighteenth century was unprecedented. Both Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Hopkins encouraged them to be careful with their actions. Considering the above, it might be possible to conclude that they were indeed unconventional representatives of female devotion to God, and indeed paved the road for female preaching in America by setting an example. The study questions conventional narratives of religious history that frequently exclude or ignore the contributions of women by contrasting the lives, roles, and influences of Sarah Edwards and Sarah Osborn. It highlights the need to recognise women's agency and influence and calls for a re-evaluation of their place in religious movements. The two women's voices, although very different in their ways of expressing themselves, are intertwined in their strong religious affections, the women's perspectives offer a window to get an insight into female self-expression in the eighteenth century.

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