I want to preach like a woman: Catherine Booth as ‘antagonistic subject’

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In this article, drawing on current literature in homiletics, I introduce the analytical tool of feminine register coupled with a particular approach to feminine subjectivity. This approach understands that the ‘what and the when’, the ‘who’, and the ‘how’ of preaching are spheres where gender has a direct impact on meaning making. I apply this tool to the arguments of Catherine Booth, the co-founder of the Salvation Army, in her advocacy of female preaching as expressed in the 1859 pamphlet Female Teaching. In this way, I argue that it is possible to see how Booth, for the sake of transformation, negotiates gender roles adopted and projected in a process of denial and affirmation. In this process her own subjectivity is developed, as she functions as an antagonistic subject within and against the existing structures. Her woman’s voice is thus heard as one among other developing feminine subjects whose collective efforts aimed at bringing change.

Key Words
Female; Preaching; Catherine Booth; Subjectivity

Introduction

Making allowance for the novelty of the thing, we cannot discover anything either unnatural or immodest in a Christian woman, becomingly attired, appearing on a platform or in a pulpit. By nature she seems fitted to grace either. God has given to woman a graceful form and attitude, winning manners, persuasive speech, and, above all, a finely-toned emotional nature, all of which appear to us eminent natural qualifications for public speaking. (Catherine Booth)

Catherine Booth (1829-1890) is best known as co-founder of the Salvation Army. The focus of this article is on her defence of women preaching, as articulated primarily in her pamphlet Female Teaching, first published in 1859. Through the discussion and analysis, I will argue that Booth’s contribution in a ‘feminine register’ allows her to be regarded as a transformative ‘antagonistic subject’ with respect to the practice of preaching. I will offer this analysis and argumentation, drawing upon

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feminist theory. To discuss Booth’s views with respect to feminist theory is not new.\textsuperscript{2} Some interpretations are contested, indicating that the application of feminist theory to historical characters requires some care.\textsuperscript{3} I will be adopting a feminist approach articulated in a recent homiletical book by Jennifer Copeland entitled \textit{Feminine Registers: The Importance of Women’s Voices for Christian Preaching}.\textsuperscript{4} It is not my intention to argue that Booth was a feminist, nor that this pamphlet advocated a feminist agenda. It is rather to see the way in which the theory helps elucidate her contribution. This article, therefore, will simultaneously introduce some current homiletical theory with respect to the voices of women in preaching, while highlighting one such historic voice.

\section*{Preaching and Gender: Register as an Analytical Tool}

Susan Durber, in her article ‘A Pulpit Princess? Preaching Like a Woman’ writes, ‘Preaching has come to us as a gendered cultural form — for men.’\textsuperscript{5} Yet, as she admits, what it means to preach like a woman is complex because gender, rather than being something ‘fixed and stable’, is ‘being constantly shaped, constructed, fought for and re-made within all kinds of cultural practices’.\textsuperscript{6} Copeland agrees with Durber’s analysis, ‘The fact remains…that preaching is a gendered cultural form and its conventionally conceived gender is masculine.’\textsuperscript{7} She is also aware of the difficulties. As a consequence, when Copeland applies feminist theory to homiletics in a desire to analyse the distinct contribution of women through preaching, she seeks to do so without reverting to an essentialist understanding of gender.\textsuperscript{8} For Copeland this non-essentialist approach requires understanding feminine gender as something in which women negotiate both their adoption of certain roles and the reality of having gender roles projected upon them.\textsuperscript{9} Kathi Weeks, one of the authors on whom Copeland draws quite heavily, describes such a

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Copeland} Jennifer E. Copeland, \textit{Feminine Registers: The Importance of Women’s Voices for Christian Preaching} (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).
\bibitem{Coppeland} Durber, ‘Pulpit’, p. 170.
\bibitem{Feminine} Copeland, \textit{Feminine}, p. 123.
\bibitem{Feminine1} Copeland, \textit{Feminine}, p. xi.
\bibitem{Feminine2} Copeland, \textit{Feminine}, p. xi.
\end{thebibliography}
notion of the feminine subject from a feminist ‘standpoint theory’ perspective as a ‘being of becoming’.10 It is a term designed to avoid an essentialist understanding of gender on the one hand and a radically contingent non-essentialist understanding on the other, to retain the value of a ‘coherent and active willing subject’.11 With this idea of subjectivity Copeland argues that women experience their life as women. When women preach, therefore, they preach with and indeed, Copeland argues, ‘should’ preach out of these experiences; it is what makes their preaching authentic and distinct:

Women should speak from our church’s pulpits, not by disguising the voice as generic and assuming essentialist femininity, but by proclaiming the truth of their own experiences. All proclamation is refracted through and hybridized by the structures around it - economic, cultural, political, and theological.12

Copeland’s feminist understanding of what it means for a woman to preach resonates with the call of Durber:

Now it is time for women to speak, and not by disguising their voices or by whispering demurely, but by beginning at last to be those who form words from their own experience and place in the world and who utter them in their own way. Women who speak in the Church (and one place in which to do that is the pulpit) are today finding that they have their own things to say, and that this is as much about content and production as it is about style and form.13

For Copeland, the distinct contribution women’s voices bring to preaching can be transformative for the practice of preaching. Drawing again on Weeks, Copeland argues that the potential for change ‘rests with those situated both within and against the current structure. Thus, women, while historically and often currently occupying a place of oppression within church structures, also emerge through the cracks in the system as the renovators of the structure.’14 In making this argument, it is noted that the power of socially constructed gender expectations cannot be underestimated, not least within an ‘ecclesial setting’ where ‘institutional forces are amplified by thousands of years of biblical interpretation, traditional patterns, and historical practice’.15 Yet, ‘these contingencies are not intractable or determinative’ and ‘The place where one participates in the practices that constitute one’s context is also the place where one begins to fashion practices that will alter this context’.16 Thus women bring change as they

12 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 73.
13 Durber, ‘Pulpit’, p. 171. Copeland at the end of her book discusses homiletics who, she says, encourage the sort of feminine register she is advocating: Christine Smith, Lucy Lind Hogan, Anna Carter Florence, Mary Catherine Hilkert, and John McClure, *Feminine*, pp. 95-121.
14 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 57.
15 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 58.
subvert the existing context by desisting from some practices and creating new ones through their participation. This relates to Weeks’ notion of the ‘antagonistic subject’. The antagonistic subject for Weeks is one who is within a social system but who, through their very interrelated relationship with it, is also capable of subverting it. This subversion takes place through a simultaneous denial and affirmation of processes where:

we selectively will that which is active over that which is reactive, that which enables us to do and to be more over that which would limit or separate us from what we can do or be, that which augments our power over that which detracts from it.

To develop this further, Weeks focuses on ‘irony’ as a mechanism of denial and ‘self-valorization’, meaning the creation of practices that are alternative, as a mechanism of affirmation. In this respect, women who participate in the deeply male gendered practice of preaching function variously as transformative antagonistic subjects as they negotiate the gendered expectation of the role and practice through denial and affirmation.

Copeland also brings to this theoretical understanding of gender and its transformative potential a discussion on the specific sites in which gender can be seen to impact the practice of preaching. To do this she develops the ‘linguistic concept of register’ as an analytical tool for homiletics:

Register offers a process for understanding how meanings extend through and beyond the spoken words. Meaning comes to life by considering not only the words themselves but also the social contexts in which the words are spoken, the relationship between the communicating parties, and the method of communication.

Exploring register means giving attention to the variables of ‘field, tenor, and mode’ in the communication event. Copeland interprets these as the ‘what and where’ (content and context), the ‘who’ (relational dynamic) and the ‘how’ (means) of communication. Copeland argues that while gender may impact most the tenor, the ‘who’ involved in the relational dynamic, it impacts all three variables in different ways. The variables also do not necessarily occur sequentially and different variables will have a greater impact than others in different situations. Changes in one will also affect the

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17 Copeland, Feminine, p. 59.
18 Copeland, Feminine, p. 60.
19 Weeks, Constituting, pp. 92-3.
20 Weeks, Constituting, p. 137.
22 Copeland, Feminine, p. xiii.
23 Copeland, Feminine, p. 48.
24 Copeland, Feminine, p. xiii.
26 Copeland, Feminine, pp. 49-50.
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Meaning making, therefore, and gendered meaning making, takes place at the intersection of these variables when women preach. For Copeland, therefore, it is in the variables that constitute register that the specific contribution of feminine voices can be heard as making a distinctive contribution to the practice of preaching with transformational potential. Following her lead, I will seek to analyse the contribution of Catherine Booth as a woman to the practice of preaching. I will do this by analysing her arguments in relation to the variables of register: content and context, the relational dynamics, and the mode of her communication. To be sure, as Copeland advances her arguments it appears that she is offering a way of exploring the actual event of preaching by women. Be this as it may, when she then ‘listens’ for the feminine register she focuses upon the theoretical contributions of several homeliticians. I will be doing something similar with Booth. I will also go back beyond Copeland to the work of Weeks when this helps to deepen the perspective being adopted for analysis.

**Female Teaching**

The primary focus for my analysis of Catherine Booth’s arguments will relate to her pamphlet *Female Teaching*. First published in 1859, there appears to be no extant copy of this first edition. I, therefore, like some other later writers, will make use of the 1861 second edition and the later still 1870 third edition entitled *Female Ministry; or, Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel*. Walker suggests that the 1861 edition ‘is most probably only slightly changed from the first edition judging from her correspondence with her mother’. Andrew Eason, however, suggests that the second edition had been ‘revised significantly’. Booth, in the introduction to the second edition, states she ‘has taken the opportunity to enlarge and improve it’. There is no real evidence, however, that Booth changed her views between the first and second edition and the way in which she enlarged it remains a matter of conjecture. The third edition was published in 1870. This

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28 Copeland, *Feminine*, pp. 95-121
29 What is offered here is my analysis based upon my reading of these authors in relation to one another.
30 Catherine Booth, *Female Ministry; or, Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel* (London: Morgan and Chase, 1870).
33 Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 2
34 In the 1861 edition Booth has a number of long quotations from Phoebe Palmer’s book *The Promise of the Father, or A Neglected Spirituality of the Last Days* (New York: Garland, 1859). Whether these were added to the later edition is an open question.
35 Catherine Booth, *Female Ministry; or, Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel* (London: Morgan and Chase, 1870). Norman Murdoch, ‘Female Ministry in the Thought and Life of Catherine Booth’, *Church*
version contains the same basic arguments but reorganises and summarises some of the contents and omits the direct and personal comments to the Rev. Rees, to whom she was responding. As with the second edition, the revision is noted: ‘all the controversial portions have been expunged, some new matter added, and the whole produced in a cheaper form, and thus, I trust, rendered better adapted for general circulation’. 36 Eason writes, ‘Catherine was no longer directing her arguments towards Rees, but was now aiming them more generally at all opponents of female preaching’. 37 The change of title may also indicate her arguments are a justification for all female ministry within the church and not just preaching. 38 Booth’s views on female preaching and ministry ‘was an important guiding principle in the Salvation Army which institutionalized women’s preaching and offered women greater institutional authority than any other British religious organization at that time’. 39 I will only refer to this third edition when it adds additional relevant material or phrasing.

**Content and Context: What and Where?**

In this section I will describe, analyse, and discuss Booth’s content with respect to some of the contexts in which it was delivered. I will identify some tensions in her work and argue that these demonstrate her practice as antagonistic subject.

In *Female Teaching* Catherine Booth argued for the validity of female preaching in three main ways. 40 First, she argued that women were ‘naturally’ suited to preaching. Among the characteristics she claimed were natural to women and which eminently qualified them for public speaking were their ‘graceful form and attitude, winning manners, persuasive speech, and, above all, a finely-toned emotional nature’, their ‘delicacy and grace’, and their ‘moral and intellectual nature’. 41 Indeed, Booth argued that the vocation of preaching, rather than rendering a woman ‘unfeminine’, could ‘exalt and refine the tenderest and most womanly instincts of her nature’. 42

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36 Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 2.
40 It is important to note that, for Booth, prophecy, preaching, and teaching men and women in public, all referred to the same practice. This question of definition was picked up on by the Rev. J. Stacey in a correspondence with Booth in 1860. J. Stacey, Letter to Mrs Booth, cited in F. De L. Booth-Tucker, *The Life of Catherine Booth: The Mother of the Salvation Army*, Vol. 1 (London: International Headquarters of The Salvation Army, 1892), p. 250. Her synonymous use remains apparent in the second and third editions.
41 Booth, *Female Teaching*, pp. 3, 4, 23.
42 Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 4.
Her second line of argument, and the one to which she devoted most space, was her biblical arguments. She maintained that a woman’s ‘right’ to preach was a feature of the Gospel dispensation when and where the Spirit was poured out upon both women and men so that they could ‘prophesy’ in fulfilment of Joel 2.28 and referred to in Acts 2.17. Through the cross the previous limiting curse on women had been removed. This was demonstrated by the fact it was a woman, Mary, who was chosen to ‘herald the glad tidings of a Saviour risen’. In Christ the difference of sex in relation to the practice of preaching has been removed (Galatians 3.28). When Paul speaks about women having to cover their head in order to prophesy and pray (I Corinthians 11.1-15), this supports the fact that women did preach in public, with the restriction not prohibiting but guiding how this should be done in keeping with ‘the law of nature and of society’. Since the apostle clearly permits women to preach, for the sake of consistency, his apparently prohibitive statements such as ‘Let your women keep silence in the churches’ (I Corinthians 14.34) and ‘I suffer not a woman to teach’ (I Timothy 2.12) cannot refer to the practice of public preaching but refer to different kinds of speaking. She cites various examples from Scripture where women are seen to have a teaching responsibility to corroborate these arguments. In the later edition, with greater nuance she draws first on examples of women from the Old Testament and argues that surely the new dispensation would bring greater rather than less freedom. For Booth, women as men have received the enabling gift and calling to preaching. In Female Ministry she states, ‘God does call and qualify women to preach, and His word, rightly understood, cannot forbid what His Spirit enjoins’.

Her third line of argument relates to the ‘good’ which women preachers have evidently done. This includes the theological argument that whatever dishonour women owned because a ‘woman was the door by which sin came into the world’ has been more than offset by the ‘exaltation of the female sex’ through the ‘remedial results of Christianity’. Furthermore, the good that has resulted from female preaching is thus evidence of a good agency, as good fruit is the result of a good tree (Luke 5.43, 44). She reinforces her arguments by providing several examples, mainly from

43 Booth, Female Teaching, pp. 7-8.
45 Booth, Female Teaching, p. 21.
46 Booth, Female Teaching, p. 9.
47 Booth, Female Teaching, pp. 9-21. There are some quite detailed arguments about what ‘speak’ and ‘teach’ must mean in each of these passages but this is predicated upon the argument that Paul cannot be now forbidding that which elsewhere he clearly encourages.
48 Booth, Female Teaching, pp. 17-21.
49 Booth, Female Ministry, pp. 15-19.
50 Booth, Female Ministry, p. 20.
51 Booth, Female Teaching, pp. 21-3.
Palmer’s book *The Promise of the Father*, of when and where ‘the public labours of women have been eminently owned by God in the salvation of souls’.\(^{53}\)

Booth’s original pamphlet was a response to a pamphlet published in the same year by the Rev. Augustus Rees, minister of Bethesda Free Chapel in Sunderland, in which he outlined his reasons for non-participation in the so called ‘Sunderland Revivals’.\(^ {54}\) One of the main reasons he gave for his ‘moral and physical absence’ was the nature of its ‘agency’, by which he meant that these revivals involved female teaching, something he declared as ‘unnatural and unscriptural’.\(^ {55}\) The particular female he had in mind was Phoebe Palmer — an American Wesleyan evangelical revivalist who, with her husband, had begun a successful preaching tour in England in 1859 and with whom the fore-mentioned revivals were associated. Palmer herself was quite careful to try and limit offence by, as it were, preaching under the authority of her husband and by not preaching from the pulpit.\(^ {56}\) This stance was related to a theological conviction that women as such had no right to preach, could only do so under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and were thus claiming no right of their own or authority over others.\(^ {57}\) Rees, however, would have none of this. He made use of correspondence from Palmer’s husband, Dr Palmer, to name what he considered was at stake:

> Here it must be observed that Dr P. fully admits what some of his followers deny, viz., that ‘a lady’ may ‘proclaim the risen Saviour.’ Of course, he means publicly, for this alone is the question—he does not attempt to split hairs, as many do, by distinguishing between ‘in the Churches’ and in the Congregation—between speaking from the pulpit and speaking from the platform—between preaching and talking—between expounding and exhorting—he admits that the chief female agent in this movement, does and ought to ‘proclaim’ publicly ‘the risen Saviour,’ to men, women, and children.\(^ {58}\)

Rees, having identified what he considers to be the issue, a woman preaching, is equally clear that he considers it a ‘shameful’ if not indeed an ‘evil’ practice, even if it may be argued that some good has come of it.\(^ {59}\) The content of this pamphlet had originally been a sermon delivered twice to his congregation and there was also talk of him publishing another.\(^ {60}\)


\(^{55}\) Rees, *Reasons*, pp. 4-5.


\(^{58}\) Rees, *Reasons*, pp. 10-12.


\(^{60}\) Catherine Booth, Letter to her mother, Booth-Tucker, *Catherine*, p. 243. The letter was clearly written in 1859. Booth-Tucker indicates no specific date for this letter. Walker, when apparently referring to the same letter, dates it as 25 December 1859.
Rees writes of female preaching, ‘This agency I cannot approve, (and I have reason to believe that nearly all the ministers in this town are of the same opinion) because, in my deliberate judgment, it is both unnatural and unscriptural’.\textsuperscript{61} It is fairly safe to suggest that he represented the perspective of dominant societal norms as reinforced by religious convictions in terms of both his understanding of what was ‘natural’ with respect to the role of women and in considering female preaching unscriptural. Anderson writes that the issue of female preaching in mid-Victorian Britain ‘was deeply controversial for secular as well as for purely religious reasons’ because it explicitly challenged ‘the social convention that respectable women played no public role in mixed society’ and ‘Christian teaching that women should be silent in the church’.\textsuperscript{62} The views of Rees, therefore, represent the immediate and wider context into which Booth’s views were articulated.

Booth’s arguments could be read simply as reactive opposition. Whereas, however, it is certainly true that Booth aggressively disagreed with Rees, the analysis of her content in context requires more nuance. For in several places internal tensions can be seen in her advocacy of female preaching. This is the case with her argument about what is natural. She reasons that ‘custom’ and ‘natural’ are not the same. She argues that there is no reason why women, if they have the ability and intellect to pursue other goals, should be ‘confined exclusively to the kitchen and the distaff’ any more than men should be confined to the ‘field and the workshop’\.\textsuperscript{63} On the other hand, in making these arguments she appears to accept and defend what were socially constructed understandings of women, their character, and their assigned domestic roles. Her claim indeed is that preaching does not negate these feminine qualities in a woman or stop her ‘faithfully discharging the duties peculiar to her own sphere’ such as working in the kitchen or rearing children.\textsuperscript{64}

Tension is also seen in her use of Scripture. Her argument is framed within a literalistic understanding of Scripture.\textsuperscript{65} So she writes that Rees’ arguments, ‘if capable of substantiation by a fair and consistent interpretation of the Word of God, should receive our immediate acquiescence’.\textsuperscript{66} Without denying a literalistic approach, however, she draws on others to use a particular though not new hermeneutical approach to argue for rather than against female preaching.\textsuperscript{67} So far so good, but it can be argued from a feminist perspective that this means she does not suggest that Scripture itself

\textsuperscript{61} Rees, \textit{Reasons}, pp. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{63} Booth, \textit{Female Teaching}, pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{64} Booth, \textit{Female Teaching}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{65} Anderson, ‘Women’, p. 478.
\textsuperscript{66} Booth, \textit{Female Teaching}, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{67} Walker, \textit{Pulling}, p. 29
may be ‘complicit’ in creating the negative views towards women’s ministry.\textsuperscript{68}

A further example of tension can be seen with respect to what has been described as ‘the most innovative and ultimately significant aspect of her thinking’, which was her argument that women had the ‘right’ to preach as women.\textsuperscript{69} This is in contrast to an alternative view which suggested women could preach but only under the specific prompting of the Spirit, making it something of an exception to the rule rather than a right for any suitably qualified woman.\textsuperscript{70} Booth maintained that women had the ‘right’ to preach and ‘she has it independently of any man-made restrictions, which do not equally refer to the opposite’.\textsuperscript{71} Yet, this very statement was immediately qualified, as she continued ‘except when, as a wife, silence is imposed upon her by her own husband’.\textsuperscript{72}

Anderson claims that, despite her arguments for a woman’s right to preach, Booth ‘remained a firm believer in the subordination of women so far as their domestic and social position was concerned (at least in the period under discussion).’\textsuperscript{73} This can be countered by pointing out that Booth places such submission in relation to the greater law of ‘love’ which removes ‘the sting’.\textsuperscript{74} Yet, at least at the level of language, while Booth argued ‘that God has not subjected woman to man as a being’ for married women, she indicates that she was subjected by God ‘as a wife’.\textsuperscript{75} While the curse has been removed, the ‘semblance’ remains and women ‘all but’ restored to their created place! There is, therefore, at least ambiguity with respect to Booth’s view of the subjection of a wife to a husband, even as she argues for the rights of women as independent beings.

If in highlighting the above tensions my point was to negatively critique Booth, I may, as with Eason, be open to the charge made by Walker and supported by Read of judging her by an anachronistic standard of equality.\textsuperscript{76} My point, however, is different. It is rather to indicate that Booth can be seen negotiating roles adopted by and projected on women in a process of denial and affirmation. She, on the one hand, denies certain assumptions and practices, while on the other hand promoting certain practices and assumptions in a way that is subverting the status quo. This

\textsuperscript{68} Copeland, Feminine, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{69} Walker ‘Gender’, pp. 178-9, emphasis is Booth’s.
\textsuperscript{71} Booth, Female Teaching, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{72} Booth, Female Teaching, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{74} Booth, Female Teaching, p. 22. This is part of Read’s argument contra Anderson and Eason that Booth maintained a view of the subordination of a wife to her husband. Read, Catherine, pp. 162 and 166.
\textsuperscript{75} Booth, Female Teaching, p. 20, emphasis is Booth’s.
\textsuperscript{76} Read, Catherine, pp. 166-7.
takes place at various levels in relation to society and Church. Whatever the limitations of her approach, it allows her in context to argue for an equality between men and women with respect to preaching, without reducing their distinct contributions to sameness under an ‘androcentric principle’.77 Copeland writes:

The contexts in which we find ourselves cannot be transformed in one sweeping movement…Instead our contexts represent a totality of practices with multiple fault lines where tremors and eruptions can occur. Internal relations between individuals within these formations are not predictable, but rather are open and contingent.78

It is in respect to Booth pushing through such ‘fault lines’ that she acted as an ‘antagonistic subject’, being one ‘situated both within and against the current structure’.79

**Relational Dynamic: Who?**

The second variable in register through which the distinct contribution of women’s voices can be heard is the ‘who’ of preaching. For Copeland, this is the variable where gender can have the greatest impact: ‘gender, as it gives definition to who is speaking has a great deal of influence on what is heard…[introducing]… the possibility that the entire communication will be altered even when the other two variables remain constant’.80 Walker writes about *Female Teaching*, ‘The mere fact that it was written by a woman was unusual.’81 Booth wrote, ‘It is pretty well-known that a Lady has tackled him, and there is much speculation and curiosity abroad it seems.’82 To put this differently, since the author of this pamphlet was a woman, this impacted the meaning making of the event in its reception. The established equilibrium of communication was changed. In the language of Copeland, such ‘imbalance may be influenced by the novelty of her presence, thus vesting her words with more importance than they deserve. Or it may be dominated by disdain for her audacity, freighting her words with unfounded suspicion.’83

Yet, more can be said on this topic of the ‘who’. For, according to the ideas of Weeks, identity or subjectivity is something ever changing and being shaped in the creative process of doing.84 It can thus be argued that Booth

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77 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 62.
78 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 57.
79 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 57.
80 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 50.
82 Catherine Booth, Letter to her parents, 25 December 1859, cited in Walker, *Pulling*, p. 29, emphasis is Booth’s.
83 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 93.
84 This is my interpretation of Weeks’ argument about the ‘Ontology of Labour’, in *Constituting*, pp. 121-5.
not only made her arguments as a woman, but that this was an activity in and through which her own subjectivity was being ‘created’.

In writing her pamphlet, Booth clearly drew upon the various sources that constituted her knowledge and understanding.\textsuperscript{85} This said, in the pamphlet she owned them. In a letter to her parents, on the production of the pamphlet in December 1859, she wrote, ‘There is one thing which is due to myself, I think to tell you – that whatever may be its merit it is mine own, and far more original, I believe, than most things that are published, for I could get no help from any quarter.’\textsuperscript{86} To be sure it is the case that in Female Teaching ‘Catherine does not apply her argument to herself. She is not claiming her own right to preach’.\textsuperscript{87} The same point can be made in relation to the fact that when she wrote the pamphlet she had never preached in public. Roger Green writes, ‘It is important to note that Catherine Booth had not yet entered into a public ministry, and therefore was not defending her own personal right to preach, but the principle of women preaching the Gospel.’\textsuperscript{88} The danger in such statements, however, is that they may suggest something of a detached personal stance from the issue. Such was not the case. Booth wrote as a woman. She was a woman who already believed that in Christ there was a ‘perfect equality’ between the sexes and that this should extend to the practice of Christian ministry.\textsuperscript{89} To be sure in Female Teaching she asked, ‘why a mind like Mrs. Stowe’s should shroud itself in obscurity, and hide its light, beauty, and power under a bushel’.\textsuperscript{90} Earlier, however, in a letter to William Booth in 1855 she asked much more personally:

\begin{quote}
If indeed there is in ‘Christ Jesus neither male nor female,’ but in touching His kingdom ‘they are one,’ who shall dare thrust woman out of the Church’s operations, or presume to put my candle which God has lighted under a bushel?  
\end{quote}

Whatever the style of her writing, insofar as the issue of women preaching was an issue for women, it was indeed a personal issue for her. Furthermore, while in 1859 Booth may never yet have preached in public, for several years prior she had wrestled with a sense of such a calling to public ministry as something, on the one hand, contrary to her personality but, on the other, yet required in obedience if she were to achieve ‘perfect consecration’.\textsuperscript{92} This spiritual inner conflict may have been heightened

\textsuperscript{85} Various authors describe her sources see for example, Read, Catherine, p. 15
\textsuperscript{86} Catherine Booth, Letter to her parents, 25 December 1859, cited in Booth-Tucker, Catherine, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{87} Catherine Bramwell-Booth, Catherine Booth: The Story of her Loves (Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), p. 183, emphasis is Bramwell-Booth’s.
\textsuperscript{88} Green, ‘Settled’, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{89} Green, ‘Settled’, pp.132-5.
\textsuperscript{90} Booth, Female Teaching, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{91} Catherine Booth, Letter to William Booth dated 9 April 1855, cited in Green, ‘Settled’, p. 135, emphasis is Booth’s.
\textsuperscript{92} Read is particularly helpful in highlighting this internal spiritual struggle. Read, Catherine, pp. 12, 16, 54, and 75.
further by the demands for her to find a means of bringing material support to the family, possible through public lectures if not, indeed, through preaching.\(^93\) Perhaps it is the deeply personal nature of the issue which explains why she was so ‘enraged’ by Rees and his arguments.\(^94\) In a letter to her mother she wondered why the women in his congregation ‘could sit and hear such self-depreciatory rubbish’.\(^95\) She said, ‘I am determined that fellow shall not go unthrashed’.\(^96\) She writes further, ‘I should like to have given him more pepper but being a Lady I felt I must preserve a becoming dignity’.\(^97\)

When Rees simultaneously attacked a woman’s right to teach and the revivalistic holiness movement, his target was Phoebe Palmer. But for another woman, Catherine Booth, these issues were at the centre of her emerging identity. In turn, being required to make such a response may have contributed to the resolution of her struggles. Booth-Tucker writes, ‘What the persuasions of her husband and friends had failed to induce her to undertake, the taunts and denunciations of opposition were to be largely instrumental in forcing upon her.’\(^98\) On Whit Sunday 1860, Catherine in the morning confessed to William’s Gateshead congregation of her disobedience in this matter of not preaching. In the evening she preached her first public sermon. This removed the barrier to her ‘entering into the experience of holiness’.\(^99\) It also provided a means for her to provide for her family and later the ministry as her own career developed.\(^100\) The ‘who’, therefore, that produced *Female Teaching* was a subject ‘becoming’ in the production of a pamphlet which was an act not simply of thinking but of doing ‘in word and deed’.\(^101\)

**Mode: How?**

The ‘mode’ or ‘how’ of register is the third variable which allows the voices of women to be heard, because of the impact that gender has upon it. Three aspects of mode will be considered.

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\(^93\) Walker is particularly helpful in highlighting the material concerns related to Booth’s life and the opportunities that lecturing and preaching could provide to her for employment, opportunities of which she was quite aware both before and after 1589, as is demonstrated in her correspondence. Walker, *Pulling*, pp. 31-4.


\(^97\) Catherine Booth, Letter to her parents, 25 December 1859, cited in Walker, *Pulling*, p. 29, emphasis is Booth’s.


\(^99\) Read, *Catherine*, p. 75.

\(^100\) Green, ‘Settled’, p. 138.

\(^101\) Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 137.
The first that requires at least to be noted is the nature of medium used. *Female Teaching* was written and published as a pamphlet.\(^\text{102}\) In nineteenth century England pamphlets were published on a large number of issues, including the political and the religious. They were intended as a means of mass communication. The third edition of *Female Ministry* was designed in such a way as to allow a cheaper publication with the purpose of reaching a wider audience.\(^\text{103}\) As with Booth’s subject matter the topics covered were often contentious.\(^\text{104}\) ‘One of the reasons Booth wrote *Female Teaching* in 1859 was that she was not satisfied with the answers that others had written to Mr Rees.’\(^\text{105}\) There is a real sense, therefore, in which Booth’s communication in the pamphlet deliberately involved her in entering a public controversy. In adopting this particular approach she joined the company of other women who engaged in literary communication as a way of making their voices heard, including on gender and religious issues.\(^\text{106}\) To pursue this literary strategy, therefore, involved Booth in engaging in another practice which had its own tensive nature with respect to the perceived private and domestic role that women were expected to inhabit, not least in religious circles.\(^\text{107}\)

The second area of mode which can be discussed is Booth’s rhetorical approach in the pamphlet. Her intention was ‘to deal exclusively with the principles involved in the controversy’.\(^\text{108}\) Her goal was ‘to establish, what we sincerely believe, that woman has a right to teach’.\(^\text{109}\) Much of the article, therefore, is a counter-argument intended to ‘prove’ that this is the case, contrary to the proofs of Mr Rees. Booth draws upon a wide range of familiar rhetorical devices in her argument. These include questions, making concessions, quoting authorities, critiquing the logic, and, indeed, the credibility of Rees and his arguments. This and the fact that she is responding to Rees gives the pamphlet a dialogical style.\(^\text{110}\)

\(^{102}\) It is interesting to note that Booth did not enjoy the experience of working with the publishers. Catherine Booth, Letter to her parents, 25 December 1859, cited in Bramwell-Booth, *Catherine*, p. 182.

\(^{103}\) Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 3.

\(^{104}\) ‘Pamphlets are especially useful, since in the nineteenth century they played an important role as vehicles of controversy which in our day they have largely lost’, <https://www.newberry.org/british-pamphlets-19th-century-aydelotte-wo-nineteenth-century-british-pamphlets-newberry-librarythe> [accessed 01 June 2017]

\(^{105}\) Catherine Booth, Letter to her mother, 1859, Booth-Tucker, *Catherine*, p. 181.


\(^{107}\) Rebecca Styler, *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 3-18.

\(^{108}\) Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 3.

\(^{109}\) Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 30, emphasis is Booth’s.

More significant for this article, Booth also evidences the use of irony which is one of the two ‘selective practices’ identified by Weeks associated with constructing feminist subjectivity. Irony as a practice is a way of ‘problematising’ ‘beliefs and commitments’ and associated with a ‘certain kind of laughter’. Booth certainly makes use of irony as a rhetorical strategy, not least in her opposition to Rees and his arguments. One example is where she exposes the irony of Rees’ support of male preachers over and against women in relation to his dismissal of the example of Mary as a public preacher. Booth responds by asking him if he can explain, then, why the Lord may have so honoured a woman with the task of announcing the resurrection rather than a man, and then herself responds:

One reason might be that the male disciples were all missing at the time. One was probably contemplating suicide, goaded to madness by a conscience reeking with the blood of his betrayed and crucified Master; another was occupied in reflecting on certain conversations with a servant maid; and the rest were trembling in various holes and corners, having all forsaken their Master, and fled.

Again one gets the sense that she would expect some laughter when she writes about Rees’ argument about women being the way in which evil entered the world. For, in preparing to address him, she writes one thing while clearly meaning the opposite:

Our author now seems to gather up his strength for a final deliverance on this subject. And certainly, the astounding information he conveys (page 14), as well as the remarkable confirmation he supplies, is worthy of the effort it appears to cost him.

In another place she refers to Rees and his supporters as ‘the monarchs of the desk’ even as she disputes their opinions. Weeks, however, develops the theme of irony in particular with respect to ‘self-laughter’ as a force of disruptive ‘negation’ and ‘resistance’ where a person does not take themselves too seriously but in so doing subverts the idea of all controlling categories. It may be anachronistic to look for this in Booth. It is also difficult to describe with certainty, because the appreciation of irony depends upon the standpoint of the listener. Be this as it may, there are places where it is possible that the irony would have invited women to reflect upon the nature of their roles. One example is where Booth seeks to show the absurdity of Rees’ arguments concerning the nature of women by presenting him as meaning ‘that so soon as she presumes to step on the platform or into the pulpit, she loses the delicacy and grace of the female character – in fact,

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111 I will discuss self-valorization below.
112 Weeks, Constituting, p. 137.
114 Booth, Female Teaching, p. 21.
115 Booth, Female Teaching, p. 22, footnote.
ceases to be a woman’. Another is where she refers to the fact that Rees admits that it is true that many women are better than some men and she responds:

Truly, the ladies of Mr. Rees's congregation must have felt themselves highly complimented by this very gracious admission, which simply amounts to saying that a refined, intelligent, and Christian female is, after all, superior to a coarse, besotted, ignorant vagabond of the opposite sex, notwithstanding that she is a woman!

The laughter that such may have encouraged in female listeners who could identify with the roles being presented would serve to subvert those roles and, at least implicitly, fixed gender classifications.

The third area in which the question of mode is significant refers to the sort of female preaching Booth was advocating. This relates to Weeks’ second practice of ‘self-valorization’. If irony is the negative practice of the antagonistic subject, then self-valorization is the positive, ‘joyful’ practice. Self-valorization refers to the ‘affirmation’ and creation of new value giving practices. In *Female Teaching*, Booth clearly advocates the practice of female preaching where women preach as women in a way that maximises the strength of their femininity, as is evident in the quotation that opens this article. In *Female Ministry* she associates ‘tenderness’ with ‘womanly’ and highlights the ‘modesty and gentleness’ and the ‘devotedness, purity, and sweetness’ of the lives of female preachers. A danger in emphasising such qualities is that it can reinforce gender stereotypes when and where women are relegated to traditional ‘helping’ roles. Yet Booth is clearly pushing beyond these roles even as she continues to accept some such stereotypes. In *Female Ministry* she writes that it is good that woman as ‘benefiting her race’ find opportunities in private such as visiting the sick, but that this should not prevent her from the honour of preaching the Gospel. This is the case even if it is a ‘novelty’.

Booth’s actual instructions on the practice of female preaching are very limited, although she did couple the stress on the female character with the need for women preachers to be ‘becomingly attired’. Given the deeply personal nature of this pamphlet, as argued above, Booth’s own practice may give us some indication of what anticipated practices undergirded her

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117 Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 4.
118 Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 23.
119 Weeks, *Constituting*, p. 137.
120 Weeks, *Constituting*, pp. 137, 145.
122 Booth, *Female Ministry*, p. 4.
123 Copeland, *Feminine*, p. 63.
125 Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 3.
126 Booth, *Female Teaching*, p. 3.
description of a feminine style. Negatively she resisted a spontaneous ‘ranting’ style which goes without ‘order and arrangement’, as if to show that God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.\textsuperscript{127} Positively, she promoted a modest, respectable, logical approach but one which appealed to the heart. One report of her preaching in 1860 described it as ‘chaste and fervid eloquence’.\textsuperscript{128} A later report in the \textit{Gospel Guide} in 1865 describes her dressed in a black bonnet, jacket, and dress, preaching quietly but with powerful arguments, enlisting sympathy and attention with a ‘calm, precise, and clear’ delivery which never became tedious.\textsuperscript{129} In some senses her personal practice appears quite limiting of the mode. Anderson, however, argues that in context this sort of style which emphasised feminine ideas of ‘sweetness and tenderness’ with a ‘tender love for souls’ made a lady preacher ‘an almost irresistible mouthpiece for an appeal to the hearts of audiences composed of “respectable working men” or the “better orders”’.\textsuperscript{130} Such gatherings were indeed Booth’s main audiences.\textsuperscript{131}

**Conclusion**

The antagonistic subject is a ‘being becoming’ in the process of denying and affirming roles which are simultaneously accepted and projected upon her. The above analysis of the arguments of Catherine Booth in \textit{Female Teaching}, in relation to the analytical concept of register, demonstrates the way in which through the ‘what and where’, the ‘who’ and the ‘how’ her views on gender were expressed and being developed by her female voice. She stressed the significance of a woman’s right to preach as a woman, expressed an approach to women in ministry which would be implemented in the Salvation Army, and was herself changed in the process. In \textit{Female Teaching} Booth writes:

\begin{quote}
The day is but just dawning with respect to this subject; thank God, however, it is dawning. Women are thinking, studying, writing, aye and speaking too, on all the leading topics of the day. They are making themselves heard in drawing-room soirées, social science congresses, confidential state counsels, and through the press, to an extent little dreamed of by a gentleman of such antiquated notions as Mr. Rees.\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

Here Booth suggests, to draw again on the language of Weeks, that women were acting as ‘multiple’ subjects.\textsuperscript{133} Such ‘collectives’, Weeks argues, are

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{127} Walker, ‘Gender’, p. 179 citing Catherine Booth, unpublished Letter to William Booth, 3 September 1860 and to be found in the British Library.
  \item\textsuperscript{128} Wesleyan Times, 20August 1860, cited in Walker, \textit{Pulling}, p. 34.
  \item\textsuperscript{129} Wesleyan Times, ‘Mrs Booth’s Revival Services in London’, cited in Read, \textit{Catherine}, p. 19.
  \item\textsuperscript{130} Anderson, ‘Women’, p. 472.
  \item\textsuperscript{131} Anderson, ‘Women’, p. 473.
  \item\textsuperscript{132} Booth, \textit{Female Teaching}, p. 24, emphasis is Booth’s.
  \item\textsuperscript{133} Weeks, \textit{Constituting}, p. 136.
\end{itemize}
necessary for bringing change.\textsuperscript{134} From this perspective Booth’s \textit{Female Teaching} was one contributory voice to these ‘multiple, subversive’ antagonistic voices for change.\textsuperscript{135}

Revd Dr Stuart Blythe is rector of IBTSC Amsterdam.

\textsuperscript{134} Weeks, \textit{Constituting}, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{135} Weeks, \textit{Constituting}, p. 136.