13. Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 18–19.
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16. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 3.
17. John Plotz, "Is Realism Failing? The Rise of Secondary Worlds," *Novel* 50, no. 3 (2017): 426–35, 427.
18. Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 46–77.
19. Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 11–25, 26–35.
20. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 788.
21. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. William Bynum (London: Penguin, 2009), 436.
22. Henry James, review in *The Nation*, December 21, 1865, in *Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Collins (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 471.

Religion

ILANA M. BLUMBERG

"WHAT 'religion' turns out to be in a given time, place, writer, or text when not constituted in advance" by any critical theory is often "revelatory," says the postsecular critic Lori Branch.[1] Nowhere is this truer than in the mid-century prose of such writers as George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and John Stuart Mill, whose varied uses of the term "religion" reveal a word itself in transformation, at times referring backward to an established social and spiritual order of Christian practice and belief while, more often, projecting toward a future order of moral and psychological orientation still in the making. In 1888, Mary Augusta Ward sought to catch the extraordinary activity compressed in

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the abstract noun when she allowed one of her characters to turn it into a verb: "We are in the full stream of religion-making."[2]

In his essay, "Utility of Religion" (written between 1850 and 1858, published in 1874), J. S. Mill rejects the presumption that religion must mean supernaturalism, a faith in those rewarding and punishing "unseen Powers" that Eliot, too, describes in her depiction of Protestant, Catholic, and pagan faiths in such novels as *Silas Marner* and *Romola*. But, like Eliot and Arnold, Mill refuses to limit "religion" to a cosmological reality and redefines it as a moral and imaginative function. Now, religion—like poetry—becomes the answer to a universal human need, paradoxically, for that thing which takes us out of ourselves, beyond the self. Religion and poetry, says Mill, "supply the same want, that of ideal conceptions grander and more beautiful than we see realized in the prose of human life."[3] We do not need to travel to another world to "exalt the feelings" and "ennoble the conduct"; instead, the "idealization of our earthly life, the cultivation of a high conception of what it may be made" may be able to supply "a poetry, and, in the best sense of the word, a religion."[4]

The essence of religion, for Mill, is to turn emotions and desires toward "an ideal object," one that is "rightfully paramount over all selfish objects of desire."[5] What motivates such selflessness? Not the promise of a world to come but the capacity to imagine the approbation of all those whom we respect, dead or alive, Eliot's "choir invisible."[6] The consciousness of being not only an individual life but a member of the human species as it moves toward the greater good of the greatest number is religion, says Mill: selfless, evolving, effective, and ennobling.

In the mid-1860s, Arnold, too, defines "religion" as an "effort" of the human race, as a "voice" of human experience like art, science, poetry, philosophy, and history, working with one shared end: the definition of human perfection and the progress toward it. Arnold, like Mill, retires the "religion" that refers to doctrine, ritual, traditions, worship, a relation between the supernatural and the natural, the divine and the human, that orders personal and collective history. Religion now comes to stand alongside culture, alongside poetry, as *pursuit*: "Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it; and here, too, it coincides with religion."[7]

For Arnold, as for Mill, the relation between the personal and the collective replaces the central relation of "religion," which had been between the human and the divine: "And because men are all members of one great whole, and the sympathy which is in human nature will not

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allow one member to be indifferent to the rest, or to have a perfect welfare independent of the rest, the expansion of our humanity, to suit the idea of perfection which culture forms, must be a general expansion."[8]

Whereas Arnold and Mill wrote of an elevated "religion" in which right action is motivated by the abstract idea of species-consciousness, George Eliot dramatized the extraordinary difficulty of such religion-making that would result in a religion that works against selfishness and even against any sense of particularism (family, neighbors, nation) in favor of universal moral progress. "Religion," Eliot writes, is "something, clearly, that lies outside personal desires, that includes resignation for ourselves and active love for what is not ourselves."[9] Yet the path to such selflessness is often for Eliot old religion. In her early novella, "Janet's Repentance," Eliot describes the progress initiated by evangelicalism, with all its many flaws: "nevertheless, Evangelicalism had brought into palpable existence and operation in Milby society that idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self."[10] In *Mill on the Floss*, it is the words of Thomas à Kempis that open Maggie to new moral understandings. And in *Romola*, it is Savonarola, the Dominican preacher and reformer, who confronts the heroine with the absence of any commitment beyond the animal affection for her most immediate family: she is "'without a law, without a religion. . . . You are no better than a beast of the field when she is robbed of her young. If the yearning of a fleshly love is gone, you are without love, without obligation.'"[11] In spite of Savonarola's own shortcomings, it is he who occasions Romola's elevation to a life of wider duty.

In the reality Eliot depicted, in which morality rarely had a "standard beyond hereditary custom" and religion often meant "revering everything that was customary and respectable," the Millite and Arnoldian ideals appear even less likely to come to fruition than the Christian ideals introduced by all-too-human preachers.[12] Religion is hard-won knowledge, most frequently encountered by isolated heroines in moments of intense disappointment and loneliness, when the prose of ordinary life begs for poetry. In Eliot's novels, such religion, when it appears, is radical, not normative. It breaks from widespread custom, from torpor, from society. Arnold claims that

> Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated: the individual is obliged, under pain of being stunted and enfeebled in his own development if he disobeys, to carry others along with him in his march towards perfection, to be continually doing all he can to enlarge and increase the volume of the human stream sweeping

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> thitherward; and here, once more, it lays on us the same obligation as religion, which says, as Bishop Wilson has admirably put it, that "to promote the kingdom of God is to increase and hasten one's own happiness."[13]

By contrast, Eliot's mid-century narratives of coming to religion suggest the painful struggle by which personal progress is achieved and, surprisingly, the enduring necessity for the Christian framework in which acts of selflessness and duty emerge as intelligible and compelling.

As we consider the centrality of "religion" to Victorian culture and literature beyond simple narratives of secularization, our understanding will be fuller and deeper if we recognize, first, the contested senses of the term; second, the tension between ideal and real versions of old and new religion, even among the most prominent agnostics; third, the affects associated with religion, ranging from wistful and wishful to despairing, bewildered, burdened, energized, relieved, freed. The sense of discovery that accompanies so many Victorian narratives of religion can be ours as well, as we re-read with an eye for the active processes of religion-making.

Notes

1. Lori Branch, "Postsecular Studies," in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*, ed. Mark Knight (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 96.
2. Mary Augusta Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, and Co., 1888), 649.
3. John Stuart Mill, "Utility of Religion," in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 10, ed. J. M. Robson (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), 419.
4. Mill, "Utility," 420.
5. Mill, "Utility," 422.
6. See George Eliot's poem, "O May I Join the Choir Invisible," readily available online.
7. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Samuel Lipman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 33.
8. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 33.
9. George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Carol T. Christ (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 239.
10. George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. David Lodge (London: Penguin, 1985), 320.

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11. George Eliot, *Romola*, ed. Andrew Sanders (London: Penguin, 1980), 433.
12. Eliot, *Mill*, 363–64.
13. Arnold, *Culture*, 33.

Rhyme

NAOMI LEVINE

ONE enigmatic statement about rhyme appears all the time in Victorian poetry criticism. It's this: "Rhyme has been said to contain in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope."[1] The statement is attributed to Arthur Hallam, the critic whose early death is the subject of Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850). Hallam's idea of rhyme has long been used to explain the form of the *In Memoriam* stanza; in the forward and backward movement of the *abba* rhymes, readers keep hearing the melancholy play of memory and hope that Hallam described.[2]

Hallam's statement has become an axiom of Victorianist close reading, but in its original context it described a set of *historical* phenomena: the migration of rhyme from Arabic to Provençal poetry and the cultivation of rhyme's expressive properties by the troubadours. Hallam, I argue, borrowed his idea from Romantic literary historiography, most directly from J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi's *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* (1813; trans. 1823). This intellectual background matters, both for our understanding of Victorian poetics and for our own ways of approaching questions of form. It tells us, surprisingly, that in the nineteenth-century imagination rhyme's effects were tied to its origins: no form without history. It also tells us that there was no such thing as Victorian rhyme if "Victorian" means England and the nineteenth century. Victorian rhyme was a medievalist and orientalist idea about the origin of European poetry, and it arose from Continental aesthetics and literary history writing.

Few people read Sismondi's comparative literary scholarship today. It is exactly the kind of large-scale historiography that twentieth-century formalism reacted against—but it was widely read in its time. The book, written in a period of conversation with Germaine

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