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THE POETRY OF RELIGION AND THE PROSE OF LIFE:  
FROM EVANGELICALISM TO IMMANENCE IN BRITISH WOMEN'S WRITING,  
1835-1925

by

Anna Kristina Stenson Newnum

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in English  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

August 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Florence S. Boos

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Anna Kristina Stenson Newnum

has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy  
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To my husband, Justin Newnum, to my parents, Stan and Karen Stenson, and in memory  
of Kathleen O'Donovan

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I have dedicated this dissertation to my family and to a life-long friend and mentor, Dr. Kathleen O'Donovan. Kathleen called me every other week to offer encouragement and to talk about my dissertation ideas before she died of cancer in September 2013. My parents Stan and Karen Stenson, who, ever the literary enthusiasts, requested that in the dedication they be referred to in Dickensian terms as my "Aged P's," have been unflagging encouragers, intrepid proofreaders, and the best of audiences. Finally, thanks to my husband Justin for his support, patience, and continually calming demeanor.

## ABSTRACT

“The Poetry of Religion and the Prose of Life: From Evangelicalism to Immanence in British Women’s Writing, 1835-1925” traces a tradition of religious women poets and women’s poetic communities engaged in generic and theological exploration that I argue was intimately intertwined with their social activism. This project brings together recent debates about gender and secularization in sociology, social history, and anthropology of religion, contending that Victorian and early-twentieth-century women poets from a variety of religious affiliations offer an alternative path into modernity that embraces the public value of both poetry and religious discourse, thus questioning straightforward narratives of British secularization and poetic privatization during the nineteenth century.

These writers, including contributors to the *Christian Lady’s Magazine*, Grace Aguilar, Dora Greenwell, Alice Meynell, Eva Gore-Booth, and Evelyn Underhill, turned to social engagement and immanence, a theory of divinity within the world rather than above and apart from it, to bridge a widening gap between religious doctrine and poetic theory. Appropriating the growing interest in immanent theology within British Christianity allowed women to write about the small, the domestic, the human, and the everyday while exploring the divine presence in them, thus elevating and publicly revealing experiences traditionally allocated to women’s private lives. Just as the women in this study questioned the distinction between the divine and the everyday, they also blurred the generic boundaries of poetry and theological prose. As lyric poetry was increasingly identified with private experience, they used literary experimentation across the genres of poetry and theological prose to engage public debates on a surprisingly large number of issues from factory reform, to mental disability, to urban poverty, to women’s suffrage, to pacifism.



This project includes four chapters, each of which examines a female poet or a poetic community of women connected through the publishing world. The first two chapters focus on tensions among commitments to poetry, religion, and social reform within Anglicanism. Trapped between the desire to encounter a transcendent God and the desire to celebrate earthly ephemera and improve earthly conditions, these poets demonstrate the tension from which a poetics of immanence arose. My third and fourth chapters follow the extension of immanence in late-nineteenth-century Catholic verse and early-twentieth-century mystical verse. These writers used a growing theological emphasis on immanence to justify poetry that relied on female experience, to suggest that the divine was at home in the constantly evolving natural and social worlds, and to illustrate God's equal proximity to the mundane and the marginalized, inspiring challenges to social and institutional hierarchies.

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## INTRODUCTION

By using the phrases “poetry of religion” and “prose of life” in my title, I am recognizing that the Victorians often gave poetry explicitly religious weight. The word “prose,” by contrast, was associated with both the seemingly more mundane genre of nonfiction prose and the everyday details of physical life, the prosaic. Yet, for the Victorian and early-twentieth-century women poets to whom this study is dedicated, the associations suggested by this title were not as straightforward as they seem. Although many canonical writers were describing poetry as a distilled, less theological form of religion by the early twentieth century, the poets in this study suggested that poetry is a means of accessing the spiritual world rather than a replacement for it. They frequently articulated a theology of immanence, which emphasizes divine presence within the world, and used this theology to proclaim God’s accessibility through poetry and to enlarge the spiritual possibilities of ordinary life. The time range of this study (1835-1925), therefore, partly represents a trend toward immanent theology within British Christianity. I suggest that women poets increasingly appropriated immanent theology because it allowed them to write about the small, the domestic, the human, and the everyday while exploring the divine presence in all of these things, thus elevating and publicly revealing experiences traditionally allocated to women’s private lives such as childbirth or the mundane task of gardening.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, feminist scholars have questioned the public/private dichotomy within both patriarchal and feminist thought. In a chapter on “Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy,” Carole Pateman explains feminist criticisms of patriarchal liberalism in relation to the public/private divide: “Feminists argue that the dichotomy between the private and the public obscures the subjection of women to men within an apparently universal, egalitarian and individualist order” (120). It was not only patriarchal liberalism that entrenched the public/private dichotomy, but also some feminist literary criticism that identified a straightforward discourse of “separate spheres” in the nineteenth century. In their introduction to *No More Separate Spheres!*, Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher explain that many feminists now “contest the division between public and private life, showing how those two states are intimately intertwined and mutually constitutive” (8). Similarly, the poets in this study do not fit well into a “separate spheres” paradigm as their work constantly traverses the realms of personal life and public activism.

This study traces a tradition of religious women poets and women's poetic communities engaged in genre and theological exploration that I contend was intimately intertwined with their social activism. Just as these women questioned the distinction between the divine and the everyday, they also blurred the strict genre boundaries of poetry and theological prose. Working in both genres allowed women to transport innovations across them and thus engage more fully in debates about theology and aesthetics. Although poetry was viewed as a more exalted genre than nonfiction prose, women's poetry was often seen as more private and as less directly influential in social and political debates than prose. The poets in this study sought to question this distinction. I suggest that they saw their religious poetry as an important enabler of public social activism. Contrary to the stereotypical domestic and reclusive image of women poets, these poets have an impressive resume of social activism. Even as poetry was increasingly identified with private experience, they used literary experimentation across the genres of poetry and theological prose to engage public debates on a surprisingly large number of issues from factory reform, to mental disability, to pacifism.

Until recently, religious women poets were often neglected by scholars because their work did not fit the predominant narrative of Victorian doubt and religious decline that sees religious discourse as retreating into the private sphere. Examining women's religious poetry is integral to our understanding of both Victorian poetics and religious development, offering a fuller picture of poetry's import in public debates, including debates about the fate of religion. I argue that many Victorian and early-twentieth-century women poets, including contributors to the *Christian Lady's Magazine*, Dora Greenwell, Alice Meynell, Eva Gore-Booth, and Evelyn Underhill, adopted a theology of immanence in order to assert the centrality of religious thought to social debates. In doing so, they offered an alternative path into modernity that embraces the public value of both poetry and religious discourse, thus questioning straightforward narratives of British

secularization and poetic privatization during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Throughout this study, I will use the term “immanent theology” to describe these authors’ engagement with the concept of immanence. I use this term to indicate an emphasis on immanence within a belief system that acknowledges both the immanence and the transcendence of God. Although “immanent theology” is not a commonly used theological term, Mark Knight and Emma Mason briefly use it in their book *Nineteenth-Century Literature and Religion* to describe a similar phenomenon. I have avoided the more common term “immanentist theology” because it is often deployed pejoratively by theologians such as Louis Bouyer to indicate what they view as an over-emphasis on immanence to the exclusion of transcendence.<sup>2</sup> Thus, while the term “immanentist theology” is used to place thinkers outside of “orthodox” Christianity, I use “immanent theology” to indicate that the women I discuss are mostly working within, although sometimes stretching, the traditional boundaries of Christian theology.

Within Christianity, immanence is linked to a strong emphasis on the second and third persons of the trinity (Jesus and the Holy Spirit). There are three different strands of immanence that generally enter into these authors’ work, though they often overlap. First, through a focus on the incarnation of Christ, which authors such as Alice Meynell extend to encompass the re-enactment of Christ’s incarnation in the everyday, present world.<sup>3</sup> Second, through an understanding of God’s direct presence within humankind, both within the self and within the other. The writers in this study often turn to this way of

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<sup>2</sup> In his *Dictionary of Theology*, Bouyer defines “Immanentism” as “A tendency to understand the immanence of God or of his action in us in such a way that it would, in fact, exclude the reality of his transcendence” (226).

<sup>3</sup> Several scholars, including Boyd Hilton and Philip Davis have used *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, an important 1889 collection of theological essays by a group of leading High Church Anglican clergy in Oxford, as an example of the growing focus on incarnation in the second half of the nineteenth century (Hilton 5, Davis 139).

understanding immanence when explaining the need for social activism. Finally, through locating divinity within nature or the material world. This last conception of immanence tends to emphasize the Holy Spirit, though in the early-twentieth century it was also influenced by a growing awareness of immanence within Eastern religious traditions.<sup>4</sup>

### Directions in Women's Religious Poetry

With the exception of work on Christina Rossetti, scholars of Victorian poetry have been slow to embrace the contributions of explicitly religious poetry to the formal development of the lyric tradition even as they have suggested that the genre itself took on a quasi-religious weight for the Victorians. In a 2004 assessment of possible new directions for the study of Victorian poetry, Virginia Blain suggested that scholars should consider “a new push toward re-opening religious debates from a new knowledge base and a newly sensitized perspective which seeks somehow to put the religion back into the poetry” (“Period Pains” 73). Several scholars have recently responded to this call by either highlighting the extent of canonical authors’ reliance on religious paradigms or by introducing religious and devotional work that does not fit into traditional narratives of Victorian doubt.<sup>5</sup> Charles LaPorte’s (2011) work on the influence of biblical

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<sup>4</sup> In *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, J.A. Colombo emphasizes the link between immanence and spirit-focused theology: “Often linked with the term, transcendence, ‘immanence’ refers to one aspect of God’s relation to the world: the manner in which God is present to and in the world. In addition to process theology, those contemporary Christian theologies with a ‘strong’ doctrine of the Holy spirit, for instance, Jürgen Moltmann, Karl Barth, and Yves Congar, tend to emphasize the immanence of God in the world” (610). In “Evelyn Underhill’s Pneumatology: Origins and Implications,” Todd E. Johnson argues that Evelyn Underhill’s focus on God’s immanence apart from the incarnation was partly influenced by “the Eastern emphasis on the Spirit as the Spirit of God, and not the Spirit of Christ” (115).

<sup>5</sup> G.B. Tennyson defines religious poetry as “all poetry of faith, poetry about the practices and beliefs of religion, poetry designed to advance a particular religious position, poetry animated by the legends and figures of religious history, and poetry that grows out of worship” (4). He defines devotional poetry as a particular kind of religious poetry that “exhibits an orientation toward worship and linkage with established liturgical forms” (6). While Tennyson provides a useful definitional framework, in her recent study of Victorian religious poetry, Karen Dieleman points out that the distinction between devotional poetry and other forms of religious poetry is not always clear when applied to individual poems: “the interrelatedness of cognition, emotion, and embodiment precludes too sharp a distinction between religious and devotional poetry, though the latter frequently carries a stronger worship ethos” (13). My own study

hermeneutics and Kristie Blair's (2012) study of form and faith, for instance, reveal the relevance of debates within Victorian religion to Victorian poetry. Other scholars have sought to remedy the over-emphasis on doubt in Victorian poetry through the recovery of poetry that focuses on faith. In a 2010 study of women's Christian lyric poetry, F.

Elizabeth Gray states that, "Over the last fifty years, scholars of Victorian literature on religious topics have tended overwhelmingly to focus on and privilege the poetry of questioning and of doubt, which I suggest has skewed our understanding of the significance of religious devotion in the century's creative work" (*Christian and Lyric* 3). Her study suggests that the focus on religious decline in scholarship on Victorian poetry resulted partly from the exclusion of women's religious poetry from scholarly narratives.

Importantly, then, an emphasis on doubt has not only obscured narratives of faith but has also obscured the work of many women poets. Although there were certainly Victorian women poets who questioned Christian faith, women's poetic identities were frequently linked to religious identity. In *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England* (2002), Cynthia Scheinberg convincingly lays out the reciprocal connection between Christian identity and gender identity in Victorian women's poetry. She argues that the hegemonic discourse of Christianity was particularly influential in defining the identity of women poets for two reasons: First, Victorian Christian culture revised the romantic conception of the poet as prophet to fit an explicitly Christian theological model, thus labeling the poet as Christian. Second, women were depicted as exemplary Christians. Consequently, women poets often based their claims to poetic authority on their uniquely Christian identity.<sup>6</sup>

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also straddles the boundary between devotional poetry and religious poetry, noting ways in which issues of worship permeate more broadly religious poetry and calling into question the extent to which it can be isolated from other religious activities.

<sup>6</sup> For Scheinberg, this alignment is problematic, as she is also interested in the its consequences for Jewish women poets who could not lay claim to the same means of gaining poetic authority.



In addition to initiating further discussion about how the gendering of both poetry and religion affected the development of nineteenth-century poetics, I describe how religious poetry both helped women to express the significance of female experiences and enabled them to enter public debates. Many discussions of the relationship between poetry and religion focus on male poets' waning interest and faith in transcendence, which emphasizes God's position above and apart from the universe.<sup>7</sup> By tracing women poets' growing commitment to immanence—divine presence pervading the universe—I suggest that this theology was a defining feature of women's poetics and also an important enabler of their public social activism.

A poetics based on immanence was largely an attempt to place a theological template over Romantic poetics' mission to ennoble the everyday.<sup>8</sup> Immanence intensified this mission in order to sacralize everyday events and the material world. The authors in this study saw poetry as particularly conducive to expressing immanent theology because of this Romantic heritage, but also because they believed poetry as a form mirrored the work of immanence. Immanent theology placed God within the world just as poetry compressed large ideas within a small space and articulated abstract ideas through the medium of concrete life. A poetics of immanence encouraged women to

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<sup>7</sup> Although J. Hillis Miller's book *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* is one such text that takes the secularization thesis as its starting point, it is partly an exception to this trend. Miller suggests that by the Victorian period "the gap between man and the divine power seems greater," but he traces five writers' (DeQuincey, Robert Browning, Emily Brontë, Arnold, and Hopkins) "heroic attempts to recover immanence in a world of transcendence" (15).

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Prickett's *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* explores how Victorian religion, rather than just Victorian aesthetics, was influenced by Romantic thought. He also suggests that Romantic poetics itself was based on an older Judeo-Christian model of religious experience (7). G.B. Tennyson has examined the influence of Romantic aesthetics on the Tractarians, whom he suggests saw the Oxford Movement as "the spirit of Romanticism at work in the Church" (17). The Christianization of Romantic aesthetics by Tractarians, notably John Keble, would in turn prove definitional to Victorian poetics. Stephen Gill has also chronicled Wordsworth's importance to the Victorians, not least because of the Victorian conviction "that Wordsworth—both the work and the example of the life—was a spiritually active, empowering force" (40-41). Most recently, in the introduction to *Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, Emma Mason has uncovered Wordsworth's importance to Victorian women poets' understanding of "feeling" (3-4).

write about everyday details in both nature and domestic life while engaging with divinity. Furthermore, it enabled them to elevate experiences traditionally allocated to women by exploring the divine presence in them. While an immanent poetics encouraged women to express their private experiences in terms of divinity, it also encouraged the recognition of divinity within the other. By using their poetry to locate God within the marginalized, women poets also used immanent poetics to provide a call to act in the public sphere.

While scholarship on women's religious poetry has lagged far behind scholarship on women's religious fiction, recent work by Cynthia Scheinberg, F. Elizabeth Gray, Emma Mason, and Karen Deileman has laid the groundwork for a more nuanced examination of women's religious verse. Taken together, these studies suggest that women used poetry to creatively engage with religion either through poetic revisions and reinterpretations of theology or through productively incorporating the formal rhythms of worship into their work. Critiquing foundational studies on women's poetry by authors such as Dorothy Mermin and Angela Leighton for depicting women's religious commitments as a necessarily repressive force in their poetry, Scheinberg contends that, in fact, women poets creatively engaged patriarchal religious discourse and, therefore, that their poetry often did the theological work they were excluded from doing within the church.<sup>9</sup> In *Religious Imaginaries* (2012), Karen Dieleman acknowledges the importance of this creative engagement with religion but asks "whether we have too quickly ruled out the affirmative and generative possibilities of (Victorian) religious institutions for

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<sup>9</sup> While Mermin acknowledges the importance of religion in giving women poets authority to speak, she argues that women did not wrestle with issues of doubt in their poetry as men did because "women could not afford to question the faith that gave them poetic authority" (114). Contrary to Mermin, Scheinberg convincingly argues that "while they did use their faith to claim poetic authority, women poets were often questioning and challenging the terms of that faith" (*Women's Poetry* 20). Scheinberg differentiates herself from feminist scholars who have dismissed religious discourses and turns instead to feminist theology, calling for a "more complex analytical model that allows for the structural influence of both gender and theology on women's poetry" (21).

women's (and men's) writing" by suggesting that their only creative interactions with religious institutions were through critique (2).<sup>10</sup> Keeping in mind both women writers' ability to use religious poetry as a mode of critique and the creative inspiration they may have gleaned from religious orthodoxy, my study seeks to examine both the generative possibilities of traditional theological concepts for women poets and the ways in which women shaped the focus of nineteenth-century theology.

Another important development in scholarship on women's religious poetry is the contention that it provided a space for women to generate an authoritative poetic voice that affirmed their access to God while also contributing formally to the lyric tradition. F. Elizabeth Gray's study, *Christian and Lyric Tradition in Victorian Women's Poetry* (2010) takes up this issue. Justifying her recovery of poetry that she admits is not always aesthetically pleasing to modern tastes, Gray asserts that "the work that these women did, in the form of religious poetry, made a significant contribution to Christian discourse, to lyric tradition, and to contemporary views of womanhood" (1). In particular, Gray notes that these poets "contribute to a revised, more inclusive language with which believers could speak of God, speak to God, and construct their own personal relationship with God" (9). Thus, she suggests the crucial role that religious poetry played in women's personal religious lives and the ways in which it helped them to construct a feminine but still authoritative version of womanhood.

While building on this understanding of religious poetry as a means for women to both accrue authority and creatively shape theology, this study turns to crucial questions about how women's religious poetry enabled them to engage in social activism and to join debates about the public role of religion in Victorian society. First, I situate women's poetry within the larger body of their work. While often identifying as poets because this

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<sup>10</sup> Dieleman takes on the task of examining how women's poetics grew out of their engagement with the worship practices of specific denominational communities, thus focusing on religious praxis in addition to religious belief.

was an acceptable and prestigious identity for women, the writers in this study were equally if not more well-known for their essays and theological writings. This fact seems surprising given that poetry is often cited as a genre that women turned to instead of participating directly in public theological and social debates. Recognizing the impressive body of nonfiction prose that formed the other half of many women poets' careers suggests that poetry did not take the place of theological writing for women. Rather, these women often worked out problems from one genre within the other genre, creating a dialogue between the two.

In focusing on women's personal religious development, previous studies of religious women poets have also often neglected their impressive records of social activism, thus adding to the illusion that these authors viewed their poetry as having a primarily private purpose. Yet the women in this study dedicated a large portion of their careers to public activism that has received only incidental mention and believed that their poetry contributed to these efforts. Thus, the second way in which this study adds to the knowledge of Victorian and early-twentieth-century women poets is through a discussion of how their poetry contributed not only to their personal and theological development but also to their social activism. Women's religious lyric poetry, when read in context, can be interpreted as a more public genre.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The idea that lyric poetry, nineteenth-century women, and religious experience are all confined to the "private sphere" has, I contend, created a critical lacunae surrounding these writers' social activism. In their critique of feminist literary critics who promulgate the idea that there were fixed separate spheres for men and women in the nineteenth century, Davidson and Hatcher point out that "the separate spheres model has narrowed the possibility that terms and fields occupying 'opposite' sides of these binaries will come into contact and conversation with one another. That is, separate spheres logic creates a structural disincentive for thinking about nation in relationship to home, political in relationship to privacy, femininity in relationship to reason, and so on" (20). Similarly, we have not asked how women's personal and religious development within the lyric tradition might merge with women's social and political activism. American historian Mary P. Ryan, who advocates for a more refined approach to the concepts of public and private rather than a complete abandonment of the terms, suggests that an expanded understanding of the public political sphere allows us to discover the important role nineteenth-century women played in it: "If we shift our angle of vision one last time, it is possible to discern an assemblage of women in a fully public and political space of their own, one that can, at times, rival male arenas in historical importance and normative value" (21). Others have called attention to the ways that the private and the public spheres inevitably penetrate one another. As Davidson and Hatcher put it, "domesticity is

Finally, while these studies collectively examine how women poets engaged their own religious traditions, women's poetry also participated in broader discussions about religion's role in the modern world and grappled with the Victorians' perception that they were confronting a period of secularization. The poets in this study were particularly engaged in suggesting ways that religion could adapt and respond to the challenges of modernization. I examine how women poets appropriated and popularized immanent theology both as a way to give voice to women's experiences and to contend for a more active, socially-engaged approach to religion. This theological focus on immanence was a key way they believed Christianity should respond to religious doubt.

### Women's Writing Across Genres

Although studies such as Scheinberg's and Gray's have begun to lay the groundwork that will help scholars examine gender in discussions of Victorian poetry and religion, they divorce the poetry and prose of the authors they study, focusing primarily on poetry. Yet many of the most popular women poets wrote prolifically in both the genres of poetry and nonfiction prose. Rather than privileging either poetry or prose and thus co-opting one genre in order to explain the other, I study both forms of writing in tandem. For instance, I look at Dora Greenwell's theological essay *A Present Heaven* (1855), which argues for a greater focus on current social reform within Christian theology, alongside her volume of poetry *Carmina Crucis* (1869), which negotiates how to adopt an attitude of patience toward God while responding to current social need. Similarly, I examine Evelyn Underhill's poetic volume *Immanence* (1912) alongside her famous work of theology *Mysticism: A Study on the Nature and Development of Man's*

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saturated by and dependent on a range of factors, terms, and agents imagined to lie outside its domain" (18). Conversely, as Pateman points out, "The sphere of domestic life is at the heart of civil society rather than apart or separate from it" (132-133). All of these theorists agree that public and private are neither static terms, opposite terms, nor inevitably gendered terms. Susan B. Boyd calls attention to their shifting nature: "the dividing line between ostensibly 'public' and 'private' spheres is unclear, and it shifts in a manner that is connected to the state's role in regulating power relations between various groups" (15).

*Spiritual Consciousness* (1911) in which she relies on the poet's aesthetic experience as a model for the mystic's approach to God. While immanent theology helped to shape women's poetry, aesthetics became particularly associated with immanent thinking in women's theological prose. This cross-pollination increased women writers' authority in both genres as they claimed their poetic experience as the grounds for theological insight in their prose and their theological work as an inspiration for their poetry.

Examining works like these in conjunction suggests that, when scholars fail to acknowledge these authors' entire bodies of work across genre boundaries, they miss identifying the combined effect of women's writing on audiences that often read their work in both genres. This division in scholarship on women's poetry and women's nonfiction has led to a double oversight. On one hand, we miss the conversation these authors establish between the two genres. For instance, some of the writers in this study use poetry to show the process whereby they arrive at the theological or social conviction advocated in later essays. Others frequently use their process of creating poetry as a metaphor for encountering divinity in their theological works. On the other hand, we miss seeing how they expanded the generic definitions of both lyric poetry and theological prose by applying techniques from one genre to the other, including forays into free verse by an otherwise metrical poet or the use of intensely metaphoric and associative language in theological prose, or even the more straightforward use of the essay form to theorize the role of poetry in religious life.

Many scholars have suggested that the gendered connotations of Victorian genres made it more difficult for women to contribute their theological and social views in the direct form of nonfiction. In *Literature, Theology and Feminism*, Heather Walton notes that literature has historically been gendered female while theology has been gendered male.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in her introduction to *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*:

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<sup>12</sup> Walton also cites arguments by theorists such as Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous suggesting that literature, particularly formally innovative literature, is a "site of feminine revolt" for women after they

*Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers*, Julie Melnyk explicitly notes that “encouragement of women’s religious work and literature did not extend to theological writing” (xi). This did not, she suggests, discourage women from theological endeavors, but made them more likely to include their theological work within non-traditional genres (xii).<sup>13</sup> Yet, while these ideas about the displacement of women’s theological writing have led to productive research on the theology imbedded within women’s fiction and poetry, they have also sometimes led to the neglect of women’s nonfiction contributions.<sup>14</sup> When Cynthia Scheinberg, as previously noted, suggests that lyric poetry provided a more acceptable way for women to engage with theology, she dismisses the remarkable simultaneous careers that many of these women conducted as essayists, theologians, and journalists.<sup>15</sup>

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were excluded from theology (169). At the same time, critics like Germain Greer and Isobel Armstrong note that, as a feminized genre, lyric poetry was a difficult genre for women to use for this purpose. I would suggest, then, that these women’s innovation lies in their ability to cross between literature and theology.

<sup>13</sup> Melnyk also helpfully outlines some of the trends she finds in women’s theological writing: “concern with the authority of the woman’s voice in religious life, with their own right to pronounce on theological topics” (Introduction xvi), their interest in “the centrality of the second Person of the Trinity” (xvi), and their focus on “lived theology” (the importance of action to theology) (xvii).

<sup>14</sup> According to Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell in their introduction to *Prose by Victorian Women*, the assumption that women primarily expressed their social ideas by imbedding them within domestic fiction, generally seen as more congenial to women’s voices, has led scholars to neglect women’s direct nonfiction engagement in major Victorian debates. Similar assumptions, I suggest, are often made about women’s use of poetry as a substitute for direct nonfiction writing. Examining women’s nonfiction prose, Broomfield and Mitchell point out, has challenged “the rigidity of the Victorian ‘separate spheres’ paradigm” (xi).

<sup>15</sup> Linda Peterson’s *Becoming a Woman of Letters* provides a useful starting point for thinking about women writers’ careers in their entirety as her case studies acknowledge that women crafted a literary identity that spanned a variety of genres. While expanding access to and indexing of Victorian periodicals have led more critics to incorporate women’s essays into their work as contextual background, there is still a need for more work that traces the tradition of women’s essays and closely examines their rhetoric. Tracy Seeley is one scholar who has followed the women’s essay tradition through several articles, including “Victorian Women’s Essays and Dinah Mulock’s Thoughts: Creating an Ethos for Argument” and “Alice Meynell, Essayist: Taking Life ‘Greatly to Heart.’” *Women in Journalism at the Fin de Siècle*, a 2012 collection of essays edited by F. Elizabeth Gray, has also begun to fill the critical gap in studies of Victorian women’s journalism by tracing a number of women’s careers through the periodical press.

Because women's verse was often depicted as private, even when published, essays afforded women poets a venue to articulate the public utility of lyrical writing beyond personal development. Writing across genres also helped women to challenge the stereotypes associated with the figure of the poetess, which Germaine Greer has argued brought women large amounts of attention and flattery but ultimately secondary status and humiliation.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Isobel Armstrong suggests that lyric poetry was particularly associated with femininity, which "while it gave women's writing a very secure place in literary culture,... amounts to a kind of restrictive practice, confining the writing of women to a particular mode or genre" (*Victorian Poetry* 320).<sup>17</sup> She argues that even after mainstream nineteenth-century expressive aesthetics expanded to embrace the stereotypical characteristics of women's poetry such as affective and emotive language, piety, and apparent simplicity, women worked within the most expressive genres of the love lyric and the religious lyric to question the limits of these genres. While Armstrong makes a convincing case that women's verse contained a layer of complexity beneath its apparent simplicity and thus challenged the conventions of poetic femininity from within the lyric tradition, women were by no means confined to writing in a single genre and also enriched their relationship to the lyric tradition or questioned its conventions by engaging in conversations about it in prose.

While lyric poetry was, perhaps, a more acceptable genre for women than theological prose, as a feminized genre, it was not given the serious intellectual weight accorded to the theological essay. By writing theological nonfiction prose the authors I examine directly claim their competence in the male realm of theology and thus validate

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<sup>16</sup> Germaine Greer's 1995 book is called *Slipshod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet*. At the same time, Talia Schaffer has suggested that the poetess label was not always as crippling for women as we might expect by examining how some women poets such as Alice Meynell were able to manipulate this image for their own professional benefit.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, many women seem to have claimed the identity of poetess even while producing essays and theological prose, which has obscured the importance of their non-poetic work for subsequent scholars.



the theological content of their poetry. Furthermore, the fact that they wrote in both genres suggests that poetry was not simply performing the work of expressing their theological ambitions through an acceptable medium, but was, rather, a generative space used to form the ideas that they would directly assert in prose. Conversely, poetry provided a means to attach physical, bodily, and personal experiences to theology and thus to enact the theology of immanence they proclaimed in their prose.

As these writers tried to define the relationship between their aesthetic and religious commitments, their attempted resolutions can be traced in the conversation they create between genres. The women in the first two chapters of this study were responding to what they perceived as a tension between the artistry of poetry and sincere religion. Thus, they had to explain and justify their use of religious poetry. By contrast, the writers in my fourth chapter were responding to the cultural perception that poetry itself had become a form of religion and so had to explain the necessity of religion as a separate entity even as they pointed to the religious functions of poetry. Working in both genres allowed these writers to create a dialog between them. Any reader of Dora Greenwell's assertion in her prose that "the poet is a man who sympathises with man, the theologian is a man who sympathises with God" ("An Inquiry" 135), for instance, would be familiar with her religious poetry and would be forced to ask how she positions her own poetic career within this dichotomy. Just as Greenwell turns to essays to discuss genre-related questions about poetry, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna turns to poetry in "A Perplexity," a March 1843 article for the *Christian Lady's Magazine*, as she discusses the difficulties of choosing appropriate prose pieces for a Christian periodical. After writing half of an article in prose, she states, "We may be permitted to continue this subject in metre" (196). She then launches into a three-page poem on the subject of the theologian's duties. Similarly, Evelyn Underhill uses the experience of the poet as a prototype for the experience of the mystic as she attempts to explain the nature of mystical experience and its place in society in her theological work. These conversations between genres are

particularly noticeable in the periodical press, which several chapters of this study examine, as it created conversations across genres through physical juxtapositions as well as across time as authors responded to one another's work.

Women poets' prose writing, even when focusing on theology, often directly participates in aesthetic debates about poetry. Analyzing Victorian discussions of poetry in prose, however, requires me to first clarify a point of definition. The Victorians exhibited a perplexing tendency to conflate poetry as a general term for creative endeavors and as a specific reference to verse. If I appear guilty of this conflation myself, it is because the definition of "poetic" within any given piece of prose is often fluid. The malleability of this term means that Victorian discussions of the "poetic" often turn into specific claims about the religious power of verse, making poetry as a specific genre bear the weight of all aesthetic discourse. As Charles LaPorte points out, literature as a general term was also available to mid-Victorians, but they often chose to use the term "poetry" in an imprecise way: "One need not be Jacques Derrida," he avers, "to see that the mid-Victorian ambiguity between poetry qua inspiration and poetry qua verse partly determines a cultural conception of poetry by strongly associating—and sometimes conflating—these ideas (12). This conflation reveals that verse forms were seen as particular markers of artistry. Thus, attitudes toward poetry as a genre often resulted from attitudes about the privileging of form over content in both literature and religion. For the Evangelical poets in my first chapter, for instance, this association led to a particularly problematic relationship with poetry as a genre. Conversely, discussions of the relationship between religion and aesthetics that use the term "poetic" often lead to inflated claims about the specific importance of poetry as a genre, to which some of the poets in my later chapters assent. Rather than simply creating confusion, then, this conflation points to why discussions of poetry became central to discussions of religious experience.

While the writers I examine use the different generic qualities of poetry and nonfiction prose to create a conversation between genres, at the same time, they sometimes blend the aesthetic qualities and generally accepted uses of the two genres. By blurring the generic lines between lyric poetry, often seen as the most artistic, most formal genre, and nonfiction prose, often seen as the least artistic, most informative genre, these women also blur the line between art and serious theological endeavors. Lyric poetry, as a genre, is prone to interpretation based on formal qualities while its philosophic content is sometimes dismissed. Similarly, Victorian essays and nonfiction prose are often read only for content or to flesh out poetic interpretation. My dissertation suggests the importance of reading the theological qualities of Victorian women's poetry while also reading the aesthetic and literary qualities of their nonfiction prose, which is often metaphoric, associative, rhythmic and even impressionistic, and thus is sometimes misinterpreted as illogical.

### The Public Implications of Women's Religious Poetry

A second major concern of this study that scholarship on women's poetry has yet to address comprehensively is the way that religious lyric poetry participated in and enabled women to enter public debates, both within their poetry and extending from it into their prose endeavors. I will argue that, while previous scholarship has focused on the increasingly private nature of both poetry and religious experience at the end of the nineteenth century, the women I examine resist this trend. Intense activism and social advocacy were surprisingly common among women poets who have, nevertheless, often been falsely characterized as reclusive and primarily introspective. There is a critical tendency to see women's poetry that engages directly in social causes as trite while women's poetry is labeled as private when it engages in complex reflection. My reading of women's religious poetry specifically contradicts this binary, suggesting that "private"

poetry often enabled social action, while poetry that directly discussed social causes was also reflective.

Although most scholars of Victorian poetry no longer depict the religious lyric as a repressive genre for women, it is still overwhelmingly seen as a private genre. Isobel Armstrong identifies feminized expressive theory, which she argues is the dominant mode of Victorian women's poetry, as "above all an aesthetic of the *secret*, the hidden experience" (*Victorian Poetry* 332). Yet, it is important to recognize that women who were publishing their poetry clearly knew that secrecy and privacy were a veneer placed over what were ultimately public utterances. I will suggest that many religious women poets struggled with, questioned, and ultimately rejected a form of aesthetics that pretended to split private religious experience from public religious and artistic expression.

Discussions of women's religious poetry have only intensified the perception that poetry was private. For instance, while Virginia Blain acknowledges the ways in which women's religious verse could be subversive of gender hierarchies, this subversiveness is based on the assumption that it is private in nature. She reads Rossetti and Greenwell's use of the religious lyric as a way to transcend the confines of women's lives because "the realm of religion was a space marked out separately from the everyday" and "since souls are unsexed, gender hierarchies could be kept at bay in this private space" ("Challenge of Genre" 172). This emphasis on "private space" and transcending "the everyday," however, obscures the extent to which poets like Greenwell used the religious lyric to infuse everyday elements of their lives with religious significance and to enter public social debates. Furthermore, even at times when their voices are primarily private, many women saw this privacy as an enabler of later social action, a space to work out the underlying theology of their actions.

Thus, recognizing the ways in which the lyric tradition contributed to women's individual religious development does not preclude examining its social implications. At

the end of Gray's study of religious women poets, she outlines several possible directions for scholarship on women's poetry concluding that "the broader social implications of Victorian women's religious lyric verse demand further examination" (*Christian and Lyric* 228). While Gray demonstrates that women poets claimed authority for themselves as "privileged Christians" through their use of religious verse, she leaves open the question of "how these gains, made through poetic negotiations, might enable the articulation of a specifically female voice of social protest and social influence" (229). My study seeks to respond to this question by examining how religious women's immanent poetics influenced their reform efforts by cultivating a concern for the marginalized and suggesting a radically equal access to God.

In order to expand the focus on women's individual religious development to encompass their social activism, we might start by noting that, when women claim authority through their lyric poems, it is not exclusively on their own behalf. Rather, women's religious poetry often takes the form of demanding calls to God on behalf of a community. For instance, in many of fin-de-siècle Catholic poet Alice Meynell's religious poems such as "To the Mother of Christ the Son of Man," she takes on her most demanding persona. In this poem, the speaker cries out to the Virgin Mary and asks that the whole community be allowed to experience her relationship to Christ:

We too (one cried), we too,  
We the unready, the perplexed, the cold,  
Must shape the Eternal in our thoughts anew,  
Cherish, possess, enfold. (1-4)

These lines express the pressure of a larger community's needs brought to bear on Mary's private religious experience, a pressure that leads to a public poetic demand. This demand that everyone be allowed to have an immanent experience of Christ comparable to Mary's experience of the incarnation uses a woman's embodied experience not to claim a privileged relationship but to express the need for more direct and democratized access to God for "the unready, the perplexed, and the cold." Similarly, the mid-century poet and

theologian Dora Greenwell makes her most direct demands to God based on her observations of human suffering:

Let my God speak to me! For I have heard  
 Strange voices on the earth, strange marvels seen;  
 While the blue, silent heavens look'd on serene  
 And the white moon-beam brought its message clear,  
 Man's goodly frame was in the market sold  
 By men, and woman's smile made cheap for gold,  
 --Yet Thou, oh God! didst buy the soul more dear! ("Summa  
 Theologiae" 61-67)

In this poem, Greenwell suggests that her passionate response to the problems of slavery and prostitution give her the authority to demand an answer. This results in her realization of the need for an immanent God rather than a merely transcendent one. These poems illustrate that women's bid to create a more authoritative voice within religious poetry often resulted from a desire to express the social needs of a larger community.

Yet in developing a public voice for their poetry, women were also contending with the growing perception that the truly committed artist need not take on concerns beyond aesthetics. Hilary Fraser, for instance, ends her study of aesthetics and religion in the nineteenth century with a discussion of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater to argue that the dominant artistic discourse at the end of the century was based on artistic privacy, religious secrecy, and a denial of the artist's public responsibility.<sup>18</sup> The women poets I examine, however, voice dislike for the idea that art can or should be separated from social responsibility. In her essay "Solitude" (1898), for instance, Meynell points out the value of solitude, but chastises poets who use the privacy of art to avoid moral and social obligations; this type of "vain artist" behaved as "master of his own purpose, such as it was; it was his secret, and the public was not privy to his artistic conscience. He does

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<sup>18</sup> Recently, in *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word*, Angela Leighton has traced this "art for art's sake" attitude into the early twentieth century claiming that "although the phrase would seem to go out of fashion with the advent of modernism, it does not entirely disappear. In fact, it is surprising just how much it continues to serve writers, sometimes defensively, sometimes apologetically, as a principle in opposition to use" (35).

violence to the obligations of which he is aware, and which the world does not know very explicitly. Nothing is easier” (20). She compares this socially irresponsible artist unfavorably with those who have given up solitude for lives of service in schools, cloisters, and hospital wards, thus suggesting the need for the ideal artist to find a balance between social commitment and personal development.

Women poets attempted to practice the role of socially engaged artist both within their writing and through direct social activism. They were committed to a surprisingly large number of social causes (from factory reform and poverty relief, to treatment of minorities and the mentally disabled, to the suffrage, pacifist, and anti-vivisection movements). A common thread underlying many of these social interventions was the conviction that an immanent deity inhabited all life in the present world, necessitating acts of care that ignored traditional human hierarchies. Some of these women even wrote extensive treatises on the need to understand these issues through a religious lens such as Dora Greenwell’s *On the Education of the Imbecile* and Eva Gore-Booth’s *Religious Aspects of Non-Resistance*. While the causes they supported varied, they all insisted that spiritual experience was relevant to the public discussions of these issues as they pushed back against the scientific and nationalist rhetorics that were claiming primacy in these debates. Starting at an early moment in the Victorian period when the Evangelical imperative for women’s religious public engagement was particularly strong allows me to trace the continuation of this imperative in the writing of later poets whose work ran counter to the idea that religion was a private, personal matter rather than a publically engaged activity.

Furthermore, I contend that lyric poetry itself was integral to these endeavors. The Evangelical poets in *The Christian Lady’s Magazine* suggested that the pastime of poetry was partly justified through its unique emotional utility on behalf of social causes. For some poets, however, it was a space that enabled activism even when it did not directly participate in it. As I have already noted, in their lyric poetry, many women poets

cultivated a voice of authority to speak to God on behalf of a wider community, a voice that in turn they used to speak to their peers on behalf of marginalized communities.

They also saw poetry as a medium that could aptly illustrate the implications of an immanent theology, which became the backbone of their social vision. Because, influenced by Romantic poetics, they saw poetry as a genre that glorified the everyday details of the sense world, they used it to depict divinity imbedded within common life, a divinity productively confined within the limited space of the lyric and within the rhythms of earthly processes. Locating God's presence within themselves became a way for women to claim direct inspiration for their causes, while locating God within the suffering bodies of others created an identification with suffering and an imperative to action. Finally, some poets went even further to suggest that this divine presence equally inhabited all forms of life, a belief that became the basis for radically anti-hierarchical stances. In this way, the seemingly intimate spaces of women's everyday lives in the lyric poem became entwined with women's public voices.

### Engaging the Secularization Debate

Victorian women poets' commitments to a public discourse on religion and a theology of immanence emphasizing God's earthly presence can, furthermore, be seen as a direct counter to narratives of secularization. A third way in which this study departs from previous projects on women's poetry is through its examination of women poets' contributions to the secularization debate. Rather than using these poets' work to illuminate a pre-established narrative of religious decline, as so many studies of Victorian poetry and secularization do, instead I focus on the ways that religious women poets themselves responded to the narratives of secularization that were already emerging during the Victorian period. Thus, I suggest not only that they were creatively engaged in questioning and shaping ideas within their own religious communities but also that they



were particularly interested in defending religion's value and relevance in the public sphere.

Scholarship on Victorian poetry is only now beginning to acknowledge the ways in which other disciplines have questioned the narrative of nineteenth-century religious decline in Britain.<sup>19</sup> Charles LaPorte recently called on scholars who study the nineteenth century to instead recognize “that the moribund condition of nineteenth-century British Christianity now seems far less evident than it has seemed to us during most of the intervening period” (2). Recovering work by religious women poets that primarily articulates religious faith rather than religious doubt responds to LaPorte's call to recognize the cultural robustness of Victorian religion. Yet, I also contend that these poets were themselves responding to the Victorian perception that religion was losing its place in public discourse.

To engage this wider debate about the role of religion and poetry in public life, I have chosen not to limit the authors in this study to a specific religious denomination, but instead to examine how women from a wide variety of perspectives defended the role of religion in public life. This does not mean, however, that religious difference is unimportant to my study. Rather, I focus on it only when it becomes a central issue of secularization for the authors. Denominational distinctions were certainly important to the Victorians,<sup>20</sup> yet a predominant focus on denominational influence in the context of

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<sup>19</sup> Charles LaPorte, for instance, points out the reciprocal relationship that has developed between historians of secularization and scholars of Victorian aesthetics, suggesting that, on one hand, well-known mid-Victorian lines of poetry have provided concise yet poignant summations of religious doubt for historians of secularization. On the other hand, scholars of Victorian poetry are particularly reluctant to relinquish the model of religious decline “because the old narratives of disappearance and loss have always served us so well” (3).

<sup>20</sup> Gray, for instance, notes “significant similarities in the preoccupations and poetic strategies of women across the spectrum of denominational affiliations” (*Christian and Lyric* 5). By contrast, Dieleman sees these affiliations as the defining feature of her study: “The religious writings of Victorian women of faith, I suggest, takes particular shape and voice because it emerges from Christian religious imaginaries formed—deliberately but also in deeper, unconscious ways—by continual engagement in particular worship practices and environments” (Dieleman 6). Dieleman asserts the need for research that differentiates the religious milieus of individual poets, noting both the importance of denominational

this study would obscure the work of those writers who deliberately chose to emphasize ecumenical concerns or to remain unaffiliated with a specific church. Dora Greenwell, for instance, has been claimed by scholars for various factions across the spectrum of Anglicanism, and she was also influenced by her varied theological research on thinkers from Catholic to Quaker. Yet Greenwell deliberately avoids focusing on divisive denominational issues to emphasize the broad theological concepts that help her respond to secular systems of thought. By contrast, the issue of religious difference lies at the heart of the Evangelical rhetoric about religious change in *The Christian Lady's Magazine* because its editor, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, spent most of her theological energy attempting to eviscerate her opponents within Christianity. While some of the women in this study believed that religion's public status was best served by asserting denominational correctness, others explicitly eschewed divisive inter-sect debates, opting for an ecumenical approach. All of these women, however, defined their religion in relation to specific theological concepts rather than seeing it as a hazy, aesthetic experience and, even when they refused direct denominational affiliation, reacted against the definition of religious experience as private spirituality.

Although I suggest that these poets respond to the issue of secularization, I do not mean to imply that their work reinforces straightforward historical and sociological narratives of religious decline. Rather, I will discuss the ways in which women poets asserted religion's vitality and adaptability in response to what they perceived as the pressure of secularization. Britain's 1851 census put church attendance at roughly half

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affiliation in the Victorian period and the influence of the specific worship practices that accompanied these denominational identities on women's poetry. At the same time, we should consider, as Gray has helpfully illustrated in regard to Keble's Tractarian poetics in her article "Beatification through Beautification," that when the popular poetry of a particular moment was associated with a specific religious group, their poetics could influence the formal qualities of poetry across religious affiliation, even affecting their religious rivals (Evangelicals in this case).

the population.<sup>21</sup> As historian Callum Brown points out, to us these numbers suggest the vitality of mid-Victorian engagement in institutional religion, but the Victorians, who had no previous records with which to compare these numbers, saw them as an indication of religious decline. Gordon Graham suggests that secularization itself might best be viewed as a Victorian discourse, yet the Victorians had no evidence that religion “was in terminal decline; they *feared* that it was” (36).<sup>22</sup> Regardless of whether religion was actually in decline, women who wrote religious verse believed they were in a fight to keep religious discourse at the center of both social and aesthetic debates. Consequently, their writing shows a preoccupation with illustrating that religion was still a salient element of modern life. Thus, although this study uses secularization theory as a model for the ways that the Victorians felt religion was threatened, it also engages with scholars who question whether the traditional secularization thesis is the best way to understand religion’s path into modernity.

First, it will be helpful to note some of the basic controversies within current debates over secularization. Steve Bruce, a staunch defender of the secularization thesis, suggests that the “bottom line” of secularization is “changes in the religious beliefs and behaviors of individuals” (Introduction 6). Thus, sociological and historical studies of British religion have attempted to trace religious engagement through church statistics and to determine when and why religion declined in the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Work by

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<sup>21</sup> W.F.S. Pickering’s “The 1851 Religious Census: A Useless Experiment?” provides an overview of the usefulness and limitations of the census.

<sup>22</sup> The vigorous public questioning of religious belief by intellectuals did not necessarily indicate widespread disaffection from the church (Graham 40), and the vehemence of these public debates may even reveal the persistence of religious ideas rather than their decline.

<sup>23</sup> McLeod is one of the most prolific and well-respected historians of secularization. The most pertinent of his more recent books for my purposes is *Religion and Society in England 1850-1914* in which he argues that, from the time period of his study on, religion shapes “the thinking and behaviour of the individual believer, but no longer to any great degree shapes the taken-for-granted assumptions of the majority of the population” (178). Callum Brown, by contrast, argues that the decline occurred later in the twentieth century than McLeod suggests.

historians such as Callum Brown, Jeffrey Cox, and Doreen Rosman, however, explicitly disputes the idea that religion, to the extent that it is measured by institutional engagement, was in decline during the Victorian period. Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain*, for instance, moves the decline of the church as an institution well into the twentieth century, suggesting that it only began to decline when it lost its appeal for women who had become the backbone of the church when religion was "feminized" during the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

The "secularization thesis" as a whole, however, is more than a debate about statistics in the nineteenth century. It emerged from mid-twentieth-century sociology and became the pervasive narrative of religious change across the social sciences and humanities, which are now reevaluating it. Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce lay out this original thesis concisely in "Secularization: The Orthodox Method":

Stated briefly the secularization thesis asserts that modernization (itself no simple concept) brings in its wake (and may itself be accelerated by) 'the diminution of the social significance of religion.' What features of modernization are involved? There seem to be three that are particularly salient: social differentiation, societalization and rationalization. (11)

This definition relies on the mutually constitutive nature of secularization and modernization, but many scholars have begun to question the idea that secularization is an inevitable process linked to modernization and to redefine secularization not just as a descriptive theory that demonstrates a growing lack of institutional engagement in Western Europe but as a predictive narrative that participates in the marginalization of religion in the public sphere. The pervasiveness of this narrative within literary studies, as LaPorte suggests, has until recently created a myopic focus on the literature of doubt. The

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<sup>24</sup> McLeod argues that the decline of British religion was based on the failure of churches to appeal to the working classes, whereas Brown argues that the decline was based on the feminization of religion followed by women's disaffection from the church in the mid-twentieth century.

poets I examine, by contrast, suggest that there were additional paths into modernity that preserved the vitality of religion rather than one overarching narrative of secularization.

While the idea that Victorian religious practice was in steep decline has been refuted through statistical methods, secularization is also often defined as the privatization of religion, a process whereby religion's pertinence to public life wanes and it is defined as a primarily private experience. In "Private and Public Religions," for instance, José Casanova describes the historical evacuation of religion from the public sphere as "the unassailable core of modern theories of secularization" even while acknowledging the possibility that this process may not ultimately define the future role of religion in the public sphere (18).<sup>25</sup> Importantly, this part of the secularization thesis has clear implications for the ways that we define religion itself. Talal Asad, for instance, argues that the secularization thesis redefines religion as "those beliefs-sentiments-practices which are not essential to our common politics, economy, science, and morality. More strongly put: 'religion' is what actually or potentially divides us and may set us intolerantly against one another" ("Religion and Politics" 6).<sup>26</sup> Asad's work, suggests, then, that the secularization thesis has created a definition of religion that does not enable scholars to discuss the persistence of religion in modernity, offering us only terms in which to talk about religion's decline.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Casanova states, "Religion was progressively forced to evacuate the modern secular state and the modern capitalist economy and to find refuge in the newly found private sphere" (18). That this process occurred, Casanova does not dispute. However, according to him, there is nothing to say that religions and religious individuals could not regain a public presence after this process occurred. He argues that "history is still open" (41).

<sup>26</sup> Asad's work implies that the modern, privatized definition of religion and secularism are mutually constitutive rather than opposed to each other ("Religion and Politics" 6).

<sup>27</sup> Callum Brown agrees with this assessment, stating, "It is when we fail to fully acknowledge that religion can acquire new ways in which to find social significance that the plausibility of secularization is undermined as a theory of explanation in industrial society" ("Revisionist Approach" 39). For Brown this can be ameliorated within the discourse of secularization theory, but Jeffrey Cox goes even further than Brown, calling for scholars to abandon the terminology of secularization and adopt "a new concept of religious change in the modern world" ("Towards Eliminating" 17).

While secularization theory suggests that British society increasingly identified religion as private spirituality, all of the women I examine reacted against this idea, seeing their work as relevant to public debate because of, not in spite of, their commitments to specific theological ideas. They tried to illustrate the ways that they believed religion could remain both publicly relevant and adaptive. Yet these women's contributions to discussions of doubt, science, and modernization have seldom been the focus of Victorian scholarship. This issue of religion's relevance to public debates was so important to women because of the way Christianity was feminized during the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Thus, they were pushing against the relegation of women's spirituality to private life. As Joy Dixon has pointed out in her study of women's spiritualism, because we tend to think of politics as a secular affair we are often quick to assume that, in order to participate in public debates on issues such as suffrage, women had to shake off their association with spirituality. She suggests, on the contrary, that women often saw their arguments for social change as part of a larger project to re-sacralize the political realm. We see this in Eva Gore-Booth's poetry on behalf of the suffrage movement in which she informs her fellow reformers that:

So long as the senses reign,  
And the spirit is trodden down,

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<sup>28</sup> In addition to Callum Brown's *Death of Christian Britain*, see Julie Melnyk's "'Mighty Victims': Women Writers and the Feminization of Christ" and Meredith Veldman's "Dutiful Daughter Versus All-Boy: Jesus, Gender, and the Secularization of Victorian Society." Both Melnyk and Veldman examine gendered depictions of Jesus. Melnyk sets out to complicate Ann Douglas's well-known argument that the nineteenth-century feminization of Christ was simply indicative of "ecclesiastical emasculation" and the waning power of Christianity (131). Instead, according to Melnyk, many women writers confronted the "complexity and contradictions" of Victorian Christianity, in which Christ was feminized but still powerful" (131). Veldman, "traces the evolution of competing feminine and masculine constructions of Jesus" through Victorian children's literature (2). She suggests that mid-Victorian depictions of Jesus were feminized, but after 1870 there was an attempt to re-appropriate him for masculine culture. While Brown suggests that the feminization of religion was a catalyst for secularization, Veldman points instead to the rhetoric surrounding the attempt to re-masculinize him as a catalyst. Melnyk, on the other hand, suggests that religion remained a strong cultural force and that identifying with Christ was a possible though not guaranteed means of empowerment for women. All, however, agree that religion was feminized during much of the Victorian period.

Your desire ye shall not gain,  
Ye shall not win your crown; (5-8)

Thus, rather than telling women to take on the voice of what she viewed as the secular, masculine political sphere to gain influence, she instead suggests that reclaiming a voice for spiritual insights was a prerequisite for women to gain a public voice. Women poets' ideas about the persistence of public religion within modernity anticipate current scholarship that examines why religious voices have, in many instances, not evacuated the public sphere. As José Casanova notes, "by refusing to concentrate on 'finding answers to religious questions uncontaminated by secondary considerations stemming from the economy, the polity, the family, or science'" religious individuals and institutions continue to maintain a public voice (41).

One of the more helpful attempts to define religion as an adaptive force within modernity comes from sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger, who suggests a way to reconcile two predominant but opposed definitions of religion within the sociology of religion. Secularization theorists often rely on a "substantive" model of religion that focuses only on the content of beliefs and does not allow for the possibility that religions might evolve, adapt, or be measured in different ways under the pressure of modern life rather than simply persist or disappear. By contrast, the "functional" definition, which considers the social functions religion performs, makes it difficult to coherently talk about religious trends because it finds the remnants of religious symbols and structures in a wide variety of phenomena that have traditionally been labeled secular:

Functional definitions can only testify to the dispersion—intellectually beyond control—of religious symbols in contemporary societies; while substantive definitions can do no more than reiterate analysis of the loss of religion in the modern world. Both constitute a partial, yet radically limited, response to the question of the location of religion in modernity. Religion is nowhere, or else it is everywhere, which in the end comes to the same thing. (38)

Instead, Hervieu-Léger suggests that we must chart a course between these models to define religion in a way that encompasses both religious continuity and religious evolution, in her terms as “a chain of memory.”<sup>29</sup>

### Defining Poetry’s Relationship to Religion

Scholarship on Victorian aesthetics has tended to posit poetry as the post-secularization heir of religious thought, suggesting that it took on the functional role of religion as substantive belief receded. Hilary Fraser articulates this widely-held view in *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature*: “In this context of the diminishing spiritual authority of the Church, many of the traditional properties and functions of Christianity were transferred to poetry. In this new elevated position, poetry was invested with so many moral and mystical qualities that it became, in the rhetoric of many Victorians, inseparable from religion” (5).<sup>30</sup> By contrast, Charles LaPorte has recently suggested that it is possible to assert that poetry held particular weight in discussions of religion without suggesting that its role was compensatory.

We have heard much of Matthew Arnold’s views on the role of poetry in replacing religion, but little of his female counterparts’ efforts to situate poetry as a means of accessing divinity without replacing it. While I would suggest that many authors did adopt the rhetoric of poetry as a replacement for religion, the authors in this study attempted to show a symbiotic relationship rather than a relationship of compensation between the two. Indeed, this is the very line that the poets in this study try

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<sup>29</sup> There are three elements in her definition: “the expression of believing, the memory of continuity, and the legitimizing reference to an authorized version of such memory, that is to say a tradition” (97). Hervieu-Léger adds to this discussion what many theories of secularization lack, a way to envision the resilience of religion in modernity.

<sup>30</sup> The equation of poetry and religion, however, was a complicated and not entirely linear process. It was one that, as Stephen Prickett suggests, involved a long debate about biblical language, and various attempts to clearly define and differentiate poetry and prose. Prickett offers a nuanced treatment of the relationship between biblical scholarship and literary discussions of the generic distinction between poetry and prose in his book *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics, and Biblical Interpretation*.



to walk, between claiming the religious import of poetry as a genre and suggesting that poetry becomes the functional equivalent of religion. Many of these writers use aesthetic experience as a model for how humans can approach divinity more intimately or uncover the divinity within the world while at the same time insisting that poetry could not serve as a replacement for religious worship and belief.

The women I write about believed that their attitudes toward poetry were of crucial importance in debates about secularization. While recent scholarship has clearly illustrated that developments within Victorian religion influenced ideas about aesthetics, the poets in this study also believed that the opposite was true: that their approach to aesthetics might have direct consequences for the trajectory of religious thought. I suggest that a poetics based on theological immanence grew increasingly attractive to women poets because it suggested God's direct presence within a changing world, and hence religion's adaptability, while also implying a continuity with past traditions.

### Immanence in the Secularization Debate

Secularization theorists have long identified changing attitudes toward transcendence as a key component of Western secularization. Yet they are only beginning to address the role of immanence in this process. Because immanence is a key concept defined in opposition to transcendence in both Christian theology and Western philosophy (albeit with different nuances), renewed attention to the interplay between immanence and secularization has revealed some of the nineteenth-century voices that diverge from the simplified narrative of inevitable religious decline in this period. While some theorists have seen immanence as either a weak element in Christian theology or as a secularizing force within it, I argue that the turn to immanent theology within nineteenth-century British literature was a counter-secular move, one which was particularly compelling for women writers.

For many secularization theorists, transcendence is the defining feature of Christianity, and even of religion in general. Wallis and Bruce, for instance, cite both Max Weber's and Peter Berger's suggestion that Christianity and Judaism were particularly vulnerable to secularization because these religions believe in a transcendent God.<sup>31</sup> According to these secularization theorists, "the projection of the divine at one remove from the world allowed people to see the world as secular and permitted its rational and empirical exploration more freely than would be possible in a world immanently pervaded by the supernatural" (Wallis and Bruce 14). While this discussion helps to establish the idea that transcendence without immanence leaves itself open to certain kinds of attack in modernity, it also strangely asserts a lack of immanence within Judeo-Christian thought. Yet, in Christian theological terms, the concepts of immanence and transcendence are not easily separated. While defined in distinction to one another, they are traditionally seen as complementary, though seemingly paradoxical, aspects of the same God. My own research suggests that, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, immanence was particularly emphasized within Christianity, both in terms of God's presence within the natural world as a whole and in terms of a growing emphasis on incarnation, which is a manifestation of immanence. Some, like the writers in this study, even overtly use immanent ideas for the purpose of reviving religious devotion.

The idea that immanence is not as vital to religion, particularly to Christianity, as transcendence has persisted in recent approaches to secularization theory. In *A Secular Age*, which has become a touchstone in recent scholarship on secularization, Charles

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Berger has since changed his views on the secularization theory, the reasons for which he lays out in his introduction to *The Desecularization of the World*. While noting that Western Europe is often an exception and that the nature of religion has changed because of our global awareness of pluralism, Berger now believes "that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false: The world today, with some exceptions to which I will come presently, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" (2).

Taylor carefully defines the link between secularization and the undermining of transcendence while also adding nuance to this relationship:

Whether one believes in some agency or power transcending the immanent order is indeed, a crucial feature of ‘religion,’ as this has figured in secularization theories. It is our relation to a transcendent God which has been displaced at the centre of social life (secularity 1); it is faith in this God whose decline is tracked in these theories (secularity 2). But in order to understand better the phenomena we want to explain, we should see religion’s relation to a ‘beyond’ in three dimensions. And the crucial one, that which makes its impact on our lives understandable, is...the sense that there is some good higher than, beyond human flourishing. (20)

Like Wallis and Bruce, Taylor seems to define religion solely on the basis of its transcendence. But unlike Wallis and Bruce, whose statements on transcendence suggest that secularization in Europe partly occurred because Judeo-Christian thought does not have a strong immanent element, Taylor seems to suggest that a focus on immanence to the exclusion of transcendence played a major role in secularization. If, as Taylor argues, religion requires a transcendent “good” beyond human flourishing, does this mean that a focus on the material aspects of “human flourishing” within a religion such as Christianity is a secularizing force?

Taylor does not, however, answer this particular question that his work provokes because his implied definition of immanence is that which excludes transcendent beliefs, not a possible element within religion itself.<sup>32</sup> Taylor’s assertion, far from seeing immanence as a counter to secularization, locates the seeds of secularization within it. Yet it is important to note that Taylor’s definition seems to be more influenced by the philosophical etymology of this term than the theological understanding of it. The philosophical definition of immanence that comes to us by way of Spinoza and Deleuze, who use the term “the plane of immanence,” is structurally divorced from transcendence.

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<sup>32</sup> He traces the rise of an immanent worldview to Romantic thought: “The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it” (15).

It is a complete immersion in the world that denies the existence of a beyond.<sup>33</sup> In Christian theology, however, transcendence and immanence can be emphasized more or less prominently but are part of the same system. I want to suggest that the theological understanding of immanence provides a helpful alternative to dichotomous definitions of immanence and transcendence within secularization theory and that it offers a useful structure to explain how women poets tried to integrate the spiritual and material worlds and thus model the relevance of their spiritual lives to public debate. Narratives based on theological immanence are often obscured by the grand narrative of secularization theory.

For many Victorian religious thinkers, a greater focus on immanence promised to re-infuse Christianity with a social awareness and appreciation of the natural world that were attractive to those whose faith in transcendence had been rattled by the hermeneutic and scientific challenges of modernity. In his preface to *Divine Immanence* (1898), Oxford don and clergyman J. R. Illingworth expressed the sense that immanence brought to light the elements of Christianity that unified society: “For one love, amid all our discord, unites the modern world; we all of us love nature in our several ways; men of science, poets, painters, men of religion, men of affairs, are equally affected by its spell—the wonder of its processes, the glory of its aspect, the contrast of its calmness to the coil of human care” (vi). He acknowledges that immanence attempts to sacralize those things which are also valued by the naturalist or the materialist. Mid-nineteenth-century thinkers such as the Christian socialist F. D. Maurice and the poet Dora Greenwell saw theological immanence as a gateway to social reform, another idea that united many religious and

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<sup>33</sup> Although I have attempted to make a distinction between the philosophical and theological definitions of immanence, there is also a case to be made that theological thinkers, in the nineteenth-century as well as today, have been somewhat leery of promoting the immanent elements of Christianity because of the secular undertone of immanence in philosophy. In “Rumors of Transcendence: The Movement, State, and Sex of ‘Beyond,’” Catherine Keller suggests that, however much philosophical thinking and theological thinking on transcendence and immanence have diverged, they still have important things to teach each other. She contends that, although theology attempts to yoke transcendence and immanence together, transcendence is almost always the privileged partner. Thus, she suggests, theologians might need to turn to philosophical writings to understand immanence’s potential.

secular causes. These ideas speak to those who feel disaffected from Christianity, forming a common ground for dialog that for Christians represented the opportunity to reclaim lost territory.

It is not my contention that immanence is always, in all circumstances, a counter to the secular, rather that it was an important way by which nineteenth-century writers sought to address waning interest in transcendence. In a brief, but perceptive, discussion of immanence's role in nineteenth-century British religion, Mark Knight and Emma Mason build on Boyd Hilton's basic premise that in the mid-nineteenth-century there was a shift away from an emphasis on atonement in Christian theology and toward incarnation. Knight and Mason expand the term "incarnation" to "immanence," the more general term for divine habitation of the world, and suggest that a focus on immanence was a response to the way in which "materialism questions the possibility of transcendence in the modern world" (155). Immanent discourses responded to materialism not by denigrating the material world, but by infusing it with divinity. One of the major questions about the turn to immanence within religion, Knight suggests, was "whether the focus on the material world was intrinsically secular" (165). Knight and Mason's assessment clearly rejects this idea when he asserts that:

Religion does not have to rely on transcendence to secure its identity: interpreting belief in terms of material concern may run the risk of eroding a realist view of God but this is not the only possible outcome. As the doctrine of the Incarnation makes clear, Christianity is committed to the possibility of thinking about the supernatural within the context of the material world... (167)

This assertion runs counter not only to the emphasis on transcendence as the primary definitional feature of religion in secularization theories such as Taylor's, but also to Bruce and Wallis's depiction of Judeo-Christian thought as leaning on transcendence at the expense of immanence. Because they are interested in understanding how Christianity adapted to cultural changes rather than simply arguing for its decline, Knight and Mason

are able to recognize that the nineteenth-century turn toward immanence represents a creative adaptation made by religion in response to modernization.

The ascendancy of immanent thinking in Christian theology by the early twentieth century is aptly illustrated by the Rev. Frederic R. Swan's treatment of the subject in his 1907 book *The Immanence of Christ in Modern Life*. His study reveals three important things about discussions of immanence in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. First, he clearly states that his line of thinking is part of a prominent trend:

In these days the belief that God is immanent in all things is more emphasized than was formerly the case. This grand conception has helped the mind to see the universe as a temple of His Spirit and a symbol of His thought. It has made the material world more interesting, more mysterious, and more living. It has given the soul its real foundation, to all history a new significance, and to all created things an eternal purpose and unity. In fact, this doctrine has explained what evolution really is—namely, the Divine development of all creation unto a preordained perfection. (9)

In these praises of immanence's ability to re-imagine materiality, history, and science, Swan hints at his second main idea: that he believes focusing on immanence is an antidote to secularization and to the indifference many had toward the modern church. Even his title emphasizes the importance of addressing the challenges of modernity: "It is very true that much of our traditional and even of our modern theology makes no moving appeal to the heart of multitudes of people both inside and outside the Churches." (10-11). Swan posits a greater emphasis on Christ's immanence as the antidote, which "will revive and reinterpret for modern needs the great Christian doctrines" (11).

Finally, he suggests that the natural outcome of this shift in emphasis will be an inspiration to engage in public service: "All good social service is based upon the great truth of the Immanence of Christ" (217). Swan's text is emblematic of a shift toward theological immanence during the Victorian period that reached its pinnacle in the first two decades of the twentieth century. As he illustrates, religious thinkers who embraced immanence saw it as a discourse that would revitalize church life by increasing commitment to social service and tapping into popular interest in the natural world.

While these ideas were popular among men and women alike, my study suggests that the theological shift toward immanence was particularly significant for women poets, who increasingly used it to develop a poetics grounded in the depiction of natural processes and women's embodied experiences. Like Swan, the poets in this study also identify immanence as an impetus for social reform, suggesting that it had both a spatial and temporal element: in other words, that God's presence within all people, indeed all life, as well as God's presence within the present moment called for an immediate response to suffering in the world. For instance, Dora Greenwell's call for reforms on behalf of people with mental disabilities rested on both an assertion of God's equal presence within all people and on her utopian insistence that Christianity called on its followers to create "a present heaven." Women, however, often recognized immanence not simply as an impetus for immediate action but also as an equalizing discourse that placed all life in equal proximity to divinity. As my final chapter on early-twentieth-century mysticism discusses, for instance, poet Eva Gore-Booth saw this anti-hierarchical connotation of immanence as the underlying force that united her commitments to feminism, pacifism, the labour movement, and vegetarianism. Thus, emphasizing immanent theology gave women equal access to God as well as grounds to questioned hierarchies of gender, class, and personhood.

### Overview of Chapters

This study includes four chapters, each of which examines a female poet or a poetic community of women engaged in genre and theological exploration. The first two chapters focus on tensions among commitments to poetry, religion, and social reform within Anglicanism.<sup>34</sup> I argue that these tensions created the conditions for later poets to fuse poetry and religious experience by invoking a theology of immanence. In my first

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Knight and Emma Mason suggest that, because the Church of England was the established church, conflicts within it had greater reverberations throughout all of British Christianity (7).

chapter, “Battling Difference and Indifference: The Ambivalent Poetics of the *Christian Lady’s Magazine*,” I discuss the poetry in an Anglican Evangelical periodical published in the 1830s and 1840s. Evangelical poets mistrusted the affinity between religious and poetic emotion but justified their use of poetry through its utility in conversion and social reform. I argue that the editor Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna’s encounter with poetry by Jewish poet Grace Aguilar helped her to rediscover poetry’s ability to promote sincere worship practices. In Chapter Two, “‘Time has need of eternity’: Dora Greenwell’s Presentist Poetics and Advocacy for the Mentally Disabled,” I compare Dora Greenwell’s poetics to the transcendence-focused poetics of her Tractarian counterparts such as Christina Rossetti. Trapped between the desire to encounter a transcendent God and the desire to celebrate earthly ephemera and improve earthly conditions, Greenwell demonstrates the tension from which a poetics of immanence arose. I argue that her theological work *A Present Heaven* and her advocacy for the mentally disabled helped her to explore immanence and an ethics of care in *Carmina Crucis*, an ambitious collection of religious poems.

My third and fourth chapters follow the establishment and extension of immanence in late-nineteenth-century Catholic verse and early-twentieth-century mystical verse. These chapters suggest that women poets resisted the trend of relegating religious and poetic experience to private life even as they found God embodied in everyday experiences. In Chapter Three, “Expanding Catholic Community: Alice Meynell’s Vision of Christ in the World,” I discuss the emergence of immanence alongside public social engagement in Alice Meynell’s poetry and the Catholic journal *Merry England* that she edited with her husband. I argue that Meynell opens up a creative space within Catholicism through an immanent and evolutionary approach to divine presence. She also makes a case for Catholic modernity by locating Christ at the precise social pressure points of urban poverty, women’s changing roles, and religious pluralism that scholars have suggested propelled secularization. My final chapter, “Mysticism in



the Mundane: Immanence and Early-Twentieth-Century Poetry,” turns to the mystical writers Eva Gore-Booth and Evelyn Underhill who sought, on one hand, to highlight an essential similarity between religious understanding and the impulse to create poetry and, on the other hand, to combat the secular trend that offered poetry as a “purified” form of religion. They suggest instead that poetry gestures beyond itself to the spiritual world.

By elevating the status of immanence within the context of theism, the women I study were simultaneously seeking to create a place for their own experiences within traditional theology and to revitalize the religious discourse on which they believed their public voices depended. This growing theological emphasis had concrete effects on both their poetry and their social activism. It offered a justification for poetry that relied on female experience while also elevating the importance of these experiences. It suggested that the divine was at home in a natural and social world that was constantly evolving, thus providing a justification for religious adaptation and evolution. Furthermore, a discourse of immanence provided equal access to God and elevated the mundane and the marginalized, inspiring challenges to social and institutional hierarchies.

CHAPTER ONE  
 BATTLING DIFFERENCE AND INDIFFERENCE: THE  
 AMBIVALENT, EVANGELICAL POETICS OF THE *CHRISTIAN*  
*LADY'S MAGAZINE*

Early-Victorian Evangelical poetics has often been passed over by scholars in their scramble to explain the growing mid-century affinity between poetic form and Tractarian theology.<sup>35</sup> Yet Evangelical poetics grappled more directly with women poets' role and the role of poetry in social reform than its more high-church competitors did. Perhaps it has been neglected because Evangelicals articulated an ambivalent attitude toward the genre of poetry. Evangelical poets faced three challenges that caused them to question the merits of poetry, and their poetics was shaped by the extent to which they felt embattled. First, these writers were reacting against the perceived partnership between poetry and the theological views of the Oxford Movement, which was a movement within the Anglican church that advocated a return to pre-Reformation liturgical practices, attempted to re-establish the authority of the church through a high doctrine of the ministry, and asserted the importance of the Eucharist. Furthermore, it was a movement that Mark Knight and Emma Mason assert was grounded "in poetics as much as theology" (87).<sup>36</sup> For Evangelicals, reforms advocated by the Oxford Movement

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<sup>35</sup> A number of important works on Victorian religious poetry focus primarily on Tractarianism. G.B. Tennyson's book *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* was groundbreaking both in stimulating research on Tractarian poetry and aesthetics and more generally in highlighting the importance of critical studies on religious poetry. The Tractarian affiliation of two major Victorian poets, Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins (for part of his life), has also inspired numerous thoughtful studies that address the relationship between aesthetics and Tractarian theology. A 2006 special issue of *Victorian Poetry* on Tractarian poetry edited by Kristie Blair and Emma Mason also brought together a number of articles on the subject by Emma Mason, Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, Kristie Blair, Elisabeth Jay, F. Elizabeth Gray, Duc Dau, Diane D'Amico, Peter Groves, and G.B. Tennyson, among whom are some of the foremost scholars of women's religious poetry. The tendency to focus on Tractarian poetry in the early Victorian period, sometimes to the exclusion of other religious poetry, is illustrated by Mark Knight and Emma Mason's decision in their excellent book *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature* to divide their chapters on the period into one focusing on poetry alongside the Oxford Movement and another focusing on novels alongside Evangelicalism.

<sup>36</sup> In particular, John Keble, an early leader of the movement helped to formulate a Tractarian aesthetics integrally tied to the doctrine of reserve. A number of scholars have noted the importance of Keble's 1827 book of verse *The Christian Year*, which became a Victorian bestseller. G.B. Tennyson asserts that "*The Christian Year* has had a greater impact on the character of English-language Christian

flirted dangerously with Catholicism. On the opposite extreme, Evangelical writers were concerned about the association of poetry with a secular form of Romanticism that suggested poetry and a “religion of nature” as substitutes for formal religion. Finally, Evangelicals were faced with a rationalist skepticism that seemed to dismiss spiritual matters, or to equalize all religious positions and thus discount the specificity of their principles.<sup>37</sup> On one hand, Evangelicals feared that poetry was usurping the role of traditional religious discourse, and on the other hand, they saw it as an antidote to spiritual indifference. As national politics opened to a wider range of religious positions, Evangelicals also found themselves unsure about whether to embrace a more ecumenical model of poetry based on the unifying principle of religious worship.<sup>38</sup>

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worship in the past century and a half than any other single influence” (10-11). In *John Keble in Context*, Kristie Blair also points out, “*The Christian Year*’s near-legendary status as a publishing and reading phenomenon is attested to by the sheer number of anecdotes and accounts circulating about it in Victorian culture” (8). George Herring also notes its popularity and long-term success: “This volume became one of the most popular books of Victorian England and remained in print for half a century, selling an average of 10,000 copies a year, and made Keble a household name even before his participation in the Oxford Movement” (21). In her article “Beatification through Beautification,” F. Elizabeth Gray argues that the aesthetic influence of *The Christian Year* extended to many women poets beyond those affiliated with the Tractarians, including writers for *The Christian Lady’s Magazine*. The interest in poetics among early leaders of the Oxford movement such as Keble and Newman helped to create an association between poetry as a genre and the Tractarians.

<sup>37</sup> Elisabeth Jay notes that Evangelicalism often had difficulty positioning itself between rationalism and Romanticism: “The ‘religion of the heart’, which, in origin had been a reaction against the intellectual deism of the eighteenth century, became outflanked on its emotional side by the secular Romantic movement and was increasingly felt to be an anti-intellectual force” (*Religion of the Heart* 104).

<sup>38</sup> Evangelicalism came to prominence in the second half of the eighteenth century. Helen Mathers argues that “Evangelicalism is defined by belief and activity rather than church-going” (127). Four main attributes of Evangelicalism posited by D.W. Bebbington in 1989 have been widely accepted by scholars (127). Bebbington’s list includes “*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *Biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross” (2-3). Taken together, he suggests that these are the main priorities that informed evangelicalism, though they are not unique to it. In her well-known study of Anglican Evangelicalism, *The Religion of the Heart*, Elisabeth Jay identifies four essential doctrines: original sin, conversion, justification by faith, and authority of the Word; and four non-essential but commonly held doctrines: eternal punishment, millenarianism, special providence, and assurance. According to her, “Evangelical religion is founded upon a personal apprehension of God,” which means that there is no human intermediary between individuals and God and that the individual is responsible for direct scriptural interpretation (50). She also notes that, while Victorian novelists tended to depict those with evangelical sympathies as extremely Calvinist, Evangelicalism in fact encompassed both Calvinist and Armenian views. Subsequent work on Evangelicalism has revised and added to these lists. Mark Noll

Often published anonymously or under initials in sympathetic journals and periodicals, this was a poetry born out of contradiction, but it was also a tradition that favored women's voices. It represents a creative coming to terms with religious doctrine, women's public authorship, and poetic form. In order to explore women's voices in the early-Victorian Evangelical press, I examine poetry and essays in the *Christian Lady's Magazine (CLM)*, edited by the Evangelical Anglican Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna. In particular, I focus on work by Mary Ann Stodart and Mary Ann Serrett Barber, the two most prolific poetic contributors to the magazine, and Tonna herself who wrote much of its content. Alongside work by these Evangelical writers, I also consider the work of the Jewish poet and theologian Grace Aguilar, whose poetry was included in the *CLM* and whose prose pieces were reviewed by it. Aguilar's contributions to the *CLM* demonstrate how women's poetry and nonfiction prose outside of the Evangelical tradition both complicated and were influenced by Evangelicalism. Through the *CLM*, I consider how a female readership influenced Evangelical discussions of social reform and poetry, what role poetry played in the discourse of anti-secularization in Evangelical publications, and what made some devotional poetry acceptable to these writers while other poetry was considered dangerous.

### Encountering Religious Difference

In 1828 and 1829, Daniel O'Connell was elected to the House of Commons as a member for County Clare, Ireland knowing that, as a Catholic, he would be unable to take his seat in Parliament. Due in part to the agitation of his supporters, Parliament

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defines Evangelicalism by two main tenets "the historic Protestant attachment to Scripture" and "the active experience of God" while adding three factors that are also significant: "a bias—whether slight prejudice or massive rejection—against inherited institutions"; political and intellectual flexibility since reality is "found in Scripture and the experience of Christ"; and a belief "that the gospel compelled a search for social healing as well as personal holiness" (129-130). Julie Melnyk's 2008 list in *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain* combines many of these characteristics to include conversion, Biblical authority, the priesthood of the believer, the doctrine of assurance, and social activism as the defining traits of Evangelicalism (20).

passed the *Roman Catholic Relief Act* in 1829, which, among other things, gave Catholics the right to sit as members in Parliament. Twenty years later, a similar drama was enacted in Parliament when Lionel de Rothschild, a Jewish banker, was elected to the House of Commons three times (1847, 1849, 1852) but, because the oath of office was administered to MPs on the Christian Bible, was unable to take his seat until the 1858 passage of the *Jewish Disabilities Act*. In the years between these two Parliamentary milestones, Anglicans had to re-evaluate their privileged position in the national political system, which seemed to be eroding.<sup>39</sup> Among Anglican Evangelical writers,<sup>40</sup> these national shifts initiated a new urgency in the discussion of religious difference as well as questions about how the enfranchisement of opposing religious groups related to their concern with secularization.

These Evangelicals expressed concern about the waning fervor of religious devotion among their own while at the same time fearing the devotional impetus of competing doctrinal views. Their writings suggest uncertainty about whether religious difference or religious indifference was the biggest enemy of the established church. The word “enemy” is no exaggeration here, for many Anglican Evangelicals believed that they were in a battle for souls that was nearing its conclusion.<sup>41</sup> They felt threatened not

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<sup>39</sup> As George Herring demonstrates, Catholic Emancipation and the repeal of the *Test and Corporation Acts*, were “earth-shattering” for Anglican clergy across the board who now feared that the previously all-Anglican Parliament would be overwhelmed by Catholics and Dissenters (14). While many Anglican Evangelicals were unsettled by the change, Herring argues that the questions surrounding church authority prompted by the opening of parliament also gave birth to the high-church Oxford Movement.

<sup>40</sup> The term “evangelical,” as Julie Melnyk points out, does not refer to a specific group within the Church of England, but to an “interdenominational movement with some shared doctrinal emphases” that included both Dissenters and Anglicans (*Victorian Religion* 19). The capitalized “Evangelical” is often used to denote Anglican Evangelicals as opposed to dissenting evangelicals (19-20). While sharing many doctrines, Anglican and dissenting evangelicals “differed in their view of the role of the church and its relationship to the state” (20), and Evangelicals associated with the Church of England were more likely to be Tories (conservative) and to be of a higher social class than their dissenting counterparts (21). In *Religion of the Heart*, Elisabeth Jay offers a useful overview of the vacillating attitudes of Evangelicals within the established church toward dissenting evangelicals.

<sup>41</sup> In the early Victorian period, there was a shift in the predominant way that evangelicals viewed the end times. While belief in Christ’s second coming and the establishment of his kingdom on earth for

only by those clearly outside of the Anglican camp, but also by the burgeoning Oxford movement within the Anglican church, which Evangelicals viewed as the enemy within, pulling the faithful toward Catholic practices.<sup>42</sup>

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1,000 years was common, there were differing interpretations regarding the order of these events. In *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850*, J.F.C. Harrison explains the two predominant views and their social implications: “There were differences of view, however, between those Christians who believed that Christ’s second coming would precede the millennium (premillennialists) and those who thought that the second advent would follow the millennium (postmillennialists). From these differences stemmed others. The premillennialists were predisposed towards the establishment of the millennium by divine, cataclysmic action, whereas the postmillennialists were prone to think that the kingdom of God would come gradually as the result of Christian, human instrumentalities” (4). Thus, these two different positions about the future sometimes led to opposing ideas about what evangelicals should focus on in the present. D.G. Paz argues that post-millennialism was dominant during the eighteenth century, but its more optimistic, gradualist view was undermined by the French revolution. Paz interprets pre-millennialism as pessimistic because it “denied that the Gospel would save the world, but expected that it would become increasingly wicked, and believed that human history was foretold and knowable.” (107) Yet, Jay also points out the sense of immediacy that it lent to evangelical thought: “The pre-millennialists sought a more immediate divine sanction and believed that Christ would issue in the thousand years, Himself effecting the restoration of the Jews and the conversion of the heathen” (90). The pre-millennialists were further split between the “Historicists,” who believed that the unpleasant events prophesied to precede the millennium referred to as the “Tribulation” had occurred in the past or were occurring in the present, while “Futurists” believed these events were yet to come (Paz 107). Tonna would have been considered a futurist pre-millennialist.

<sup>42</sup> The traditional origin of the Oxford Movement is July 1833 when John Keble preached his sermon “National Apostacy” in opposition to a bill that would abolish ten Irish Anglican bishops’ positions (Melnyk, *Victorian Religion* 23). However, recent scholarship has suggested that this particular event was less pivotal, instead emphasizing the reaction against the opening of parliament to dissenters and Catholics as a catalyst (Herring 46). While numerous scholars have pointed out the difficulty of clearly defining the Oxford Movement, which evolved over a number of decades and never offered one unified statement of purpose, they have pointed to a number of emphases that set Tractarians apart from other Anglicans. Feeling that the church’s state authority was being questioned, the early part of the movement was focused on establishing an “alternative source of authority for the Church” (Herring 29). Thus, the doctrine most characteristic of the movement was “apostolic succession” (Chadwick 12), which George Herring defines in *What Was the Oxford Movement?* as “the linking of the contemporary Church back to the Apostles themselves and hence to Christ, through the unbroken chain of their successors, the Bishops” (Herring 6-7). This was a way to guarantee the validity of the church’s sacraments. Other ideas associated with the movement were the *Via Media*, a conception of the Anglican church as a path between “Reformers and the Romanists” (Herring 34); reserve, the idea that “some spiritual truths should not be communicated promiscuously to the uninitiated” (Melnyk 24); an emphasis on the Eucharist, which evolved into the assertion that Christ’s presence was precisely within the elements (Herring 39); asceticism; and approval of auricular confession. Herring also suggests that the rhetoric of the Oxford Movement relied strongly on asserting a return to early church practices (31-32). The second generation of the Oxford Movement was known for the revival of rituals within church services, and so the movement’s later proponents came to be known as ritualists. While many Evangelicals were suspicious of the Oxford Movement, seeing it as Catholicism in disguise, scholars have also pointed out a shared ethos between the two movements. Both Evangelicals and Tractarians shared a desire for religious revival and an attitude of religious seriousness (Melnyk 43). Likewise, they were both focused on holiness (Herring 12) and committed to a religion “of the heart” (Chadwick 11).

For the prolific premillenarian, Anglican Evangelical writer and editor Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, the *Roman Catholic Relief Act* was, literally, the end of the world, or at least the beginning of the end times.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the 1830s, she warned the readers of her periodical, *The Christian Lady's Magazine*, that the Pope was the anti-Christ, and that they should be wary of elements within the Church of England (i.e. the Oxford Movement) advocating practices associated with Catholicism. In her *Letters from Ireland*, published throughout 1837, she uses the terms of religious battle, calling the *Roman Catholic Relief Act* the “fatal stroke of 1829” administered to the nation by Satan and made possible by those who believed “national prosperity” was more important than religious integrity (423). She articulates her sense that the grip of British Protestantism is eroding through her dismay at the building of Catholic worship spaces in England:

With an aching heart I looked upon the edifice where thousands of my fellow-creatures were doomed during the Sabbath to receive, in blind submission, the false doctrine of their blind teachers. I felt that, without a fearful dereliction of duty in some quarters, such a spectacle could not be permitted to present itself in British dominions three hundred years after the blessed Reformation...At the same time I fully anticipated, in the just judgment of God, an extensive visitation on our native shores of the pestilence that we had neglected to eradicate from those of our sister island. (423)

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<sup>43</sup> In his study of evangelicalism, Boyd Hilton points out that usually we think of post-millennialists as having a more active social agenda because pre-millennialists believe that the world will improve only after the second coming while inevitably descending into chaos prior to it. However, he notes: “Yet in the early nineteenth century these roles seem to have been reversed, for it was the post-millenarian moderates who wished to leave economic relationships alone, and the pre-millennarians—Irving, Drummond, and Shaftesbury—who called for paternalistic intervention. The explanation of this apparent paradox is that ‘improvement’ then was generally envisaged in moral rather than material terms” (16-17). He cites Tonna as an example of the convergence of paternalism and pre-millennialist views (97) and suggests that those evangelicals who had a more interventionist view of God might therefore be more inclined to support an interventionist state (15). Kathryn Gleadle suggests that Tonna’s (and many other Evangelical women’s) pre-millenarianism was an important catalyst and enabler of political activism: “The network of pre-millenarian activism helped to facilitate women’s commitment to a wide range of causes” (100). It also added a sense of urgency to these causes. Although not all of Tonna’s ideas were directly related to premillenarianism, it “provided pressing justifications for women’s active involvement in contemporary affairs” (101).

Here, Catholicism is a “pestilence” deserved by the English because they failed to care enough about converting the Irish from Catholicism to Protestantism, and the symptom of this pestilence is the various Catholic structures poking up through Britain’s skin.

In 1837 Tonna responded to Catholic devotion with the desire to tear down the enemy church’s walls. Leading up to the Rothschild debates in the 1840s, however, her discussion of Jewish devotion in the *Christian Lady’s Magazine* differed dramatically. In 1842, she tells of an experience walking in the Jewish section of town on a Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath) with a friend. She is so respectful of their devotion to the Sabbath that she states, “We stepped through the little quiet street, as if along the aisle of a church” (“The Voice of Jacob” 266). Instead of wishing to raze a competing structure to the ground, here she raises up a harmonious, imaginary church amidst Jewish devotion. Tonna’s inconsistent attitude toward religious difference exemplifies competing concerns over secularism among her peers. In her discussion of Catholicism, she sees religious difference as a force that will propel the nation toward secularism or, as in France, toward atheism.<sup>44</sup> Her ideas about the unique position of the Jews, however, forced her to transcend theological differences and articulate admiration for their devotion practices.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Here Tonna contends that Catholicism is a hidden step toward atheism, a common anti-Catholic trope identified by Maria LaMonaca in her book *Masked Atheism: Catholicism and the Secular Victorian Home*.

<sup>45</sup> Tonna’s interest in and valorization of Judaism was a trend among evangelicals. In *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland*, Donald Lewis asserts that “by the middle of the nineteenth century philosemitism and Christian Zionism became important ‘identity markers’ for large numbers of British evangelicals” (10). Furthermore, Paz notes that some pre-millennialists linked support for Jews and opposition to Catholics with their understanding of the end times: “Some Futurists expected the restoration of the Jews to Palestine to mark the Second Coming. A subset of these, most notably the anti-Catholic writer Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna and the Jewish-to-Roman-Catholic-to-Anglican convert Joseph Wolff, believed that Jews should be converted, but should maintain a separate identity within Christendom by retaining circumcision and the dietary laws, and that the restoration of the Jews and the overthrow of the Papacy would together usher in the Millennium” (108).



### The Generic Building Tools of Faith

Complicating the question of when to construct structures of common devotion amidst doctrinal differences and when to tear down competing structures was the question of what building materials, if any, could be used at all. Of course, the appropriate physical properties for houses of worship were a matter of debate among Jews, Protestants, and Catholics, but here I refer to the figurative building materials that Tonna and her contemporaries used, to the genre mediums through which they constructed or destructed temples of ideas. Evangelicals recognized that their mediums of expression were by no means neutral and were associated with certain religious affiliations. For Evangelicals, direct, expository prose was the safest medium of expression but not always the most effective way to spread their message. While the early-Victorian Evangelical suspicion of fiction, based on the idea that fiction was akin to lies, has been well-documented, their far more complex and ambivalent attitude toward poetry has not.<sup>46</sup>

The Evangelical writers of the *Christian Lady's Magazine* alternately expressed fear that poetry would draw the magazine's female audience away from Protestant teachings or domestic duties and hope that poetry would aid the crusaders of their causes

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Altick explains the seemingly contradictory attitude many evangelicals had toward literature: "Rightly used, books could make men wiser, purer, and more devout; but misapplied, they could prove a snare of the devil" (108-109). They were particularly suspicious of imaginative literature, which they believed elevated earthly concerns. D.G. Paz also gives an overview of attitudes toward novel reading among Nonconformists and Anglican Evangelicals at the beginning of the nineteenth century, noting that attitudes liberalized as the century went on. Early in the nineteenth century, most evangelicals viewed fiction as lies or saw it as a distraction from reading the Bible, though there were some exceptions. When Tonna gave up writing fiction in 1841, however, Paz sees this as pushing back against the acceptance of fiction that was becoming more entrenched by mid-century (56-57). While Julie Melnyk points out evangelical suspicion of novels, she simultaneously calls attention to the potential some evangelicals saw in fiction: "while many loved poetry, novels were treated with much greater suspicion. Despite the overgeneralizations of popular discussions, Evangelicals saw in the genre a further potential for doctrinal and moral edification, and Evangelical novelists from Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna to Emma Jane Worboise found a ready readership" (*Victorian Religion* 22). I would suggest, however, that, with the exception of hymns, the evangelical attitude toward poetry was not nearly as unequivocally positive as Melnyk suggests given its association with the Oxford Movement. The debate surrounding poetry in evangelical circles focused on the distraction of aesthetic beauty rather than the issue of falsehood.

and draw people from materialism to spiritual pursuits. These writers expressed ambivalence toward poetry not because they saw poetry as the antithesis of “true” religion, but because they believed the medium was so attuned to religious sentiment that it could be easily mistaken, or worse, substituted for “authentic” religious experience.

The *CLM*'s discussion of poetry addresses not only poetry's effect on female audiences, but also the issue of women's authorship of poetry. Tonna's decision to include selections of poetry, largely by female poets, in almost every number of the magazine allowed poets themselves to join the journal's debate. In her groundbreaking study of Christian and Jewish women's poetic identities, Cynthia Scheinberg has argued that Victorian Christian culture revised the romantic conception of the poet as prophet to fit an explicitly Christian theological model, thus labeling the poet as Christian. She suggests that, because women were depicted as exemplary Christians, women poets often based their claims to poetic authority on their uniquely Christian identity, making the assertion of Jewish identity all the more challenging for Jewish women poets. While this argument sheds light on many of the most famous Christian women poets such as Christina Rossetti, it obscures the reasons that some groups within British Christianity still hung back from embracing poetry and the extent to which many female Evangelical poets viewed their authorship as antithetical to their religious pursuits. Seeing poetry as either a secular substitute for religious feeling or as aligned with theological positions they disliked, Evangelical writers struggled to justify the inclusion of poetry in their periodicals even as they continually published it.

During the years that Tonna edited the *Christian Lady's Magazine* (1834-1846), the convergence of women's poetry and Christianity that Scheinberg convincingly documents had not been solidified. Furthermore, over the course of these years, the attitudes toward poetry articulated in the journal were in flux. At the outset of the journal, prose writers noted several reasons why poetry remained suspect. Rather than seeing poetry as territory that was being appropriated by Christian women, these writers

expressed concerns that poetry was encroaching on Christian territory, distracting Christian women from key doctrinal and practical concerns. On one hand, poetry was still associated with the romantic “religion of nature,” seen by Evangelicals as a secularized form of religious emotion in danger of usurping the role of traditional religious discourse. On the other hand, poetry was associated with the Oxford Movement, a movement that emerged from Oxford in the 1830s and attempted to reincorporate liturgical practices into the Anglican Church that Evangelicals associated with Catholicism and, as Mark Knight and Emma Mason have argued, grounded its teachings “in poetics as much as theology” (87). Recently, F. Elizabeth Gray has traced the influence of John Keble, the most prominent Tractarian (Oxford Movement) poet, on Evangelical poets including those in the *Christian Lady’s Magazine*. This connection only reinforces why Evangelical women expressed reluctance about writing poetry, which seemed “tainted” with the ritualist aesthetics of a competing discourse.

For Evangelicals in the 1830s and 1840s, the Oxford movement was a direct challenge from within the Church of England, drawing members toward the precipice of Catholicism. In particular, essayists in the *CLM* were concerned about the beautiful and potentially distracting formal qualities of literature, which seemed to be particularly emphasized in poetic genres. These elements of poetry appeared to complement the Oxford Movement’s desire for more structured, aesthetically appealing, liturgical services. This emphasis on aesthetic worship was tantamount to worshipping art, and dwelling too much on the poetic qualities of language presented a similar threat.

At the same time, poetry was a central vehicle for presenting the *CLM*’s social agenda and devotional commitments. This contradiction forced writers in the *CLM* to seek an acceptable place for poetry within their Evangelical worldview. Writers for the magazine at first attempted to justify their use of poetry by separating its use value from its artistry. While they mistrusted the affinity between religious worship and the formal elements of poetry, they pointed to poetry’s utility, a utility that was ultimately located in

its motivational qualities. Poetry could be used alongside prose to persuade the magazine's audience to act on their social and religious convictions. Writers for the *CLM* used it, for instance, to mobilize women on behalf of factory reform or to convince women to be more assiduous in evangelism. Furthermore, poetry was valued for its more personal inspirational qualities and was seen as the most naturally devotional medium of writing, with the inherent capacity to combat indifference toward spiritual matters.

Just as writers for the *CLM* began to reach an uneasy consensus that poetry was a tool for conversion and social reform, Tonna's commitment to dispelling prejudice against England's Jews opened up the magazine's poetic community to Grace Aguilar, an accomplished Jewish poet. Tonna began by believing that it was part of her Evangelical mission to convert the Jews to Christianity, but her pre-millennialist theology eventually inspired her to focus more on improve their standing in English society and promoting a Jewish nationalist identity. In her efforts to improve their physical situation and break down Christian stereotypes of Jews, Tonna promoted writers in the Jewish press, including Aguilar, who in turn complicated Tonna's view of the religious "other" and the place of non-Christian poetry. Although Aguilar and Tonna did not share the same doctrines, they shared a concern about the formal elements of religious ritual distracting from a "religion of the heart." Aguilar's presence as part of this community of women writers highlights the ways in which Evangelical writers' attitude toward poetry had to stretch beyond seeing it as a transparent purveyor of Christianity in order to accommodate her work. Her status as a doctrinal outsider forced Tonna to redefine the value of poetry based on religious authenticity rather than religious doctrine and demonstrated the need for a more complex poetics that emphasized poetry as an act of worship.

### Poetry in the Periodical Press

The *Christian Lady's Magazine* contains a particularly vibrant discussion of both the purpose of poetry and the place of the “embattled” Anglican Evangelical within secular society. As a magazine edited for women, with many contributions by women, it also provides useful information about the relationship between Evangelical views and views on women writers. Writers for the magazine are particularly self-conscious about their role in shaping the reading habits and genre choices of their middle-class female audience, especially those who are still in the formative stages of life.<sup>47</sup>

Evangelical magazines were particularly concerned about locating their mission within what they perceived as the secular world of the periodical press. Thus, these magazines offer useful information on the place of literary endeavors within Evangelical thought. In her introduction to the first issue of the *CLM*, Tonna expresses her concern about both secularization and the fragmentation of the British Church:

[I]t is an undertaking of considerable difficulty to conduct a periodical, on conscientious principles, in days when not only is the world breaking loose from all restraint, vexing itself, and harassing the church: but even those whom God hath chosen out of the world are so disunited among themselves, so carried about by winds of doctrine, so entangled by the cunning craftiness of man...that were our foundation other than the Rock of Ages, we might tremble for the very existence of the visible church.” (1-2)

Tonna sets up her periodical as an antidote to this trend but frequently expresses the difficulty of finding appropriate literary material to include in a periodical with the stated purpose of helping women to become godlier. She calls attention to the role that the periodical press has played in supposed secularization and in the promotion of religious ideas to which she objects. In a March 1843 article titled “A Perplexity,” Tonna continues to wrestle with her role as an editor stating, “The Press is doing great things for Satan, in especial reference to the manifest contraction of his remaining space on earth; and to

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<sup>47</sup> For an overview of the magazine, see Monica Correa’s article “Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna & *The Christian Lady's Magazine*.”

rescue any portion of that mighty engine from his grasp, for the Lord's use, is a privilege not to be trifled with" (199). On one hand, she notes that her own medium is particularly prone to undermining "true Christianity." On the other hand, she depicts her mission, venturing into the very lair of the beast to sanctify a few square yards, as exceedingly important. This attitude is similar to the attitude about poetry adopted by many *CLM* contributors: it is a dangerous medium because of its associations, yet one which they wish to re-appropriate.

I examine material from 1834, when the magazine began, to 1846, when Tonna died.<sup>48</sup> I have chosen to examine issues of the magazine during Tonna's editorship because she was such a central voice in shaping and writing each issue of the magazine. A typical issue began with a serialized memoir or piece of fiction by Tonna and concluded with "The Protestant," the ongoing dialogue that Tonna constructed between a niece and uncle discussing political and national issues. Between these bookends, the material ranged from a series of entries on theology, to geology, to advice on reading. Although much of the magazine's material was written by Tonna herself, it featured a number of regular contributors during the years of Tonna's editorship and also contained a vibrant "letters to the editor" section in which readers wrote directly to Tonna or responded to each other and often received a reply. This makes the magazine a useful window not only into Evangelical beliefs and assumptions but also into the debates among Evangelicals. Most issues also included several poems despite anti-poetry rhetoric among several major contributors. Increasingly, readers were asked to sympathize with Tonna's various social causes from helping those in the Irish slums, to better treatment of fallen women, to kindness to animals, to factory reform, to Zionism.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> After Tonna's death, the magazine continued under different editorship for three more years.

<sup>49</sup> For a recent treatment of Tonna's involvement in politics, see Kathryn Gleadle's "Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna and the Mobilization of Tory Women in Early Victorian England." Gleadle argues against the common assertion that the triumph of Evangelicalism depoliticized women by the early Victorian period. Instead, she examines the ways in which various theologies associated with conservative

Tonna's journal not only provides a useful sampling of women's poetry, but also a fascinating juxtaposition of poetry and prose. Comments on the purpose of poetry in prose pieces influence the way readers receive poetry in the journal, and the use of poetry within prose pieces also alters readers' relationships to prose. Periodicals, where nonfiction prose and poetry are most obviously juxtaposed, demand more attention from scholars of literature and religion than they have received.

Due to the exclusion of poetry from periodical indexes such as the Wellesley Index, scholars have only just begun to theorize the role of poetry in periodical contexts. In *British Victorian Women's Periodicals: Beauty, Civilization, and Poetry*, Kathryn Ledbetter has recently asserted that poetry, which often appeared in the margins of women's magazines, actually formed the ideological center of these publications. Studying this poetry, she suggests, provides a "short-track to ideology of its moment, existing on the pages of most women's magazines as a prolific testament to the utility of sentiment, patriotism, domestic ideology, and traditional values" (9). Beyond this, looking at prose alongside poetry in women's journals provides a window into women writers' self-conscious consideration of poetry as a means of dissemination for both their own and competing ideologies.

While poetry sometimes functioned as the clear carrier of a journal's ideology, Linda Hughes has also suggested that poetry in magazines was used as an important contrasting element to their prose content. Hughes argues that poetry functioned as both a literal and figurative "sacred space" that mitigated and ultimately mediated the modernity of the Victorian periodical. Poems both opened up white spaces on the page and pointed to universal truths amidst the ever-changing, diverse, and sometimes violent contents of

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evangelicals encouraged politicization. She directly contradicts D.G. Paz's characterization of Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's political activities as fitting with a separate spheres paradigm, claiming that "'domestic ideology' is too simple a construct with which to understand Tonna's work" (114). Instead, she points out the "lack of consensus" about women's political roles within the *CLM* (117).

the periodical press. According to Hughes, “Affective poetry participated in forward-looking change insofar as it was original work (a ‘novelty’) but also registered awareness of an unchanging zone beyond modernity, its predictable rhymes and sing-song rhythms serving as countercharms to unpredictability elsewhere and forming a spiritualized counterpart to the rhythmic waves of serial publication” (99). On one hand, poetry functioned to counteract the modernity and secularity surrounding it. On the other hand, it was used to justify the merit of these periodicals, to make their modernity more palatable.

Hughes highlights the religious function of poetry within the secular periodical, and her argument about poetry suggests that the idea of a sacred space may be instrumental to the success of secular modernity. Yet, if poetry mediated the secular content of the mainstream periodical, what was its role within the context of religious periodicals like the *Christian Lady's Magazine* that already claimed to be a space set apart from the secular press? Did these periodicals see poetry as contributing to their religious message or as a vestige of the secular world? Ledbetter argues that, in women's periodicals, poetry was seen as the purveyor of correct ideology, as a teacher of Christian values: “Poetry in women's periodicals taught noble attitudes and Christian values that prepared women readers for their important role of maternal saviors in the domestic plan for improving civilization, a role once reserved for male poets in earlier years” (2-3). My research on the *CLM*, however, suggests that in the context of the early-Victorian Evangelical press, which saw its role as confronting both the secular world and errant religious positions, rhetoric about poetry was much more conflicted.

During the years of Tonna's editorship, the topic of poetry as well as its inclusion in the magazine remained controversial among writers for the *CLM* but also evolved. Discussions of poetry in its earliest years are dominated by an attempt to distance the Evangelical notion of poetry from both the Oxford movement and secular Romanticism. These writers acknowledged but mistrusted the affinity between religion and the



emotional element of poetry. In the middle years of the journal, Tonna's focus as an editor shifted toward social reform, and poetry became an efficient ideological tool with which to emphasize writers' points in prose. During her final years as editor, Tonna became more interested in poetry as a means to promote a spirit of religious worship (a much more ecumenical goal), partly prompted by her encounter with the Jewish periodical press.

### The Dangers of Sentiment

In its early years, The *CLM* contained explicit prose discussions of poetry outlining its many dangers, particularly to the young females, the journal's target audience. These prose writers viewed poetry only through its generic status and formal qualities, arguing that poetry was particularly dangerous because of the apparent affinity between poetry and religion. This attitude is invoked in an 1834 article called "Sentimental Religion," which the anonymous author "Z." suggests is often a "cherished self-delusion" (105). The article argues that modes of expression that were once purely religious are now being corrupted: "In the former age it was the fashion to deride and persecute all religious feeling—it is now the fashion to imitate it; for the enemy has varied his mode of attack; no longer the roaring lion, he appears at present as the angel of light, and instigates his faithful followers to make terms of peace with their former adversaries" (109). This statement echoes Tonna's frequent warnings that the primary attack on religion is not from an outright appeal to anti-religiousness but from subtle changes within the church itself that move the church toward a compromise with secularity.

The author's reference to the "enemy's" tactics also alludes to his/her fear that poetry and admiration for nature, which inspire similar feelings as religion but are essentially secular, are now being treated as religion's replacements; the article begins by criticizing "the devotees of nature" (107) who are associated with Romantic poetry.

Eventually, however, the author tries to qualify her negative outlook on poetry while still warning of its dangers:

Let me not be supposed, however, to draw any unjust inference with regard to the influence of poetry; for I would caution my readers, not against the use, but the abuse, of that which I think may frequently have a beneficial effect upon the character. I warn them to be cautious in forming *practical associations* on the subject of religion, which they will find it difficult in after-life wholly to eradicate; for we cannot deny the fact, that many truly pious individuals have lamented, that they found it difficult to distinguish poetical sentiment from religious feeling, or to ascertain which were the fruits of fancy, and which the aspirations of a renewed heart. (112)

The author pinpoints a danger based on the similarity between secular “poetical sentiment” and “religious feeling,” a similarity between the emotionalism in both modes of expression. While this emotionalism and a sense of transcendence may be an essential element of religion, the author suggests that poetry runs the risk of emphasizing one element of religiosity over other essential elements of religious truth. On one hand, poetry is a particularly suitable religious medium; on the other hand, it muddies the waters for those peering into the pool of religious sentiment in an attempt to perceive the essential nature of “true religion.”

The solution for this author is not to draw poetry more firmly back into the religious fold as a medium that should be used exclusively for religious endeavors, but rather to help Christians create a mental division between “poetical sentiment” and “religious feeling,” to categorize the former as undeniably secular and the latter as purely religious. In cautioning readers against “*practical associations* on the subject of religion,” the author attempts to separate religious content, its “subject,” from its associated formal elements. While the author suggests that it is still acceptable to “use” poetry to enhance character, she sets it firmly aside when it comes to cultivating religious doctrine.

The grave concerns about poetry expressed in “Sentimental Religion” suggest that, while poetry may have been seen as a “sacred space” within the secular periodical, some saw it as a secular encroacher within the pages of the religious periodical, creating a

juxtaposition between sentiment and religion that was better avoided. While they valued direct and sincere expression of emotion, vague sentiment that was not grounded in specific principles was all the more dangerous to these authors because it could be appropriated for any cause.

Several authors for the *CLM* imply that the sentiments cultivated by poetry are particularly dangerous to young religious female readers who were deemed less spiritually and emotionally mature, and therefore less able to distinguish between religion and poetics. A June 1838 article, “Cultivation of Poetical Powers in Children” by N. N., applies this concern to young people interested in writing poetry as well. It calls on parents to discourage their children from writing poetry:

I should be inclined to recommend very great caution, to say the least, in encouraging the sproutings of early poetical talent. As it regards females, for that is the point in question, my opinion is founded on considerations relative to the cultivation of the mind, and to the formation of the character. Undue encouragement to poetry appears to me much the same to the mind as dieting upon trifle and sweetmeats would be to the body. The faculties require more solid, as well as plainer and more wholesome food, in order to acquire their due strength, and I might even pursue the subject to a greater extent: education is to call forth all the faculties of the mind, and to employ them to the highest ends; she does not perform her duty if she rests satisfied with calling forth *one* only, and that the very one which she is bound to watch with most suspicion, and to keep most carefully within due limits. (549)

These “sproutings” of poetical talent are far from benign as they might eventually cause the mind to “vegetate in wild, useless, and unsightly luxuriance” (550). (Oh my!). While mental growth and education are important to this author, poetic education threatens to overwhelm all other faculties, a weed in its native soil of the female mind. This passage is rife with the language that writers for the *CLM* persistently use to describe the relationship between young women and poetry: the suggestion that poetry may lead to

“uselessness” and the neglect of “duty,” and the metaphor that poetry is an unwholesome comestible to which young women are particularly attracted.<sup>50</sup>

The great ambivalence toward poetry in Evangelical settings is perhaps best epitomized by the shifting attitude of Mary Ann Stodart, one of the *CLMs* most frequent contributors during the first half of the magazine’s existence. Despite the large number of devotional poems included in the pages of the *CLM*, M.A.S. (as Mary Ann Stodart signs her contributions to the *CLM*), compares poetry to poison in her series “Hints on Reading” (1836): “to allow a girl unrestrained access even to the British poets, is much the same as to place in her hands a draught of virulent poison” (433). She suggests that imaginative poetry is particularly harmful for women whom it will encourage in “useless” pursuits. Here Stodart adds a gendered note to the Evangelical imperative of religious utility, suggesting that women are more likely to fall into useless pursuits and connecting these pursuits with poetical sentiment.

Along with taking women away from their duties, Stodart implies that poetry may contribute to secularization by diluting religious principles with sentimental attachment. Like the author of “Sentimental Religion,” she initially rejects the idea that poetry and religion might be productively fused. She argues that religious poetry, not just secular poetry, may be dangerous, even a poetical reading of the Bible itself, as it may distract from religious instruction because of its beautiful formal qualities: “I dread, for myself and others, the resting in the poetry of the religion: the listening to the Bible as a very pleasant sound, a very lovely song, while we forget the spirituality of the law, and the extensive requisitions of the gospel” (435). This caution, like the one in “Sentimental Religion,” appears to emanate from the *CLM*’s fear of “Catholic” liturgical practices

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<sup>50</sup> Patrick Brantlinger calls attention to the frequent evangelical and utilitarian use of “poison” as a metaphor for imaginative literature in the first half of the nineteenth century. Writers such as Hannah More sought to “replace poisonous literature with wholesome reading” (6). Joanne Janssen documents the use of metaphors of “toxicity” for reading within the *CLM*, especially in relation to fiction (331).

incorporated into the Oxford movement, the poetical poison closest to home. For M.A.S. in “Hints on Reading,” poetry is completely determined by its formal and aural qualities. It cannot effectively convey religious content (“the law”) and thus stands in the way of a straightforward connection with God. Yet her attempt to separate form and content becomes absurd when she questions the poetic qualities of the Bible itself, which Evangelicals claimed as their sole spiritual guide.

The attitude toward poetry exemplified by the authors I have discussed thus far seems to deny that it has any efficacy for Evangelical purposes. Ironically, however, in attempting to separate the aesthetic form from the practical and essential content of religion and thus differentiating themselves from competing spiritual positions, proponents of Evangelicalism may have unintentionally aided secular thought. The Evangelical authors I discuss here participated in what Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce call the “rationalization” of theology, which focused on the pragmatic, “this-worldly ends” of religious thought (14). Once Evangelicals had grounded their claim for religion’s validity solely in terms of morality (and thus usefulness), when secular thinkers began to split the moral from the religious, Evangelical religious thought was particularly vulnerable. While the *CLM* begins its discussion of poetry by separating aesthetic and moral concerns with an anti-poetry stance, as the periodical developed, its authors began to recognize the importance of re-incorporating a poetic element into Evangelical thought.

### Coming to Terms with Poetic Authorship

Despite the grave reservations about poetry expressed in these prose pieces, Tonna and writers for the *CLM* found poetry to be an apt, not to mention space-efficient, method of conveying their messages and religious experiences. While M.A.S.’s excoriating remarks on poetry seem to delineate her clear stance on the genre’s demerits, the same article that calls poetry poison also speaks of her own attraction to it: “Poetry was my passion, and, if you will have it, my bane even in childhood; and if I appear to

speak with harshness of so early and intimate a friend, it is because I know her to be deceitful and treacherous, and a very Cerce” (“Hints on Reading” 429). In fact, M.A.S.’s passion for poetry was far from being a past relationship. The true irony of her remarks is that she was the most frequent single contributor of poetry to the *CLM* for its first four years from 1834 to 1837, publishing 13 poems in the magazine over the course of these years. This fact suggests that her response to poetry was far more complex than her essays admit. Many of M.A.S.’s poems are devotional praise anthems or biblical paraphrases, yet her own extreme position in “Hints on Reading,” that poetry might be dangerous even when it is a part of the holy scriptures, would seem to indicate that poetic paraphrase also falls under her critique.

In the years following negative discussions of poetry in the prose of the *CLM*, several poets, including M.A.S., carried the discussion of poetry into the poems themselves, specifically addressing their own roles as poets or using metaphors that explored the relationship between poetry and religion. M.A.S. filled her poems with attempts to reconcile her ideological aversion to poetry in the abstract with her attraction to poetry as a craft. One of her attempts is an excessively defensive poem titled “Stanzas” (March 1839) that directly addresses those (like herself!) who would criticize her for writing poetry. In some parts of the poem, she excuses herself as someone who finds it difficult to leave a potentially bad relationship: “I cannot suddenly be wrenched / From childhood’s early friend.” Yet she also argues more directly against the idea that writing poetry takes her away from more “useful” daily duties:

O blame me not because my hand  
 Oft strikes the simple lyre,  
 And sometimes ye may catch the sounds,  
 That passing thoughts inspire:  
 It is not that I shrink away  
 From daily toil and care,  
 For strength and patience I would pray  
 The allotted weight to bear.

It is that when my heart is grieved,  
 My wearied spirit worn,

It soothes my heart to strike the harp.  
 Which charmed life's early morn:  
 I stay not in the muse's bowers  
 Neglecting duty's call;  
 I know, even 'mid her fragrant flowers  
 How passing moments fall. (1-16)

M.A.S.'s references to the "lyre and the harp," the Romantic images for poetry writing, directly associate the activity she refers to with her poetic career. By claiming that her poetry writing does not interfere with her daily duties, she seeks to make her authorship seem less threatening according to the gendered expectation that women will place family and household duties first. Furthermore, she links poetry with the performance of these duties, suggesting that a limited sojourn in the world of poetry "soothes" her and helps her to bear "the allotted weight" of her daily tasks, tasks which are heaven-ordained rather than chosen. Here she begins to locate an acceptable place for poetry writing within her philosophy of religious service and gender-determined duty. In this way, poetry becomes a reinforcement for "useful" labor, at least for the person writing it.

But how can she justify a practice that helps her perform personal duties when she claims that the resulting product may poison the young females of Britain? To those who would ask this question, M.A.S. lashes out defensively with a biblical allusion:

And who art thou that dost presume  
 To sit as judge on me?  
 Nay—cast the beam from out thine eye,  
 Thy brother's mote to see; (33-36)

Still, this does not address those innocent bystanders, young ladies in danger of ingesting toxins. In the third stanza, M.A.S. claims, "And well we know each gift of God / Has some appointed end." This statement hovers, unexplored and unsubstantiated, near the end of the poem almost as a question to herself. While M.A.S.'s poems demonstrate the spiritual usefulness of writing poetry for the author, she finds it more difficult to justify their dissemination to a wider audience. What the appointed end of poetry may be, she is not yet able to answer, but it will be the focus for much of her future prose writing.

Meanwhile, poems by M.A.S. and others in the *CLM* continued to represent female poetic composition in a positive light despite emphasizing that poetry must not take precedence over domestic and spiritual concerns. M.A.S.'s (Nov. 1837) poem "Lines: Written after Reading a Sketch of the Life of Mrs. Hemans" represents Hemans' response to mountains and oceans as almost prophetic, attributing powers to Hemans that had been typically associated with the male Romantics:

She knew the voice they spake,  
And her spirit's deep reply  
From her burning lips in rapture brake,  
And glowed in her kindled eye. (13-16)

M.A.S.'s discussion of Hemans exemplifies a shifting attitude toward women's poetry. As Kathryn Ledbetter points out, "As early as the 1830s, observers were noting that the days of the male poet/prophet engendered during the Romantic era were over, and poetry was left to women. Poetry was now a feminine genre, and women's periodicals represent one of many material containers with which we may examine the feminization process" (16). M.A.S.'s poem, however, also describes her own inability to follow the same path as Hemans. In the final stanzas, she hears a voice bidding her not to linger over Hemans, "For dreams of earth are wild and vain, / And eternal things are near." She asserts the preeminence of religious belief over poetic talent, seeing them as similar but still competing:

The poet's path seems bright,  
But o'er that to the Christian given,  
Are undying songs and unfading light,  
And it leads direct to heaven. (29-32)

The ultimate question about Felicia Hemans (whom M.A.S. would continue to discuss in her 1842 book *Female Writers*) is not whether she was a good poet, but what her religious status was at her death. The poem is structured to offer the author a choice between her poetic and spiritual ambitions.

Another poet who frequently published in the *CLM*, Mary Ann Serrett Barber (she signs her poems M.A.S.B. or M.A.S. Barber but should not be confused with Stodart,



M.A.S.), offers readers of the *CLM* a similar choice in her February 1840 poem “Stanzas.” Like the earlier prose writers who worried that poetry shared sentimental qualities with religion that might ultimately distract from religion, Barber presents poetry and domestic ideology as two attractive secular alternatives that might distract from “The Kingdom of Thy Savior’s grace!”:

Lov’st thou the page where moves along  
 In pomp of words, the pride of song?  
 And are thy daily musings fed,  
 With visions of the mighty dead?  
 Deem’st thou that *there* a charm is found,  
 Above mortality’s dull round?  
 Deep of that spring thou drink’st in vain.  
 ‘Twill soon be thine to thirst again!

Or, is it by thine own fire-side  
 Thy hopes with folded wings abide?  
 Content, with glad, yet patient song,  
 To cheer life’s daily hours along?  
 And still the burden of their strain?  
 Heard at each pause—again—again,  
 Does one sweet thought recurring come,  
 ‘To love and be beloved at home!’ (1-16)

.....  
 Though wisdom’s earthly lamp is bright,  
 Thou followest but a meteor-light!  
 Though sweet the voice of love may be,  
 ‘Tis but the syren’s song to thee,  
 If on the earth it bids thee rest,  
 Nor seek a home more truly blest,  
 A rich inheritance above,  
 Of perfect rest and perfect love. (25-32)

Although this poem, with its comparisons of poetic song to a “meteor-light” and love to a “syren’s song,” calls to mind the magazine’s earlier assertions that poetry interferes with religion, this poem changes the logic of the argument. Rather than suggesting that poetry interferes with domestic duties, and thus with heaven-appointed tasks, this poem equates poetry and domestic ideology, suggesting that both can detract from contemplating heavenly matters. This poem’s angel in the house “hopes with folded wings,” but is instructed to “Let better hopes thine heart engage” and to set spiritual aspirations beyond

hearth and home. At the same time, poetry and domestic love pose a problem only “If on earth it bids thee rest,” suggesting that poetry and love could instead inspire a more eternal search.

In the preceding poems, poetry serves metaphorically as an aspiration that falls short of heavenly pursuits, but it can also serve metaphorically as a figure for Christian devotion and communication with God in this world and the next. In an October 1837 poem, “Prayer and Praise,” Mary Ann Stodart suggests that viewing poetry as a devotional medium for the expression of prayer or praise makes it acceptable. In the final stanzas, she depicts the soul in heaven as a female harp player, again playing on the Romantic association between poetry and the lyre or harp:

Perfect is praise when prayer expires,  
She joins the seraph’s golden lyres,  
And sweetly through the listening skies,  
Her loud and joyous anthems rise.

No care, no sorrow there restrain,  
The soul has left sin’s galling chain,  
And, dazzled by the burst of light,  
Gazes around in awed delight.

A nobler theme her harp employs,  
Than aught that waken’s angel’s joys,  
Redeeming love calls forth her lays,  
Eternity’s employed in praise. (29-40)

Here M.A.S. focuses on the Evangelical mainstay of atonement through Christ’s redeeming love. The soul, figured as a female poet, is freed by this love to be perpetually creative. By transporting an image of the female poet to heaven, M.A.S. makes it eminently acceptable because the poet/soul responds to direct inspiration from God’s redeeming love, and her theme is praising God. Conveniently, this female poet’s audience is God alone, which eliminates the possibility of corrupting any young females. Through this image, M.A.S. begins to suggest an extended scope for women’s creativity when it is linked directly to religious themes.

### Poetry and Women's Sphere: Fledgling Immanence

Several years later in *Female Writers: Thoughts on Their Proper Sphere, and on Their Powers of Usefulness* (1842), a full-length book that was reviewed by the *CLM*, Stodart continues her discussion of women as poets and begins to answer her earlier question about poetry's "appointed end" in society.<sup>51</sup> This essay has mostly been discussed by scholars as an example of attitudes toward particular poets, such as Hemans, or as an example of the restricted range of topics that women's poetry was expected to address,<sup>52</sup> but it also gives us a window into the logic that M.A.S. used to explain the value of women's poetry despite her conflicted feelings about it. She first notes that poetry has a dual purpose: "It is hers to describe, with truth and force, those objects which are too vast, and those which are too minute for ordinary ken; the former escaping common observation, from the inability of an ordinary eye to take the range of the whole at one view; and the latter, from the delicacy of observation required for their survey" (83). In essence, the poet's job is bringing to light the sublime or the beautiful, which are not recognized by most people going through their ordinary lives. Not surprisingly, Stodart represents women's poetic talents as belonging to the minute and the beautiful rather than to the sublime: "All that is beautiful in form, delicate in sentiment, graceful in action, will form the peculiar province of the gentle powers of woman" (86). While women may not have the "power of Homeric song" to tell of great wars, Stodart claims that they can tell of the individual soldier's longings and thoughts of home (86).

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<sup>51</sup> In July 1842, the *CLM* gave a generally favorable review to Stodart (though suggesting that she is too open to the idea of women reading the classics which are deemed "pagan"). The review notes that women are indebted to Stodart for the "advocacy of their claims to a somewhat higher grade in the scale of intellectual eminence than is generally conceded to us" (82).

<sup>52</sup> A few other brief treatments of her work include the observation by Kristie Blair in *John Keble in Context* that Stodart tries to create "separate but equal spheres" for women's lyric poetry and men's epic poetry (30), and Kate Flint's observation in *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* that Stodart, unlike other commentators of her time, surprisingly focuses on the reading women writers should undertake to help form their careers (99-100).

Stodart seems to mark off a restricted sphere for women writers. Her emphasis, however, is claiming that good poetry occupies a wide enough field to leave room for the talents of both male and female writers: “Is the hand of poor weak woman ever permitted to sweep the living lyre, and to elicit its thrilling tones? The notes are varied; it is a lyre of many strings, and instrument of wider range than any constructed by mortal hand” (86). If men are more adept at striking one extreme of the lyre, sublimity, Stodart claims that women are more adept at striking the other, beauty. M.A.S.’s description of the female mind adheres to her assertion that women are particularly suited to and necessary for producing a certain kind of poetry:

The portraiture of the female mind is not less difficult. A pencil dipt in the rainbow-hues should be the instrument, and the clouds of heaven the material for receiving the delineation. Indeed the first peculiarity that strikes us, is the extreme delicacy and sensitiveness of its organization. The Aeolian-harp which trembles and vibrates at every breath of wind; the mimosa leaf which shrinks from the gentlest touch, are but faint emblems of a sensitive and refined woman. (18)

Although not explicitly a reference to the female poet, this quotation links the Romantic image of the author as the Aeolian harp with a gendered conception of women’s delicacy, reinforcing the idea that women’s sensitivity to beautiful minutia is her contribution to the world of poetry.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, M.A.S. goes on to link her discussion of women’s sensitivity to the beautiful with her conception of how religion links to poetry. In doing so, she begins to suggest a tradition of immanence in women’s poetry, a theology that emphasized accessing God through earthly minutia. While M.A.S. delineates a confined sphere for women’s poetry, she also suggests that poetic powers tending mainly toward the minute

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<sup>53</sup> Isobel Armstrong notes that the vibrating string, air, and breath are common tropes in Victorian women’s poetry: “responsive, finely organized feminine creativity, receptive to external influence, returning back to the world as music that has flowed in, an exhalation or breath of sound” (*Victorian Poetry* 326). This use of breath, according to Armstrong helped to establish women’s expressive poetics: “The body imprisons breath but involuntarily releases it: this is an apt figure for the release of feeling which cannot find external form” (327).

and the beautiful are enhanced through religious themes.<sup>54</sup> “When religion takes poetry into her service, the province of the handmaid is yet farther extended, her power amazingly increased. Linked to eternal, immutable truth, how wide is her range! how sweet, how potent is her song! (84). Here, poetry is personified as a handmaid, whose abilities and province are expanded by association with her mistress, religion. With her insertion of religion into this discussion of the sublime and the beautiful, Stodart’s essay seems to imply that women’s thematic territory of poetic minutia can be expanded limitlessly. Once these tiny poetic moments of beauty in earthly life are connected to divine themes, the poet’s worth is immeasurably extended, as is the worth of the woman’s everyday sphere of existence. Thus, Stodart demonstrates the beginnings of a theory of immanence in women’s poetry.

Yet this idea of immanence remained problematic for women writing in the *CLM* because of its association with Romantic thought, as immanence is often most apparent in poetry that describes nature. Most of Stodart’s poetry in the *CLM* predates her discussion of the characteristics of women writers, and her own poetry in the magazine never achieves the concrete eye for minutia that she claims is women poets’ hallmark. The early career of M.A.S. Barber (Mary Ann Serrett Barber) is a better example of how poets in the *CLM* flirted with the idea of immanence but ultimately relied on transcendence. From 1837-1840, Barber took over the distinction of being the most frequent poetry contributor to the *CLM*. She would go on to be a social reformer and to publish extensively in the *Church of England Magazine*. Her poem “Revelation” (March 1838) expresses an interest in immanence but ultimately rejects it. In this poem, Barber includes an epigraph from the apostle Paul’s words in Acts, “Whom ye ignorantly

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<sup>54</sup> F. Elizabeth Gray has suggested that women poets in the *CLM* “co-opted the disabling convention of feminine ‘beauty’ (physical and moral) and transformed it” (“Beatification through Beautification” 265). She further argues that, in order to “negotiate conflicting expectations, women entered the cultural economy of decoration and display on their own terms” (266). M.A.S.’s use of beauty to theorize poetry performs a similar function.

worship, Him declare I unto you,” suggesting that God may be worshipped through earthly phenomena but that this worship falls short:

Oh God! the wonders of thy might  
In nature's glorious law,--  
In earth and ocean, day and night.  
Our Pagan fathers saw.

They saw, but knew thee not; the heaven  
Was bright with stars in vain,  
In vain to bless their fields was given  
The late and early rain. (1-8)

Barber's critique rests on her opposition of the verb "saw" in the first stanza and the verb "knew" in the second Stanza. She notes the possibility of seeing God's might in natural elements and occurrences (earth, ocean, day, night), but also the impossibility of "knowing" God through these things alone without proper doctrinal instruction. Appreciation without doctrine, she emphasizes, is "in vain, / In vain."

While "Pagan fathers" refers literally to pre-Christian Britain, it also calls our attention to early-Victorian women's poetic relationship to their male, Romantic predecessors (who had by no means faded from the literary scene). In many ways, this poem demonstrates Barber's need to distance herself from Romantic attitudes toward nature as exemplified in poems such as Wordsworth's "The world is too much with us":

Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn. (9-14)

For Wordsworth, appreciation of the natural world (in the face of modern materialism) creates moments of poetry that trump Christian theology. This attitude was not acceptable to female Evangelical poets, and part of their difficulty in creating a poetics of immanence was their need to separate it from the Romanitc "religion of nature."

In a June 1837 article called "On Natural Pleasures," J.D., a regular *CLM* contributor, explains what s/he believes is a problem for many admirers of the natural

world. J.D. asserts that “Natural harmonies are the interpreters of spiritual ones,” yet natural objects often hinder rather than “promote spiritual advancement” (521). This is because nature appreciation often stops short of immanence, which creates a connection with God, and deifies nature itself or the observer’s emotions:

He therefore forms to himself a deity, often his own heart, by conferring a species of apotheosis on every object that affords him some transient delight. He sees not that it bears the impress of its Creator’s holiness; he uses it not as a clue wherewith to unravel the divine perfections; he rejoices not at the disgust which arises from the intemperance of his admiration, nor esteems it to be an argument for the attainment of some more satisfying good. Perpetually grasping at phantoms, he finds them wither at his touch, and yet never dreams that it is to the image, (though debased indeed,) of God within his soul, that he even owes their fleeting portion of enjoyment. (522)

Fearing “apotheosis” of the object, Evangelicals remained suspicious of the idea that God could be encountered in everyday objects. A safer theology was to suggest, as this author does, that nature should be used as a “clue” or “type” of heavenly truth.<sup>55</sup> Yet J.D. continues to emphasize the importance of small details in understanding God: He “is surely to be honoured, not in the contempt nor rejection of his mercies, but in that humble, thankful spirit which receives all, even the minutest, as a gracious emanation from himself” (525). Although worried that the human observer can get too caught up in the earthly environment, J.D. nevertheless suggests that attention to the minute is an imperative for appreciating God.

### Immanence and Gender Ideology

The belief that women were more suited to deal with the beautiful and the everyday, and thus with immanence, initially rested on the assertion of gender differences and separate spheres. Stodart could assert women’s privileged relationship to immanence only by arguing for their particular sensitivity to and interest in minutia as a gift from

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<sup>55</sup> For the importance of Biblical typology in Victorian writing, see George Landow’s *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought*.

God. In 1836, the *CLM* became the vehicle for a robust debate on the topic of gender ideology between X.Q., a frequent contributor on theological and scientific matters who self-identifies as male, and M.A.S., whom we now know as a seemingly reluctant poet and writer of advice letters. In July of 1836, X.Q. wrote an editorial entitled “Female Inferiority” in which he calls upon M.A.S. to justify comments in the previous month’s “Hints on Reading” letter. “Hints on Reading” was an advice column by M.A.S. that purported to be a series of “letters” from her to a young female friend on the topics of reading and education. X.Q. challenges M.A.S.’s argument that women’s minds are naturally formed to notice small everyday details rather than the large scope of ideas. He claims that differences between the mental powers of the sexes are not due to “any essential or natural difference between them, but to the varied, nay opposite training they have received. Bring up any number of boys in the manner usually employed in the education of girls, and you will find them as vain, as frivolous, as ignorant as any ‘boarding-school miss’ can possibly be, and *vice versa*” (35). While X.Q. does not object to the division of labor created by different gender roles, he questions the assertion that these roles are God-given (and therefore not subject to change) rather than socially determined.

In her August response, M.A.S. reasserts her opinion that:

The adaptation of the sexes to their respective spheres of action, is so beautiful an instance of the wisdom and goodness of God as displayed in the creation, that I, for one, with the feelings of a weak woman, but with the heart of a rational being,—aye, and I trust, of a Christian too—entertain a peculiar repugnance to anything that militates, or seems to militate against the restrictions imposed upon us, not by society merely, but by God himself. (114-115)

Her rhetorical stance in this passage reveals internal tension as she emphasizes female frailty but simultaneously asserts her own intellectual ability to argue with a man about the issue because she is a “rational being” and a “Christian,” two categories that establish



her equality with X.Q. In his September 1836 reply to M.A.S.'s impassioned comments, X.Q. writes a cogent analysis of the role that society plays in shaping gender ideology:

But I must still take leave to consider this difference as arising from education and habit, not from nature. Nice and minute distinctions are as much swept from the mind of man by the broad generalities of his training, as the grander and more extensive fields of thought are denied to woman, while she is educated among those trivialities with which she is allowed, nay compelled to occupy her mind (238).

While X.Q.'s argument warmed my heart as a modern feminist, it is also easy to see why his approach is not only incompatible with M.A.S.'s ideas about the heaven-ordained nature of social hierarchies, but also with the place that she had carefully crafted for women as the ambassadors of everyday life. X.Q.'s "trivialities" are what M.A.S. deems the sacred duties and beautiful minutia that women are uniquely formed to recognize and discuss. While arguing for the natural equality of women's intellect, X.Q. at the same time devalues the knowledge and experience that women already possessed.

### Genre and Public Voice

M.A.S.'s debate with X.Q. not only highlights the relationship between her gender ideology and her interest in poetic immanence, it also highlights her difficulty in navigating the idea of audience and the public place of female authors. Like so many female prose writers at this time, she uses the veneer of private letter writing to make public statements, a practice which she would later criticize in *Female Writers*; she criticizes those women writers who really mean their "personal" letters to be read by a wider audience: "Are their productions always penned with the idea that they will be strictly confined to the individual to whom they are addressed? We dare not answer in the affirmative, neither dare we hold up to public view, all the evils which a negative answer would suggest" (118). In her debates with X.Q., however, she uses this same tactic to retreat from attack: When X.Q. questions her about her comments in "Hints on Reading," she protested to Tonna in her response:

You know, my beloved friend, that these papers of mine were really written at the request of a dear Christian girl, and that they are sent to her through your Magazine, simply because it is a convenient channel for her receiving them regularly; and because their usefulness, if they possess any, is thus extended. Criticism never entered my head, any more than if I were writing a private letter to yourself or any other friend. (117)

The implausibility of this assertion, that she decided to publish a private letter in a public magazine because it was faster than the post, merely demonstrates the extent to which women felt they needed to maintain the veneer of private writers. Her second assertion of extended “usefulness” is much more in keeping with her philosophies about poetry. Presenting a piece publicly can only be justified when its utility is assured.

When the debate between X.Q. and M.A.S. wound down in October 1836 and M.A.S. got back to writing “Hints on Reading,” she still seemed preoccupied with the question of whether public letter writing was acceptable: “Various causes have occasioned the delay of my letter, of which the real difficulty of treating the subject of poetry *publicly* has been one. I should have little comparative difficulty had I to discuss it between you and me alone; but not knowing into whose hands my papers may fall—how remarks may be misconstrued...” (429). Given her previous experience, it seems likely that her remarks might “fall into the hands” of other readers of the magazine such as X.Q. and turn into a public debate.

### The Spiritual Uses of Poetry

While it is easy for M.A.S. to explain the usefulness of publishing letters, in *Female Writers*, she finds it much more difficult to explain the usefulness of disseminating poetry. M.A.S.’s images of poetry suggest that it is dangerously mutable, unpredictable, insubstantial, and overly abstract. As she transitions from her discussion of poetry to her discussion of letter-writing, her other genre of choice, she notes: “We descend from poetry to the common concerns of life; from sporting and fluttering in the fields of air, in order to take our stand on solid ground amid the ordinary occupations of our fellow creatures” (104). By characterizing her discussion of poetry as sporting and

fluttering, she creates an image of poetry as not serious and as an abstract luxury. This description of poetry also contrasts with her description of what women's religious writing should accomplish: "The peculiar province of women, as writers in the sacred cause of Christianity, appears to us to be, to bring religion to bear on the ordinary circumstances of life, on its social and its relative duties" (166). For M.A.S., women's role as writers is not only associated with minutia and sensitivity, but also with concreteness and practicality as opposed to abstraction.

In explaining the usefulness of poetry, M.A.S. attempts to demonstrate that it works both as an anti-materialistic tool and as a materially useful medium of reform. Saying nothing of her earlier stance that poetry might obscure true religion, she concludes the section on poetry in *Female Writers* by stating "we have said enough, perhaps more than enough for these useful-knowledge days, when, however, poetry is more required than ever, to prevent our sinking into materialism" (102). Here, poetry is represented as a spiritual, anti-secular force, something that pulls people out of the this-worldly preoccupation with amassing material goods. Although this stance seems the opposite of her previous warnings that poetry might cause a young woman to mistakenly place too much value on the poetic exterior of religious worship, in actuality, both her fear of poetry and her commendation of it are based on a perception that poetry and religious observance are closely linked. If poetry mimics the experience of religious worship, it can, on one hand, direct the materialist to a higher form of thought and, on the other hand, allow the religiously observant to think falsely that they have fully grasped (penetrated) the divine mystery through a well-chosen poetic phrase.

Yet, in order to avoid this potential conflict between poetry and women's call to discuss concrete and everyday matters, M.A.S. seeks to recast poetry as a practical medium as well, thus seemingly moving it back into the material, and perhaps pragmatic, realm: "It is time, however, to descend to the practical application of the subject. A distinguished poet of our own country and times, has said, that, if he knows his own

heart, he would rather write one little hymn which might find an echo in a Christian breast, than be the author of *Paradise Lost*. Most entirely do we subscribe to his words. We would be *utilitarians* even as it regards poetry; for we do hold most strongly that every gift of God has some appointed end” (my emphasis 99-100). Here M.A.S. comes back to the question her earlier poem, “Stanzas,” had asked about the “appointed end” of poetry. M.A.S.’s comments not only highlight the affinities between evangelical and utilitarian thought with regard to literature, but also cast the emotions invoked by poetic expression in a new light. With her utilitarian focus, she transforms the emotionalism of poetry from a dangerous distraction into a form of utility promoting the social causes she supports. Quoting the poet Thomas Campbell, she references poetry’s power to sway those who read it:

Poetry is the forcible expression of truth. Far from us and ours be the debasing doctrine that its proper region is fiction. Poetry rejoices in the truth; there it can spread its wings with ease and freedom, unfettered and unimpeded. In the words of a living poet of great and heartstirring power, ‘Song is but the eloquence of truth.’ And a mighty, glorious eloquence it is. The monarch seated on his throne bends beneath its power, and the savage, roaming in his wild woods, acknowledges its sway. (85-86)

Poetry has the power to “bend” and “sway” those who are too powerful or too socially and culturally removed from the author’s circle for her to normally reach them. It can speak to people as far removed from each other as the monarch and the “savage.”

### Uniting Poetry and Prose in Social Causes

The *CLM* highlights the utility of poetry most in pieces that incorporate both poetry and prose. Despite the great uneasiness about poetry in the journal as a whole, Tonna nonchalantly uses both her own and others’ poetry to drive home her points within prose pieces. These pieces demonstrate a different approach to poetry in the *CLM*, one that uses it as a religious tool and integrates it into the context of the magazine as the continuation of an argument in a way that barely acknowledges its status as a separate genre. While authors downplay the generic status of poetry in these pieces, their choice to

shift between genres reveals the work that they need poetry to do when other modes of address fail them.

Poetry provided a space for contemplation when other forms of literature seemed problematic. In Tonna's previously mentioned 1843 article, "A Perplexity," she calls attention to the *CLM*'s fraught relationship with literature and points to the Evangelical ambivalence toward fiction which Joanne Janssen has followed through the *CLM*.<sup>56</sup> Because Tonna had just finished serializing her long novel, *The Lion of Judah*, her audience might have expected the issue to open with a new piece of fiction. Instead, this opening article of March, 1843 is an editorial discussing the difficulty of choosing appropriate pieces of fiction for a Christian periodical.<sup>57</sup> Tonna aligns fiction with falsehood and implies that members of the Oxford movement are more adept at writing lies and fiction. Yet, although she feels the need to delay including a work of fiction while she ponders its appropriateness, she feels no such compunction about poetry. In fact, in the middle of her meditation on her role as an editor, she turns to verse to help make her point: "the true position of each one who stands forth as a periodical writer, in these eventful times, is that of a Watchman: and the duty of such is to be ready to answer

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<sup>56</sup> In "'Embodying Facts': Anxiety about Fiction in *The Christian Lady's Magazine* and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's Social Problem Novels," Janssen argues that Tonna demonstrated her "creativity, inventiveness, and rhetorical skill" in navigating evangelical concerns about fiction (349). Although Christine Krueger argues that Tonna was influenced by evangelical attitudes that were "deeply suspicious of fiction" (126) and suggests that Tonna "promised to exclude fiction" in the *CLM* (131), Janssen suggests that Tonna created a hybrid genre of fiction that incorporated and served as a vehicle for large amounts of factual information in order to reassure her audience: "In periodical articles and in her fiction, Tonna validates nineteenth-century concerns about reading, but by claiming the factual basis and truthful nature of her own work, she reassures a suspicious audience that her work is beneficial rather than dangerous" (348-349).

<sup>57</sup> Janssen notes this shift in Tonna's attitude about fiction toward the end of her life when she affirmed that "fiction's dangers had the power to overrule any benefit offered by the genre's incorporation of fact" (341). In his *Memoir of Charlotte Elizabeth*, Tonna's husband documented her decision to stop writing fiction after she finished *Judah's Lion*: "The conviction grew on her mind that such writings were not wholly consistent with Christian sincerity and truth; and though she could not but admit that the Lord had given an extensive blessing to her own labors in this department of literature, she attributed the welcome reception of such works to an unhealthy tone in the public mind" (11-12).

the question that the observant Christian will more and more anxiously put. We may be permitted to continue this subject in metre” (196). Tonna immediately follows this comment with one of her poems, a prophetic vision of standing watch over but apart from the world leading up to the apocalypse. She invites her readers to “Ascend my tower, / And count with me the waning hour” and exhorts them to “Watch thou; and keep thy garments white.” Her use of poetry at this moment helps her to extend the meditative space of her prose piece as she invites the reader to pause and consider the “watchman” metaphor for a longer period of time. It also allows her to reflect on one genre, fiction, by using another genre. Finally, the poem serves as an invitation to her readers to enter more fully into her thoughts, as she metaphorically invites them to join her activity of watching.

Poems within *CLM* prose pieces often serve as a direct invitation for readers to more fully engage their emotions in the topic at hand. In a July 1836 piece, “The Italian Boy’s Appeal,” M.A.S. combines a poem with a prose appeal on behalf of foreign child beggars. M.A.S. turns her appeal to the magazine’s audience into a direct and immediate interaction between an Italian, Catholic beggar boy and a middle-class Protestant lady, thus asking her audience to envision themselves being personally engaged by a child in need:

Stay, gentle lady, do not turn  
Your smiling eye away;  
An English ear won’t lightly spurn  
What foreign tongue would say. (1-4)

We also, however, discern M.A.S.’s voice thinly veiled in what the child “says” as she emphasizes the child’s physical need, but also the opportunity to convert him to Protestantism:

One little word my heart may move,  
To you it may be given,  
To tell a soul of Jesu’s love,  
And point the way to heav’n. (37-40)

Having captured her audience's interest on behalf of the particular child in the poem, M.A.S. expands her argument in prose:

I cannot send my poor little poem to press, without adding a few words in plain prose, on behalf of those unfortunate vagrants whose claims it attempts to advocate. And I do it the more willingly, as feeling that if it is incumbent on the servants of Christ, to make known the truths of salvation to perishing sinners, it is equally incumbent on them to strive, heart and hand, against the encroachments of popery. (13-14)

The "plain prose" gives her an opportunity to make sure that the meaning of her poem and its usefulness to promote conversion are clear, while the plea in her poem establishes reader sympathy.

Poetry provided not only an emotional appeal but also a more expansive space for reflection on a topic. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, as Tonna became an influential advocate on behalf of the ten hours movement and better working conditions for women and children, she incorporated poetic appeals from like-minded reformers into her calls to action.<sup>58</sup> "English Slavery" (July 1838), a long article in which Tonna details evidence from a Parliamentary report on poor factory working conditions for children, ends with Michael Sadler's poem "The Factory Girl's Last Day." Tonna turns to poetry when she finds herself at a loss for words at the end of the article: "But we labour in vain for language sufficiently descriptive of these horrors. Let the reader pause, for a moment, and try to realize, in her own mind, what it is to *be worked to death!*" (65). Rather than simply instructing her readers to pause and imagine, she incorporates Sadler's poem, which forces them to do so. The poem tells the story of a father watching his child die

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<sup>58</sup> In *A Magazine of Her Own?*, Margaret Beetham describes the *CLM*'s engagement in advocating for better working conditions: "In the later 1830s, the magazine offered a radical critique of conditions of the new industrial working class with a concern for their material poverty as much as the spiritual neglect in which they lived" (50). Beetham notes the importance of Tonna's fiction in this campaign: "Certainly Tonna and her magazine pioneered the use of fiction to debate 'the Condition of England' question, as it came to be known" (50). I will suggest that Tonna also saw poetry as a crucial tool for activism.

because of overwork in the factories. At its climax, the ringing of the factory bell encroaches even on the sacred moment of death itself:

All night with tortured feeling,  
 He watched his speechless child,  
 While close beside her kneeling,  
 She knew him not, nor smiled  
 Again the Factory's ringing  
 Her last perceptions tried  
 When from her straw-bed springing,  
 'Tis time!' she shrieked, and died. (49-56)

Before including the poem, Tonna explains why it is so important to look at one instance of a child suffering in a factory but downplays the fact that this story appears in verse:

There is, however, a short and simple narrative extant,--of a single case, the facts of which were detailed by one of the witnesses before the Commons' Committee of 1832, which does give a somewhat nearer view of the truth. But our readers must remember that they are perusing, not a fiction, but the narrative of a fact which actually occurred; and they will feel also, that it is not possible, supposing such things to occur at all, that they should occur in a few instances only... The little sketch to which we allude, and which merely throws into verse a fact stated in evidence, is entitled "The Factory Girl's Last Day. (65-66)

Despite this having been simply "thrown into verse," the use of poetry here is both characteristic of Tonna's tactics and necessary to create a more extended meditation on a factual detail.

Although prose writers in the *CLM* worried about the emotionalism of poetry leading to "uselessness" and torpor among women, Tonna's use of poems within prose pieces harnesses emotion on behalf of the actions she wishes readers to take.<sup>59</sup> By framing poetry by other authors in a new prose context, Tonna uses its emotion to inspire her specific audience to take social action. She includes Thomas Hood's now famous 1843 poem "The Song of the Shirt," which reveals the poor working conditions of

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<sup>59</sup> Janssen suggests that this is particularly common in evangelical rhetoric and notes a similar goal in Tonna's use of fiction: "By telling heart-rending stories supported with detailed evidence, Tonna had a particularly evangelical goal: she wanted to prompt her readers to a change of heart followed by a change of actions" (343).



seamstresses, in her January 1844 installment of “The Protestant.” Hood’s poem makes an appeal for empathy directly to a male audience:

O! Men, with sisters dear!  
 O! Men! With mothers and wives!  
 It is not linen you’re wearing out,  
 But human creatures’ lives?  
 Stitch—stitch—stitch,  
 In poverty, hunger, and dirt,  
 Sewing at once, with a double thread,  
 A Shroud as well as a Shirt. (25-32)

Tonna, however, makes this poem much more applicable to an Evangelical female audience with the dialogue immediately preceding it. She speaks of women buying linen rather than of men wearing shirts, and she points out the lack of empathy for poverty in Evangelical circles:

“In the present case, Uncle, I feel that we may all do something. I pledge myself to purchase no more ready-made linen, unless I can positively ascertain that a fair price was paid for the needlework. My plan will be to buy the material, and to employ the very poorest workwoman I can find competent to the task, giving her full time and liberal remuneration.”

“By so doing, you may perhaps not lighten the burden of suffering in respect to others, but you will remove the burden of guilty participation from your own soul. Cease not to lift up your voice, to rouse the feelings and to expand the views of your countrywomen, who, to say truth, are sinking into a state of elegant, self-indulgent indifferentism, for the consequences of which I tremble. Those who, in the days of their spiritual darkness would have given a penny to a poor creature, will, when brought to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, give a tract instead of the penny. This is an error: *they should give both....*”

“It is very remarkable, Uncle, that the cause of suffering poverty should find its most zealous advocates elsewhere, than among the professed followers of evangelical truth....”

“No doubt of it: Christians need a good stirring up.” (91-93)

Much as in current discussions of consumer habits, the Uncle suggests that the Niece’s plan of action will do little but assuage her guilty conscience if undertaken alone. Instead, he points out the need for aggregate action among women: “Cease not to lift up your voice, to rouse the feelings and to expand the views of your countrywomen” (92). Again, at the end of his remarks, he notes the need for “a good stirring up” (93). This is precisely

the function that Hood's poem plays in Tonna's article, while Tonna's article frames "The Song of the Shirt" to reach and appeal to a new audience.

### Dealing with Difference

Tonna's interest in social reform (especially when it led to opportunities for conversion as well) and her ability to place poetry within that context helped to establish poetry as a useful and accepted tool in the *CLM* during the middle years of Tonna's editorship. Tonna's interest in reaching out, however, eventually led to complications in her straightforward understanding of poetry's utility. During the 1840s, the final years of her editorship, Tonna became involved in a number of causes related to England's Jewish community. Her encounter with Jewish literature, particularly with the poetry of Grace Aguilar, caused her to re-evaluate her ideas about poetic merit and unsettled the *CLM*'s simplistic opposition of utility and artistry.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, her fascination with the fledgling Jewish press inspired a new conviction that the periodical press allowed communities to forge their own image in the face of misunderstanding and to project their voices onto the national stage. This was a much more positive view of her own medium than she expressed when she first founded the *CLM*.

A few critics who write about Tonna have noted her growing interest in Judaism and her defense of English Jews toward the end of her life (and her editorship), but they have yet to explore the great mental stretch that this advocacy involved for a woman (and her readers) who was known for vehemently fighting against any form of Christianity that was not Evangelical Anglicanism. Although Tonna's interest first in conversion and then in pre-millennialist thought led to her interest in Judaism, her foray into the Anglo-Jewish community called her initial views on comparative religion and conversion into

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<sup>60</sup> When Tonna moved from Ireland to England, she became "familiar with London's Jews in their principal surroundings" (Rubinstein, "Pioneering Philosemite" 107). Her acquaintances in London included several Jewish literary figures, and Grace Aguilar was among them (107).

question. While the complexity of Tonna's interest in Judaism has been ignored by many literary scholars, several historians of Jewish culture and literature have recognized her as a figure who influenced British attitudes toward Judaism. Most notably, historians William D. and Hilary L. Rubinstein discuss Tonna as part of their research on philosemitism in Britain.<sup>61</sup> Hilary Rubinstein notes that Tonna's views on Judaism evolved, so that by the end of her life she was a "pioneering philosemite." For instance, in April 1841 Tonna wrote in *The Protestant* magazine that allowing Jews into parliament would be "to abandon altogether our distinctive character as a Christian nation" (qtd. in Rubinstein, "Pioneering Philosemite" 103).<sup>62</sup> By contrast, in an 1843 issue of the *CLM*, she expressed her support for allowing Jewish parliamentary members ("Pioneering Philosemite" 109).

Describing Tonna as a "philosemite," however, does not absolve her from all forms of narrow-mindedness. Most scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jewish culture describe philosemitism as a veiled form of prejudice. Michael Galchinski explains that "It meant not loving Jews, but *using* love as a strategy to persuade them to convert" ("Jewish Women's Dilemmas" 31). Similarly, Galchinsky argues that the concept of "tolerance" that had first become popular in late-eighteenth-century liberal Christian attitudes toward Jews, while preferable to the hatred and forced conversions that preceded it, also had its limits: "'Toleration' meant that, though conversion was still the goal, liberal Christians would try to persuade rather than coerce Jews to accept the

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<sup>61</sup> The Rubinsteins discuss Tonna in their book *Philosemitism: Admiration and Support in the English-speaking world for Jews, 1840-1939*, and Hilary Rubinstein's 1998 presentation to the Jewish Historical Society of England, "A Pioneering Philosemite: Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna (1790-1846) and the Jews," examines Tonna's attitude toward Judaism in detail. Rubinstein sees her as a pioneer of Victorian philosemitism, particularly calling attention to the mutual respect and close friendship she eventually built with Jacob Abraham Franklin, a leader in the Anglo-Jewish community and the editor of the Jewish periodical the *Voice of Jacob* (110-111).

<sup>62</sup> Hilary Rubinstein notes that support for Jewish parliamentary emancipation was growing not just among liberals but also among "some of the most redoubtable religiously-minded defenders of Parliament as an exclusively Christian assembly" such as Tonna ("Pioneering Philosemite" 103).

Gospel” (29). Hilary Rubinstein argues, however, that unlike liberal Christians who advocated for tolerance, Tonna’s attitude “surpassed tolerance. It arose from a deep, spiritual conviction and a profound admiration for Jews” (“Pioneering Philosemite” 103-104). I would suggest that Tonna’s admiration for Jewish literature was also a catalyst in changing her typical conversionist rhetoric into a rhetoric of mutual respect with the Anglo-Jewish leaders of her time.

In order to understand Tonna’s interest in the Anglo-Jewish community and her attitude toward their literature, we first need a basic understanding of how they fit into her theology. Tonna held the eschatological view that the “end times” and Christ’s second coming were not far off. Thus, her urgency and her rhetorical strategies in advocating reform hinged on the idea that her readers (and all of those that they might influence) would be called to account very soon for their actions on this earth. Yet, for Tonna, as a pre-millennialist, the second coming was something wonderful to be hastened rather than delayed (if one had one’s house in order) for it would sweep away the world’s injustices and restore the world to a right relationship with God. Just as many of those who embrace end-times theology today point to the creation of Israel as one sign of the coming apocalypse, Tonna quoted various passages of scripture to argue that the end times would include the re-establishment of Israel as a nation (in the holy land) and the Jews’ conversion to Christianity.<sup>63</sup> This view, however, was much more mainstream among Evangelicals of her time than it is today. In her recent book *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture*, Nadia Valman explains that millenarianism was common among Evangelical women writers of the 1820s through the 1840s, many of

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<sup>63</sup> Elisabeth Jay explains, “The conversion and restoration of the Jews to Israel was intimately linked with millennialism, for it was held that the recreation of the state of Israel would either immediately precede, or coincide with, the beginning of the millennium. The unsettled situation which prevailed in the Middle East throughout the nineteenth century was seen as an opportunity for hastening the Lord’s work” (94). Although pre-millennialists such as Tonna did not believe that they could usher in a utopian world prior to the second coming, they did believe that they could hasten it by enabling the signs that were predicted to precede Christ’s return.

whom believed that converting the Jews would hasten Christ's second coming.<sup>64</sup> Evangelicals saw Jewish women as particularly amenable to conversion so that "[b]y the 1840s [converting Jews] was one of the most popular charitable causes among middle-class British women, resulting in unprecedented literary productivity by women for women readers" (11).<sup>65</sup> Unlike many women Evangelicals of the 1840s, though, Tonna was not a straightforward conversionist. The Rubinsteins, for example, chronicle Tonna's initial involvement in and eventual split with the *London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews* (*Philosemitism* 133-134).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> She notes that "Evangelicals also saw the conversion of the Jews as a crucial step in hastening the Second Coming of Christ, and England, with its history of tolerance rather than persecution, had a special role to play in this project" (6). Valman explores philosemitism among Evangelicals such as Tonna as a double-edged sword: "This affection, however, coincided with a severe critique of Judaism as archaic, law-bound and corrupt. Rapprochement with Jews was sought, then, with a view to their conversion, which Evangelicals pursued with indefatigable vigour" (5-6). At the same time, Tonna's own emphasis on individual conversion waned as she focused on advancing greater respect for Jewish traditions among Protestants.

<sup>65</sup> Valman claims that, instead of advocating liberal ideas of tolerance, these writers focused on "affective affinities between Jewish and Christian women" (12).

<sup>66</sup> There is a debate among historians of Philosemitism about whether Tonna eschewed conversionism or continued to embrace it. The Rubinsteins argue that, in parting ways with the LSPCJ, Tonna "in effect conceded that, at any rate until the Restoration, Judaism constituted an alternative path to redemption, and she consequently opposed 'the erroneous plan of Gentilizing the Jews'" (*Philosemitism* 134). Tonna's Christian critics certainly accused her of abandoning the project of converting individual Jews. However, Donald Lewis directly refutes the Rubinsteins' interpretation, arguing that Tonna "never abandoned her conversionist stance" (193). As evidence, he cites her husband's assertion against "the charge, hinted by some, that she kept back from the Jews the essential saving truths of the Gospel" (*Memoirs of Charlotte Elizabeth* 36-37). He also cites Tonna's words in the *CLM* in March of 1846 toward the end of her life: "Anxious, deeply and prayerfully anxious as we are that every child of Abraham should see and acknowledge in the crucified, the buried and risen Jesus of Nazareth, their promised Messiah, their Redeemer, their Deliverer, and their King, we yet lament and wonder that amid all their laudable zeal for individual conversions, the great bulk of Gentile Christians should so far overlook the immensely important fact that throughout the whole Scriptures national restoration is so linked with national conversion, and to our apprehension so clearly shown as preceding it, that it becomes most bindingly obligatory on us as believers in the sure word of Prophecy to watch every sign of the times, and seize every possible opportunity for commending that stupendous work, which is certainly, in many of its details to be fulfilled by Gentile instrumentality" (241-242). While the rhetoric of Tonna's critics and her husband's defense do not provide sufficient evidence either way, Tonna's own words suggest that she was not opposed to those who continued to promote conversion, but that she felt this was a misplaced emphasis. At the same time, she reviled those who encouraged Jewish converts to give up Jewish cultural traditions and religious customs upon conversion.

Two things convinced Tonna that the *London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews* was taking the wrong approach. First, she came to believe through her interpretation of scripture that even Jews who converted to Christianity should not give up their distinctive Jewish cultural practices.<sup>67</sup> In his memoir of Tonna, her husband Lewis Hypolitus Joseph Tonna explains her position:

She wished them to hear the message ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,’ unaccompanied by any such additions as—‘cease to circumcise your sons; work on the seventh-day Sabbath; throw aside the Talith and eat swine’s flesh,’—conditions which of course are never expressed in words, but are practically enforced. (36)

Rather than aiding her cause, she believed that Jews giving up their cultural identity would hinder their progress toward creating a Jewish state and violate their covenant with God, and she urged Jewish converts to maintain their separate Jewish identity. Second, Tonna’s interpretation of what would happen in the end times suggested that the Jews would come to recognize Christ *en masse* only after the re-establishment of a Jewish state and the rise of Jewish culture.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, instead of promoting conversion efforts among the English Jews, she focused on proving to Christians that the rise of Jewish culture and a Jewish state were in progress and that Christians should accept and promote these advances.

Tonna’s discussion of Judaism in the *CLM*, therefore, aims mostly to combat the prejudice against Jews held by her Christian readers. In the process, a woman who sounds incredibly bigoted when she discusses Catholicism manages to sound somewhat progressive when she discusses Judaism. This seems contradictory if not outright

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<sup>67</sup> Tonna was fluent in Hebrew (“Pioneering Philosemite” 106).

<sup>68</sup> Tonna was the leader of one party in a schism of the conversionists: “By the mid-1840s, however, a fundamental schism was emerging in the ranks of conversionists between those who believed that Jews should be converted prior to their restoration and those who insisted that such attempts were futile, since Jewry would be converted *en masse* in Zion and, moreover, would retain their distinct national characteristics based upon the ancient Covenant between their patriarch, Abraham, and God” (Rubinstein and Rubinstein, *Philosemitism* 133).

hypocritical to modern readers,<sup>69</sup> but Tonna believed that Catholic views were based on ignorance, while Jewish views were based on learned misinterpretation, and she justified her stance through premillennialist theology. Although Tonna was no less confident in the superiority of her Christian interpretation of scriptures over Jewish interpretations than her conversionist counterparts, her specific version of pre-millenarianism opened up a space for respectful dialogue with the Jewish community by eliminating an immediate push for conversion. Instead, Tonna's belief that Jewish and Christian difference would eventually be dissolved in the future allowed her to meanwhile focus on what they had in common, particularly on shared attitudes toward worship. Valman notes that Evangelicals like Tonna saw parallels between their own struggles against ritualism and priestcraft and Jewish efforts to break away from Rabbinical tradition (94). Furthermore, Tonna held up the faithfulness of Jewish worship practices, more visible because they were different, as an example of how Christians should combat secularism.

Poetry played a particularly prominent role in Tonna's rather strange quest to demonstrate the advancement of the Jewish people by showing off their talents. Yet discussing the merits of Jewish poetry also caused Tonna to revisit the question of what makes poetry valuable to a religious audience. Her encounter with Jewish perspectives,

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<sup>69</sup> It was not uncommon for Protestants who expressed the most extreme anti-Catholic views to simultaneously express philosemitism. Several scholars have described why this occurred, but the seeming hypocrisy of this position did not escape all of Tonna's early readers. In an October 1842 article for the *CLM*, "The Jewish Press," Tonna quotes an article from the *Voice of Jacob* that criticizes her for assuming that Jews would join in her condemnation of Catholicism. The author sees anti-Catholic attitudes as "uncharitable and harsh, nay more, as highly intolerant" (347). Valman argues that, "The argument against intolerance towards Jews quickly became meshed with a critique of Catholicism" (58). Protestants contrasted their approach to converting Jews with what they perceived as the Catholic approach: "The Protestant approach to conversion was, then, also a feminised one understood in contrast to the invasive violence perpetuated by Catholicism against both Jews and the Anglican liturgy" (58). Donald Lewis also points out that Protestants used their discussion of Jews to establish superiority over Catholics: "By embracing the Jews, the Protestants could, on the one hand, condemn the legacy of Christian mistreatment of Jews in Roman Catholic Europe and distance themselves from traditional Catholic attitudes to the Jews and thereby commend themselves to Jews. On the other hand, the evangelicals saw in the conversion of Jews like Frey and Wolff and in the evangelical mission to the Jews an affirmation of their own identity as true apostolic Christians. By the 1830s philosemitism and anti-Catholicism were becoming the flip sides of the same coin" (101-102).

therefore, was not tangential to the development of women's poetry in the *CLM*. On the contrary, I argue that Tonna's work with Jewish poet Grace Aguilar did more than allow the two women to establish an affective connection while ignoring doctrinal differences, it caused Tonna to question the very heart of Evangelical exceptionalism and once again brought forward the fraught question of how much poetry was in alliance with Evangelical thought. Eventually, led by Aguilar, she suggests that creating an attitude of worship and promoting humanitarian action form the basis of poetry's value.

### Literary Encounters with Difference

The material that Tonna published about Jews was positive throughout the run of the *CLM*, but it became dramatically more engaged with her contemporaneous Jewish community in Britain as time went on. Material published early on in the *CLM*'s discussion of Judaism conforms to the more typical (though still positive) attitude toward Jews expressed by Christian female reformers of the time.<sup>70</sup> One such contribution is a poem called "The Jew" by "Elnie," who published two poems in the *CLM*. Although it appeared in the May 1838 number of the *CLM*, a note appended to the poem states that it was composed in 1833, thus placing the sentiments it expresses at an even earlier point in debates about Judaism. This poem expresses what the author believes Christians' stance should be toward Jews, but also speaks of Jews as an object of pity rather than of admiration. At the same time, it subtly reveals the difficulty of locating poetry's purpose in creating a positive stance toward another religious position. The first three stanzas paint the picture of a wandering Jewish man who is mourning the loss of his people's greatness. Following this, Elnie suggests that the proper response is to pity him rather than harm or take advantage of him. The poem concludes with the following three stanzas:

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<sup>70</sup> Galchinsky points out, "Most representations of Jews available between 1780 and 1860 in England encouraged Christians to pity Jews" (29).



Rouse, rouse ye, then, Christians! if Christians indeed,  
 Your hearts for the sorrow of Judah will bleed;  
 Ye will mourn for her temple, her glory laid low,  
 Ye will mourn for her son, the poor sorrowing Jew!

Oh think ye with fear on the curse and the woes  
 Jehovah hath threatened on Abraham's foes;  
 Oh remember that He who was offered for you,  
 In the days of His flesh was a sorrowing Jew!

And thou, blessed Spirit, whose life-giving power  
 Alone can the feet of the wanderer restore,  
 Oh teach them their own pierced Messiah to view.  
 And bring to His fold the poor sorrowing Jew! (21-32)

The first stanza quoted here begins with a call to action for Christians ("Rouse, rouse ye"). Yet, the poem does not advocate that Christians *do* anything in particular as this phrase would lead us to expect. Instead, it simply suggests a change in attitude and encourages an emotional reaction. The poem functions mainly as a rebuke of those Christians who take advantage of Jews, but it rebukes them not by counteracting negative stereotypes of the Jews, but by putting forward another stereotype of "the poor sorrowing Jew!", a refrain which is repeated in the last line of every stanza. It thus allows Christians to maintain a posture of authority even while relinquishing hatred of Jews.

At the same time, this poem also points out what many Christians had difficulty coming to terms with: that they shared much of their religion in common with Jews. This poem suggests that Christians "if Christians indeed" must acknowledge this affinity and defend Jews from persecution. Thus, the poem suggests that respecting Judaism is definitional to being a Christian. It posits a connection between Christians and Jews in all three members of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (which is ironic as the existence of the trinity is one of the main points of departure between Christianity and Judaism). By using this doctrinal device, Elnie seeks to show Christians that defending Jews is a part of their Christian commitment rather than antithetical to it. First, she points out that Jehovah, the God of the Jews, is also the God worshipped and feared by Christians. Next, she uses Jesus's earthly origins to point to the roots of Christianity in Judaism. Finally, faced with the simultaneous (and perhaps competing) desire to affirm

that the Christian religion is in fact superior to Judaism and the desire to inculcate respect among Christians for the Jews' inheritance as God's chosen people, Elnie turns to the Holy Spirit to get her out of her predicament. Again refraining from calling her audience to action, in the final lines she suggests that the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit "alone," will convert Jews to Christianity, so it is only important for her audience to have the right attitude toward the Jewish people. Thus, this poem does not advocate for specific Christian actions to help Jewish people, nor does it ask for their efforts in converting them. Rather, it asks them to recognize the long-standing connection between Christianity and Judaism as a reason to refrain from hurting a people that Elnie depicts as already downtrodden.

This sympathetic, yet problematic, poem demonstrates the difficulty Christian women had in creating effective advocacy on behalf of the Jewish community, but it also serves as a foil for the remarkable way that Tonna eventually used her admiration for Jewish literary culture to counteract stereotypes of Jews and reverse negative policies toward them. Rather than using the stereotype of the sorrowing Jew, Tonna depicted Jewish culture in Britain as impressive and admirable, seeing Jewish accomplishments as a sign of their coming nationhood. Instead of advocating on behalf of the Jewish community by using her own poetry, she eventually uses Jewish poetry itself to demonstrate Jewish artistic competence.

Tonna's discussion of the key role that the Jewish periodical press could play in enhancing the standing of the Jewish community not only demonstrates her respect for Jewish intellectual and artistic endeavors, but also reveals that she had dramatically revised her attitude toward the periodical press since her early days as an editor. Unlike her concern of eight years earlier that the press was often the "instrument of Satan," Tonna hailed the advent of the Jewish periodical press as a wonderful mechanism for showing Christians the worth of English Jews. In 1842, almost every number of the *CLM* had a commentary on the rise of the Jewish press or on the relationship between

Christians and Jews, and in January of 1842, Tonna first brought her readers' attention to new Jewish publications in a short notice called "A Sign of the Times":

[One of the remarkable things of the present eventful days is the establishment of a highly respectable Jewish Newspaper, in English, edited by the chief Rabbi of the Portuguese connection. It is, of course, Rabbinical in doctrine, but contains much interesting matter, and among the rest a Dictionary of Biblical Rabbinical Hebrew. It is entitled 'The Jewish Chronicle.' What would our persecuting forefathers have said to this! On all sides we are compelled to recognize the rapid national rise of the Jewish people: bone coming to his bone. Ezek. Xxxvii. 7.—ED] (19)

Uncharacteristically, Tonna affirms the value of the Jewish press even while noting that its doctrine is opposed to her own. In March she gives one reason for being interested in the Jewish press: English Jews would now be able to show those who mocked them that "The Jews are not what such shallow observers as this writer in Blackwood suppose, or affect to suppose them; and this will soon be made manifest to all people by means of the press now that they are availing themselves of its powerful aid" ("The Voice of Jacob" 252). Tonna now sees the press as a powerful instrument regardless of who wields it. Mastery of the press, she hopes, will create respect for Jewish culture.

Just as Tonna was able to articulate the periodical press's value for the Jewish community more clearly than she was initially able to explain its value for her own cause, she was also able to more clearly articulate the value of women's poetry within the context of promoting Jewish culture. This suggests that, because Tonna's experience of literature outside of her own tradition forced her to view the work that poetry does from an outsider's perspective, she was able to see new possibilities for poetry within her own context. Thus, Tonna's encounter with difference in the form of Anglo-Jewish culture had the opposite effect on the journal as her worries about Catholic encroachments, causing her to re-open the definition of "good poetry" rather than retreating behind the safe entrenchment of "good poetry equals good doctrine." Tonna's tactic of using the literary merit of Jewish writers to combat negative attitudes toward Judaism led her to

downplay the doctrinal correctness on which she had fixated in previous works and instead focus on formal merit, beauty, and a devotional attitude.

By incorporating Jewish poetry into the pages of the *CLM*, Tonna found an apt means to demonstrate Jewish literary merit to her readers rather than just telling them about it.<sup>71</sup> In February 1842, the month after she began discussing the Jewish press, Tonna included a poem by an anonymous “Daughter of Israel” that had previously been published in the Jewish newspaper *The Voice of Jacob*. Although nothing in the content of this poem, titled “The Holiness of Grief,” marks it as a peculiar choice for an Anglican Evangelical magazine, the way Tonna responds to the poem marks a shift in the *CLM*’s rhetoric on women’s poetry: “We copy the following from the Jewish newspaper noticed in our last. The stanzas are eminently beautiful. The genius of this splendid people is now shining out in every possible way. Oh, that a beam of ‘the Day-spring from on high,’ may speedily kindle into a holy flame the breasts of all the sweet singers of Israel!” (“Jewish Poetry” 143).<sup>72</sup> Here, the beauty of the stanzas and their ingenuity are not reviled as distracting furbelows, but rather constitute the very heart of what Tonna wishes to

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<sup>71</sup> Cynthia Scheinberg has masterfully demonstrated the rhetorical use of Jewish difference within Christian poetics. She argues that the “simultaneous invocation and dismissal of Jewish poetic/prophetic identity is essential” to Victorian poetics (*Women’s Poetry* 34). “With the belief that the processes of poetry and Christianity are essentially linked, Victorian theological poetic theory repeatedly engaged with Jewish difference as part of the process of constructing the English Christian poetic self, yet always with an explicit need to disassociate this theory of poetry from actual Jewish people” (54). Tonna, however, seems to go against this trend by explicitly using Jewish poetry to call attention to “actual Jewish people,” although she is simultaneously co-opting a narrative of Jewish cultural ascendancy for her Christian premillenarian project. Scheinberg also suggests that, within the construction of Christian theological poetics, “a Jewish poet, offering a ‘self-understanding’ of Jewish identity, becomes an oxymoron” (55). In publishing and calling attention to Jewish poetry within the *CLM*, Tonna seems to provide a space for her Christian readers to encounter this “self-understanding of Jewish identity,” though that space is surrounded and mediated by her own Christian editorial voice.

<sup>72</sup> Here Tonna is using what Scheinberg identifies as a philo-Judaic discourse “that repeatedly emphasized the perfect poetry epitomized by ‘the sweet singer of Israel.’ This ‘sweet singer’ was generally understood to be King David in his assumed authorship of the Psalms, but the image extends to other Hebrew poets of the Bible and classical Judaism” (*Women’s Poetry* 52). This discourse sometimes avoided depicting Jewish poetry as an incomplete part of a Christian paradigm, instead suggesting it as the “highest model of poetic identity available” (52).

demonstrate: the worth of the Jewish people, and their march toward nationhood. In addition to re-orientating the *CLM*'s attitude toward the beautiful formal qualities in poetry, Tonna turns much of the journal's previous rhetoric about women's poetic endeavors on its head. She especially notes that the poem is by a "Daughter of Israel" and touts the accomplishments of a female poet as proof of Jewish genius. Amazingly enough, while the place of women's poetry was quite fraught in the earlier years of her own journal, here she points to the accomplishments of a Jewish female poet as proof of the rising status of the Jewish people, a clear endorsement of women's poetry as a marker of cultural achievement.

By incorporating Jewish voices directly into her periodical, Tonna created an opportunity for dialogue with the Jewish thinkers of her time. In his memoir of Tonna, Lewis Tonna reveals that his wife embraced the idea of open dialogue that many other Christians feared:

She rejoiced that the Jew could now speak out for himself, say who and what he was. Strong in invincible truth, she feared no damage to its sacred cause by fair and open discussion, and in matters of faith and doctrine, she felt it to be infinitely better that the men of Jacob should be able to bring forth their strong reasons, instead of feeling that their voice was stifled in a one-sided controversy. (41)

Although Tonna, in her role as editor, had the power to comment on all of the Jewish poetry and excerpts that she included in the *CLM*, she often did not try to Christianize the Jewish viewpoints in these excerpts. Tonna's extended discussion of advancements in Anglo-Jewish culture in a September 1843 article called "Jewish Literature" not only gives us a glimpse of her conflicted feelings about the relationship between Jewish and Christian doctrine, but also includes a poem by Grace Aguilar from a distinctly Jewish perspective. In this extended discussion, Tonna once again points to Jewish literary merit and in particular singles out Grace Aguilar as the type of Jewish writer whom she respects. First, she refutes the common idea that Jewish leaders keep their people in ignorance of even Jewish scriptures and "That in the higher circles of society, the Hebrew

people are neither inclined—nor fitted to mingle with us: and that between their literature and ours a gulf exists, impassable to both, save for purposes of critical investigation” (222). Here she suggests, on one hand, that Jewish religious opinions are not formed in ignorance even though they differ from Christian readings of the scripture, and on the other hand, that Jewish attainments in literature demonstrate their social equality.

In this article, however, she goes beyond combating prejudices that would deny Jews their merited place in secular “high society” to point out the religious price minorities must pay to gain such acceptance:

In this, and in every walk of science, in the fine arts, and in what are called the belles-lettres, the highest eminence is continually attained by Jews; they, alas! we find too often among them, as among ourselves, that in such cases religion is made of no account; and to avoid the current reproach which it ought to be their constant labour openly to rebut, they frequently deny their race, exchanging a nominal Judaism for equally vain, unmeaning christianity. Having professed to follow Moses, until the allurements of fame sparkled before their eyes, they, as a mere step to distinction, have professed to follow Christ; without once knowing or caring about either. (223)

In contrast to what we might expect from Tonna, the staunch Evangelical, she criticizes Jewish conversion rather than Jewish refusals to convert. While Rubenstein has documented Tonna’s split with conversionists because of her specific millenarian beliefs, this article also reveals the extent to which Tonna’s shift of opinion rested on worries about secularization. For Tonna, these “nominal” conversions demonstrate the materialist bent of not “knowing or caring about either” religion, a lack of interest in any spiritual matters, conversion for the sake of gaining wealth or fame. In fact, she comes close to acknowledging that practicing Jews and practicing Christians are allies in promoting a common worldview.

Tonna’s distaste for nominal conversion caused her to embrace writers such as Grace Aguilar whose religious integrity she admired, seeing Aguilar as her own counterpart within the Jewish community. Just as Tonna sought to encourage young Christian women in their faith, one of Aguilar’s main goals was to provide young Jewish

women surrounded by Christian reading material with a Jewish perspective.<sup>73</sup> In her article, “Jewish Literature,” Tonna offers a particularly glowing review of Aguilar’s book *The Spirit of Judaism*, which makes an argument against excessive formalism that an Evangelical crusader against the Oxford movement might well recognize. In *The Spirit of Judaism*, Aguilar advocates for a Jewish “religion of the heart” rather than a religion of mere tradition or mere inheritance. She grieves “that the very rites and ceremonies instituted to keep up a lively remembrance of the Lord should be the very means of bidding us forget Him, as if religion consisted only in outward form” (229). While she does not think that all the formal elements of religion need to be abandoned, she bids women to “teach the *religion* of the heart unto her children, instead of merely inculcating peculiar forms, and desiring them to observe peculiar rites” (156). Aguilar’s comments highlight similarities between Jewish calls for worship reform in the mid-nineteenth century and Evangelical thought. Aguilar even uses the term “religion of the heart” in reference to the way she wants her fellow Jews to worship, which was a term frequently used in reference to Evangelicalism at this time.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Cynthia Scheinberg notes that Aguilar “paid special attention to the needs of Jewish women in her writing, knowing that they were often readers of Victorian novels and poetry written from Christian perspectives” (*Women’s Poetry* 149). At the same time, Scheinberg establishes that Aguilar sought both Jewish and Christian audiences in her quest to improve the position of Judaism within England (143).

<sup>74</sup> Elisabeth Jay, for instance, titled her well-known study of evangelicalism *Religion of the Heart*. Aguilar worried that evangelical Christianity offered an accessible religion to young women where Judaism had failed, thus leaving them more open to conversion. In her discussion of Aguilar, Valman emphasizes the extent to which the tone of Aguilar’s theology (along with other Jewish reformers at the time) was influenced by Evangelicalism: “Aguilar recasts Jewish theology in the feminised and personalized terms of Evangelicalism” (98). While other critics have emphasized the ways in which the European Anglo-Jewish Enlightenment may have influenced Aguilar, Valman asserts that “this reading disregards the many striking ways in which her work creatively appropriates not the rationalism of the European enlightenment but, rather, the moral and religious fervour as well as the literary forms of the Evangelical Revival” (95). Valman’s suggestion that Aguilar shared many affinities with her Protestant counterparts is convincing, but Cynthia Scheinberg also points out that her interest in direct personal approaches to God are a precursor to Jewish Feminist theology rather than simply a concession to Christian Protestantism (*Women’s Poetry* 154).

Tonna, on the other hand, wrestles with the fact that she likes Aguilar's sentiments in *The Spirit of Judaism* quite a bit but doesn't know what to do with Aguilar's doctrinal differences: "We never read a book in which the spirit of *love* was more perfectly developed,--one more free from every approach to asperity, more overflowing with tenderness for all who, like herself, make the Bible their study and delight. Yet is Miss Aguilar an uncompromising Jewess; she labours assiduously to do away with the necessity, and thereby with the doctrine, of that atonement without which no sinner can for one moment stand before God" ("Jewish Literature" 224). Rather than trying to resolve this "problem," Tonna seems to present it as a question to her readers. How should we react to this author who shares everything in common with us but our most essential point of doctrine? Not knowing quite what to do, Tonna turns to one of Aguilar's poems, stating: "We do feel very proud of it, as a noble specimen alike of Jewish feeling and of Jewish literature" (227). This statement seems to get her out of the controversy, suggesting that the poem is a nice, uncontroversial way to demonstrate Jewish literary merit without worrying about doctrine. In fact, the poem is nothing of the kind. The poem of Aguilar's that Tonna republishes is called "Stanzas: To the Memory of the Rev. Robert Anderson of Trinity Chapel, Brighton" by "A Child of Israel." In it, Aguilar offers a tribute to a Christian clergyman friend who has just died. Rather than avoiding the issues that Tonna brought up in the preceding article, Aguilar offers the mirror image of Tonna's sentiments from a Jewish perspective, the admiration of one who is not of the same faith, but the wish that they were:

Yes! tho' I mourn thy Faith was not God's loved and chosen one,  
 I know, I feel, a fadeless wreath thy faithful work has won,  
 According to the light vouchsafed, our Father's Love demands,  
 And thou didst give Him "all thy heart" e'en as His word  
 commands.

And did His will, with holy zeal, and reverential awe,  
 And follow'd all which thou believ'dst was His most sacred law,  
 And so, I know, I feel thee bless'd on earth, and now in Heaven;  
 And mourn thee, Brother! ay and wish such grace to *us* were given.



And yet rejoice that now for thee the clouds of Faith are flown,  
 And Israel's God is known to thee, as ONE and ONE ALONE!  
 That all of darkness, all of doubt, no more thy soul may claim,  
 For ev'ry varied Faith on earth in Heav'n is the same! (29-40)

Aguilar expresses the belief that the Reverend will go to heaven because he was faithful in following his own beliefs. The answer her poem gives to Tonna's question is that an afterlife is not dependent on religious doctrine but on religious faithfulness, a position that Tonna is unable to take, but which she still publishes in her journal. Instead of fretting over theological differences, Aguilar emphasizes the similarities between her faith and the Reverend's such as serving God and helping the poor.

While Aguilar argues that theology does not determine one's ultimate fate, she still asserts that her own theology, rather than the Reverend's, is correct. The statement that God is "ONE and ONE ALONE!" is a direct refutation of the Christian idea of trinity. Why does Tonna, who claims to appreciate poetry mostly for its ability to propagate correct doctrine and sway people to social reform, include a poem directly contradicting her own doctrine in her periodical? By allowing Grace Aguilar to publish in the *CLM*, and thus allowing her readers to see the mirror image of her own sentiments from a Jewish perspective, Tonna certainly increases respect for the Jewish community's spiritual integrity. Perhaps, unwittingly, she allowed her audience to see that Evangelical Christians were not the only ones who had to deal with religious difference. Tonna also, however, brings into question her journal's previous attitude toward and selection criteria for poetry—reinforcing Christianity by effectively dispersing correct doctrine—because Aguilar was Tonna's opponent over the issue of how to understand sacrificial atonement.<sup>75</sup> Sidestepping these tricky doctrinal divisions, Tonna instead chooses to

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<sup>75</sup> Tonna's understanding of Christ's death on the cross embraces a theology of penal substitution, which rested on an interpretation of the tradition of sacrifice in Judaism that was not necessarily shared by Jews (or all Christians). Tonna sees the physical act of sacrificing an animal as absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of a sin in the Old Testament, with Christ offering himself as the final sacrifice. Nineteenth-century Jews did not necessarily interpret the tradition of sacrifice in the same way. In an October 1843 article, "The Jewish Press," Tonna publishes an excerpt from *The Voice of Jacob* in which the editor explains how his understanding of atonement differs from hers. He suggests that the physical act of sacrifice was not essential: "True, the offering of sacrifices was prescribed for several transgressions, but

define Aguilar's merits based on shared attitudes toward worship and on shared humanitarian concerns.

### Publishing Across Religious Boundaries

Both "The Holiness of Grief" and "Stanzas: To the Memory of the Rev. Robert Anderson of Trinity Chapel, Brighton," the two poems I have discussed thus far, had been published in other venues prior to Tonna's publication of them in the *CLM*. This suggests that the inclusion of these poems in the *CLM* was more helpful to Tonna in telling her millenarian narrative about Judaism than to the authors in gaining an audience for their work. At the same time, at least in Grace Aguilar's case, this republication provided a new type of audience. After being introduced to the readers of the *CLM*, Aguilar continued to publish several poems directly in the *CLM* and even turned to it when her work was not accepted by Jewish publications.<sup>76</sup> This suggests that Aguilar also found the relationship beneficial, and that she was interested in speaking to a Christian audience as well as a Jewish one.<sup>77</sup>

While acknowledging her anti-conversionist stance, some scholars have, in fact, accused Aguilar of being too attracted to certain elements of Christian culture or of being too willing to make herself palatable to a Christian audience, toning down her Jewishness

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we ought not therefore to decide so hastily whether it was the mere sacrifice, and not the confession of the sin committed, an expression of penance, and the resolution in future to avoid the like misdeed, which were to accompany it, that constituted the atonement, (Lev. V. 5;) or whether, in such a case, sacrifices were not ordained in order to render the confession and penance more impressive" (349).

<sup>76</sup> Aguilar gave an account of sending her poem "The Hebrew's Appeal" to the *CLM* after it was refused by the *Voice of Jacob* when she republished it in the American periodical *The Occident* edited by Isaac Leiser. Rachel Beth Zion Lask Abrahams sees Aguilar's decision to send her work to Christian publications after its rejection by Jewish publications as a sign of Aguilar's growing confidence as a successful artist (143), while Scheinberg notes that Aguilar was interested in reaching both Jewish and Christian audiences (*Women's Poetry* 153).

<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Franklin, the editor of the *Voice of Jacob* was at first hostile to Tonna, but later became her friend and used her periodical to help spread the word about Jewish causes (Rubinstein, "Pioneering Philosemite" 110-111)

in order to gain acceptance.<sup>78</sup> Others, such as Michael Galchinsky, have pointed to the necessity of a more conciliatory approach in order to be heard. In his discussion of Aguilar's novels, he argues, "Because she balanced demands with concessions, both in relation to men and in relation to the dominant culture, she became the most lauded Jewish woman writing in Victorian England" ("Jewish Women's Bargains" 29).<sup>79</sup> Galchinsky argues that Aguilar's novels suggest that, in exchange for Christians respecting Jewish difference, Jews would confine these differences to the domestic sphere.<sup>80</sup> Yet if we examine Aguilar's work in the context of a specific Christian publication like the *CLM* and her relationship with Tonna as an editor, her work seems to have far fewer concessions.<sup>81</sup>

One way that more recent scholars, such as Cynthia Scheinberg and Nadia Valman, have defended Aguilar's publication decisions and interest in Protestant

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<sup>78</sup> According to Abrahams, who questions Aguilar's knowledge of Rabbinical Judaism, *The Spirit of Judaism* reveals a "Jewish Protestantism drawn from her early association with non-Jewish acquaintances" (142). Scheinberg points out that Aguilar's interest and success in reaching Christian audiences "has had the effect in critical literature of casting Aguilar as too interested in Christianity, a critique which has thus led to an implicit questioning of her Jewish identification" (*Women's Poetry* 153). By contrast, Scheinberg sees her as an important feminist voice within Judaism and points out that she always approached Christian communities with the goal of defending Judaism.

<sup>79</sup> In "Modern Jewish Women's Dilemmas: Grace Aguilar's Bargains," Michael Galchinsky argues in relation to Aguilar's novels that she makes "bargains" with both Christian liberalism and patriarchal Jewish culture. He extends this argument in *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer* in which he suggests that "While Aguilar was negotiating the terms of Jews' increasing participation in the Victorian world, she was also negotiating terms for women's increasing participation in the Jewish world" (136). According to Galchinsky, she was so successful "because she balanced demands with concessions, both in relation to men and the dominant culture" (136).

<sup>80</sup> Nadia Valman interprets Aguilar's depictions of the domestic sphere differently, seeing her use of private space as a commentary on the privacy of religion: "Aguilar's writing on Judaism in a feminine and domestic context powerfully served the cause of Jewish emancipation, whose advocates claimed that religion was a matter of private conscience of no concern to the state" (111).

<sup>81</sup> Valman argues that "what makes the work of Grace Aguilar distinctive is...her attempt to articulate a Jewish identity in the language of Evangelical Christianity" (100). Valman does not see this as a passive absorption of ideas. Rather, "Protestant rhetoric was able to provide her with a persuasive polemical strategy for the cause of the Jews" (95). This is in line with Scheinberg's reading that Aguilar's similarities to Christian women writers reveal "a rhetorical strategy...rather than ideological commitment to Christian/Protestant doctrine" (*Women's Poetry* 154).

Christianity is by recognizing the role that Jewish gender norms played in Aguilar's relationship to the Evangelical press. Valman argues that, unlike many Jews who were attracted to Protestant ideas because they saw them as a point of entry into gentile society, Aguilar's attraction to Protestantism was motivated more by "the empowering Evangelical conception of femininity" than by a desire to enter mainstream society (99). Even while Evangelical women like Stodart and Tonna touted their alleged commitment to separate spheres, they exercised enormous control over the content of their work and their means of publication. Aguilar, by contrast, had a very difficult relationship with her male Jewish publishers and their editorial comments.<sup>82</sup> Thus, her attraction to Evangelicalism, her use of its rhetorical tactics, and her use of Evangelical publication venues may reflect her desire for a greater voice within her own community rather than her desire to leave it behind for Christianity.<sup>83</sup>

While Aguilar's defenders have effectively presented a gender-based motive for Aguilar's relationship with the Christian community, little work has been done to understand the effect that her work had within Christian publication venues like the *CLM*. Publishing in the *CLM* enabled Aguilar to present Judaism to a wider audience as a viable religious discourse. Together, Tonna and Aguilar created a dialogue about Jewishness that not only asked the *CLM*'s audience to respect Jews in spite of their differences, but also asked them to admire Jews for clinging to these differences. In her relationship with

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<sup>82</sup> The Jewish periodical *Voice of Jacob* gave Aguilar's work *Records of Israel* "a luke warm reception" while the Evangelical periodical press extolled her (Valman 98). In addition, Aguilar had a difficult relationship with Isaac Leeser, a Philadelphia rabbi who published *Spirit of Judaism*, but added extensive corrections and commentary critiquing her without her permission (Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry* 152). Scheinberg suggests that Aguilar turned to lyrical poetry as a vehicle for theological ideas because it helped her to escape this type of Rabbinical critique (*Women's Poetry* 148).

<sup>83</sup> Valman points to the greater freedom Evangelical women had to comment on religion. Thus, Aguilar not only turns to Evangelical rhetoric to appeal to Christians, but also to assert authority within her own community: "Amongst Evangelicals the spectacle of a woman writing on religious matters was not quite so extraordinary. For Aguilar, meanwhile, the complaint of the prophet whose words were falling on deaf ears linked her to the rhetoric of embattled self-righteousness typical of the Evangelical woman writer, whose calling required her to transgress feminine modesty" (98).

Tonna, we see that Aguilar's commitments to her beliefs elicited Tonna's admiration and helped Tonna to expand her thinking on religious difference beyond the kind of "tolerance" that Michael Galchinsky critiques. While both Aguilar and Tonna had to make accommodations in order to work together, Aguilar, as a religious minority constantly confronted by religious difference, was the more adept in articulating her own beliefs while still maintaining an open dialogue with Christians like Tonna. Even though her poetry emphasizes the commonality in Christian and Jewish devotion, it makes no doctrinal concessions (asserting, for instance, the Jewish belief that God is "one"), and it suggests the equal or superior status of the Jewish religion rather than allowing Tonna to co-opt Judaism as a tool for Christian teleology.

In her quest for acceptance of Judaism, Aguilar both emphasized commonality and affirmed the value of religious difference. In her book *The Jewish Faith* she states that she "never could discover, the distinction between Jewish and Christian *spirituality*," and she distinguishes between creed and spirituality in a way that invites Christians to appreciate the elements of Judaism that they have in common (9-10). Yet she also demonstrates the need for religious difference, claiming that "Religion is the only subject in which prejudice in favour of one's own is a positive virtue...All who have at all studied human nature, will allow, that the heart most honest, most faithful, and most clearly comprehending its own, is endowed with the greatest charity and liberality towards the religion of another" (10). Her argument has a double power, both affirming her appreciation for other religious positions and deflecting their desire to change her own.

Aguilar's suggestion that the spirit of religion can be celebrated separately from eliciting agreement on creed influenced Tonna's reevaluation of religious difference toward the end of her editorship. While Tonna does not join Aguilar in her second conviction that it is best to understand other religions through devotion to one's own, she comes close in her admiration for the religious Jew over the nominal Christian convert.

Furthermore, although she does not put the split between spirituality and creed in the same terms as Aguilar, Tonna's defense of the Jewish people often centers on shared attitudes toward worship and reform. Beyond admiring the artistic merit of Jewish literature, Tonna begins to acknowledge the shared ideas and dignity of present-day Jewish practices. She attempts to share this attitude with her readers by emphasizing similarities in the worship practices of Evangelicals and Jews like Aguilar who were reforming the Rabinnical system. In June 1842, Tonna compares a Christian gathering to promote charity and worship reform with a Jewish gathering for a similar purpose. Like the Evangelicals, this group was opposed to ritualism in worship: "while we have been congregating our thousands in Exeter Hall, in behalf of the noble Gentile institutions that do honour to the church of Christ, our Hebrew brethren have assembled also, in promotion of objects highly laudable among themselves" ("Jews, Turks" 553-554).<sup>84</sup> She goes on to extol Jewish charities and reforms in synagogue worship. In doing so, her object is partly to suggest that Jews and Christians will eventually unite (or really, that Judaism will be subsumed in Christianity one day). In noting the parallel development of "Gentile" and "Hebrew" institutions, however, she also suggests another standard of value outside of creed, one which might have parallels in a number of other religions: purity of worship.

In recognizing a worshipful attitude as the definitional feature of sincere religion, perhaps one that transcended doctrinal differences, Tonna was dipping her toes into a dangerous (at least from her perspective), swirling pool of nineteenth-century debate on

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<sup>84</sup> While previous scholars had linked the reforms made to the Jewish service in 1842 by the secessionist congregation at the Western London Synagogue to the Jewish Enlightenment and Reform Judaism in Germany "which emphasized the universalist aspect of Jewish teachings," Nadia Valman asserts that scholars have more recently linked it to 1840s theological controversies and to Evangelical ideas in particular: "The Evangelical attack on Rabbinical Judaism (alongside Catholicism and Anglo Catholicism) as superstitious and separatist, deeply affected the leaders of Anglo-Jewry who were increasingly seeking entry into the upper reaches of gentile society Their response to the forcefulness and persistence of this critique was to reconceptualise Judaism in more bibliocentric and spiritual terms" (99).

how Christians should approach the topic of comparative religion. Although we have become very familiar with a narrative of secularization arguing that scientific discoveries in geology and biology were responsible for a loss of faith among Victorians, Gordon Graham, an astute observer of sociological debates on secularization from the vantage point of philosophy, notes that “the story of Christianity in the nineteenth century does not accord very easily with the simple suggestion that scientific knowledge eroded its credibility” (35). Graham suggests, rather, that the study of other religions and the development of religion as a science first undermined Christianity’s claim to uniqueness (54).<sup>85</sup> The community of Evangelical writers who contributed to the *CLM* struggled with this new information about Christianity’s relationship to other ancient and modern religions, and they came to several different conclusions. Information about the similarities between religious practices in different creeds could be used to argue that religion is a natural human impulse across cultures, and that it was therefore foolish for a culture to turn away from it. At the same time, they balked at the idea that Christianity was just one among many religions, an idea which could be used to question the truth claims and relevancy of any particular religion.

Even before Tonna began to use worship to promote ties with the Jewish community, writers for the *CLM* such as X.Q., who we earlier saw advocating for gender equality but who was also Tonna’s most frequent contributor on theology, church history, and science, had already laid out the idea that worship is a unifying thread in all religions. In May of 1838, in the first part of his series on “The Religion of Nature,” X.Q. notes one of his premises: “the general consent of mankind that worship, or, in other words, RELIGION, is needful to them, be it of whatsoever form or nature. My present design is

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<sup>85</sup> While scientific developments would become a major factor in loss of faith among social elites, Graham suggests that devout Christians had a system of ideas in place that allowed them to reconcile scientific developments with existing Christian ideas, but they had more difficulty coping with the idea that Christianity’s history was merely a compilation of ideas from other religions (40).

to consider the origin, and not the existence of this universality of natural religion” (original emphasis 443). X.Q.’s premise is particularly pertinent to this discussion. He suggests not only that religion is a common human need, but also defines religion in passing. Religion is “worship,” of something greater than oneself.<sup>86</sup> Thus, if one were worried about the possibility of secularization, promoting and defending worship as a general practice would be crucial.<sup>87</sup> X.Q. confirms this connection among the worship practices of different religions in order to set those who would move away from worship as outside the pale. He points to the arrogance of those who think that they can do without religion: “It is left for civilized man, in Christian lands, to be ‘the fool’ that says in his heart, ‘There is no God!’” (443). For X.Q., recognition of the common desire for worship is an indictment of skepticism.

This attitude, however, was too liberal for some *CLM* contributors such as Stodart (M.A.S.), who articulates a more substantive and typically Evangelical definition of religion in her 1844 *Principles of Education Practically Considered; with an Especial Reference to the Present State of Female Education in England*:

To the great majority of readers, it is hardly necessary to say that the word religion is frequently employed with great latitude of signification. The term came to us, as is well known, from ancient Rome, where it signified the sum of ceremonies and institutions established in honour of the gods, not including the idea of doctrine and precepts. The original heathenish cast of the word, is, it is to be feared, traceable in its present usage. The Socinian takes the word, and applies it to his lifeless code, which, by the highest abuse of language, is sometimes called Christianity. The Romanist

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<sup>86</sup> This definition accords with contemporary explorations of the commonality among religions. Gordon Graham, for instance, suggests that: “Any religion understands human beings to be subservient and inferior to, because dependent upon, a higher realm of being, whether this is conceived as a personal all-powerful God or not. To think otherwise is to attribute an absurd pre-eminence to humanity within the world as a whole” (150).

<sup>87</sup> Gordon Graham’s understanding of worship accords very well with X.Q.’s as he also argues that it is a defining feature of religion. “True piety is thus a kind of humility. It consists in acknowledging our finitude against the ‘intuition’ of infinity. Worship inspires a reverence for the mysteries that lie beyond our finitude (including the limits of our understanding), and consists in forms of veneration by which piety and reverence are expressed” (150).



lays hold of it for his external observances, while even the Deist will talk about his incomplete and unsatisfactory creed, and will entitle it religion. The word is applied to the foolish mass of Mahomedan absurdities, to the self-torturing rites of the Hindoo; so that many differing creeds...ascrib[e] to it almost every possible shade of meaning. (28) <sup>88</sup>

Stodart pointedly advocates for a definition (an explicitly Evangelical definition) of religion in terms of “doctrine and precepts” rather than “ceremonies and institutions.” For her, the “liberalism” that refuses to pronounce on truth in any particular religion is the real secularizing threat.

A key difference here is that X.Q. believes secularization arises from the prideful attitude that people can do without worship, while Stodart believes it arises from the inability to distinguish between religions. Not only do they offer two different theories about how secularization comes about, but also two different definitions of secularism: for X.Q. it is the failure to acknowledge a non-human source of authority, a withdrawal of religion from social practice. For Stodart, it is the space allowed for religious pluralism, the willingness to grant any given practice validity by calling it religion and thus rendering the term valueless. Although Tonna’s rants against Catholicism suggest an affinity with her friend Mary Ann Stodart’s viewpoint, in discussing Judaism, she moves closer to the view of those like X.Q. who affirm that the religious impulse is distinguishable from creed.

Tonna uses her discussion of Jewish worship both to point to the common humanity of Jews in the face of rampant stereotyping and to criticize Christians for being less stringent in their worship practices. Thus, she sees the members of a minority religion, whose worship practices often seem more visible because they differ from majority practices that are taken for granted, as her allies against secularization. In March 1842 she writes an eloquent rebuttal of an article that had been published first in

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<sup>88</sup> Socinianism is a “religious system which denies the Trinity and the divinity of Christ” (O’Collins and Farrugia 224).

*Blackwoods* and then in *The Times*. This article, as Tonna presents it, perpetuated all of the ugliest stereotypes against the Jews as well as making fun of their names and their Saturday Sabbath. Tonna takes this as an affront to her own religion, not just to Judaism: “The Jew is brought forward to be publicly scoffed at; but the Bible and the Sabbath are the real objects of this contumely” (“The Voice of Jacob” 247). While the article in *Blackwoods* attempts to draw a line between Christian norms and Jewish aberrations, Tonna redraws the battle line between those who respect religious practices and those who scoff at them. Furthermore, her refutation of the idea that Jews are greedy “weasels” calls on Christians to recognize the merit of Jewish Sabbath observances:

We pass over pages of scoffing, and would just remark on the singular plea in favour of Sunday trading founded on the fact that the Jews having kept the seventh day, Saturday, holy, and rigidly abstained, at a very great pecuniary loss, from availing themselves of the very busiest and most profitable day of the whole week, (wonderful that *weasels* should be so conscientious as to keep aloof just when the *prey* is most abundant, and most within their grasp!) do not judge it needful to break the command which bids them labour six days, and do all that they have to do, by complimenting us with an external observance of our rest, on the first day of the week. (251)

Here Tonna even suggests that Jews have been more faithful in their adherence to scripture than Christians, pointing out that they rest on the seventh day, the day God originally designated. Her respect for their faithful, weekly practice of religious worship outweighs the perceived differences between Christians and Jews. Because *Blackwoods* chooses to criticize Jews based on superficial distinctions of naming and timing rather than the realities of religious practice, Tonna can unabashedly defend Jewish religious practice against secular indifference without engaging in debates of creed.

With this unifying power of worship in mind, I would like to return to a passage previously mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In an 1842 response to criticisms of her pro-Jewish attitude, Tonna offers an anecdote to illustrate Jews’ respect for their Sabbath day. She explains that she and a friend walked into a Jewish section of town that held many poor Jewish vendors and were greatly impressed to realize that, because it was

a Saturday, everything was closed for the Jewish Sabbath even though this was the day when they could have made the most money by selling to gentiles. Here, I would like to pause again over her startling reaction: “We stepped through the little quiet street, as if along the aisle of a church” (266). In this moment, her own religious feelings are activated by the worship of a different religious group. Respect for the Sabbath becomes a trait that transcends the doctrinal differences that at other times Tonna had seemed to view as most important, and religious worship becomes a trait that is not tied to creed (just as it is not tied to a physical building).

Perhaps Tonna so enthusiastically promoted Aguilar because she recognized in Aguilar’s sentiments a Jewish counterpart to her own value for infusing the world with worship. In Aguilar’s poem “Village Bells,” which appeared in the April 1844 volume of the *CLM*, Aguilar describes an experience of admiring Christian worship that mirrors Tonna’s admiration for Jewish worship. At first glance, the poem seems to be a simple reflection on the beauty of Sunday church bells, but the reader gradually realizes (especially when knowing the source of the poem) that its narrator admires the tradition of church bells as an outsider to this form of worship. Nevertheless, they enhance the narrator and her companions’ ability to worship in their own way outside of the church. The poem begins by juxtaposing the sound of the Sunday church bells with the visual images of nature that the narrator and her companions see as they walk outside. Soon, the poem becomes a theological reflection as the sound of the bells mingles with the narrator’s musings on the goodness of God’s creation:

And trees in Autumn’s gorgeous dress  
 And flow’rs her smile that woo’d,  
 And little birds, all join’d to bless,  
 HIM, who had call’d them ‘good.’  
 The silv’ry gushings of the rill,  
 Mingled with that low chime,  
 Save such sweet music, all was still  
 For it was Holy time. (9-16)

At the end of this stanza, the narrator recognizes not only God's goodness through nature, but also that, although it is not part of her own tradition, a gentile call to worship is nevertheless a holy moment. Furthermore, in the following stanza, the narrator describes how the bells enhance her own worship by fixing her thoughts on God and on the shared Christian/Jewish belief in creation and a day of rest:

A thousand things around us spake  
Of Him, who all had made,  
With every chime the air that brake,  
On Him our thoughts were stay'd.  
We hail'd with joy the day of rest,  
To weary spirits given—  
And lov'd the sound, our way that blessed  
With such sweet dreams of Heav'n. (25-32)

Here we see that nature itself provides the material for the narrator's observations about God, but she credits the bells with the important task of focusing her attention in the lines "With every chime the air that brake, / on him our thoughts were stay'd" (27-28). In this moment, a Christian act of worship detected by the narrator's ears breaks in on a typical Romantic moment of appreciation for nature and leads to a Jewish act of worship in which the narrator and her companions "hail with joy the day of rest" ordained by God.

The final stanzas clarify the relationship between the narrator (and her nature-appreciating companions) and the Christian worshippers who are called by the bells:

'Twas but a lowly group, that sought  
To yon old church the way,  
Their God was in each simple thought,  
For 'twas their Sabbath day—  
There was a look of hope so mild  
On every passing face,  
The old man, and the little child  
Sought each his 'custom'd place.

Oh, I have listen'd oft—but ne'er  
Seem'd village chimes so sweet,  
Or breathed so fondly tones of pray'r,  
The wand'rer's soul to greet;  
They have a voice so softly meek,  
Where cottage worship dwells—  
Oh ne'er did chime so sweetly speak  
As did those village bells! (33-48)

Aguilar subtly notes that it was “*Their* God” and “*their* Sabbath day,” not hers. She is obviously not headed to join the worshippers even as she appreciates their call to prayer. The narrator’s position is clearly one of the outsider who has often “listen’d” to the bells but not participated in the worship. She also labels herself as a “wand’rer,” a descriptor often used to describe the identity of diasporic Jews. Similar to Tonna’s experience of walking down a Jewish street on Saturday, however, this poem chronicles the practice of worshipping one’s own God through an encounter with another religion’s devotional practices.<sup>89</sup> Although Aguilar has no intention of joining the Christian worshippers in their church for Sabbath observances, the bells, and the worship that they symbolize, inform her experience of nature, leading her to praise God for his act of creation and establishment of a Sabbath day, a rest from work regardless of which day of the week it may be observed.

Fittingly, Aguilar expresses this sentiment of admiring worship in a poem. For all the *CLM*’s discussion of poetry as a device to disseminate correct doctrine and create social reform, much of the journal’s poetry is devotional, sometimes describing and often enacting religious worship. Just as Aguilar describes the music of the church bells as informing her view of the world around her by focusing her thoughts on God, poetry in the *CLM* informs the material around it by focusing the reader’s thoughts on paying homage to God. Early criticisms of poetry as a genre in the *CLM*, led by Stodart and endorsed by Tonna, had centered on the idea that beautifully structured language could be used to separate the emotional impetus of religious worship from a grounding in religious creed. Yet in discussions of Judaism, the magazine’s condemnation for the distraction of form turns into praise of a devotional attitude channeled into beautiful art. In addition, we

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<sup>89</sup> This same issue arises in one of Aguilar’s most famous poems today, “A Vision of Jerusalem, While Listening to a Beautiful Organ in One of the Gentile Shrines.” As a religious minority, Aguilar would have been forced to consider the worship practices of other traditions quite frequently, but for Tonna it is a new discovery. Scheinberg performs a detailed reading of this poem in *Women’s Poetry and Religion in Victorian Britain* (183-188).

can see the conflicting attitudes toward secularism expressed by Stodart and X.Q. playing out in the *CLM*'s shifting views on poetry as Tonna increasingly moves toward X.Q.'s understanding of worship as a religious impulse that transcends creed. While Aguilar often depicts music as a medium that performs the emotional operation of transcending creed, Tonna comes to recognize this same power in poetry itself.

### Uniting for Reform

Tonna and Aguilar's shared focus on worship and devotion, however, did not mean that they had abandoned their outward-looking commitments to humanitarian reforms and their interest in using poetry for their causes. While worship provided a bridge between religions, social reform provided a shared impetus for the two writers to move forward together. Even prior to working in tandem on behalf of Jewish/Gentile relations, Tonna and Aguilar demonstrated their affinity in the realm of social reform, both advocating similar reforms within their own religious communities and working for practical improvements in the lives of English workers. As a writer, Tonna is best known for her impassioned prose and sentimental fiction related to poor working conditions in factories and among seamstresses. Joseph A. Kestner has, for instance, argued that Tonna's *The Perils of the Nation* and *Wrongs of Woman* were key texts in promoting the Ten Hours Bill and the Public Health Act.<sup>90</sup> Aguilar expressed similar concerns about factories. In 1845, Aguilar published a poem in the *New Monthly Belle Assemble* that passionately argues for changing the child labor conditions in England. Aguilar commands:<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Passed as the *Factory Act* in 1847, this bill limited the workday for women and children to ten hours ("Later Factory Legislation"). Kestner is referring to the 1848 *Public Health Act*, which was the first piece of public health legislation in Britain. The act created a central Board of Health and allowed for the creation of Local Boards of Health, but did not mandate any particular action ("1848 Public Health Act").

<sup>91</sup> The *NMBA* was not an explicitly religious publication. It was, however, aimed at a female audience. Kathryn Ledbetter notes that Aguilar's poetry in the magazine is predominately religious, but also "expresses romantic or reformist ideals" (49).

Arise! Ere other nations see,  
 And hold us up to shame.  
 Oh! England, set thine infants free:  
 Thus blazon forth thy fame! (81-84)

Throughout the poem, Aguilar advocates for change by appealing to English national pride, claiming that England's true identity is not consistent with its treatment of child laborers. Furthermore, its humanitarian reputation on the international stage is undermined by this shameful treatment of its own. With the words "hold us up to shame," Aguilar chooses to identify with her English nationality rather than highlight her Jewish cultural affiliation in order to appeal to her audience as someone who has a clear stake in England's reputation.

Aguilar was presented with a more complex issue of affiliation when placed in the position of advocating on behalf of the international Jewish community. Her relationship with Tonna as an editor gave her the platform she needed. In April 1843, a decree (known as a "ukase") was issued by the Russian Emperor Nicholas I to dissolve all Jewish settlements near the border with Prussia and Austria, which would force Jews to relocate either outside of Russia or to the Russian interior, leaving their trading enterprises to be filled by Russians.<sup>92</sup> This edict, set to go into effect in several years, caused much consternation among the English Jewish community. The ukase also brought Tonna and Aguilar together in a social cause.<sup>93</sup> Tonna presented the issue of possible mass death among Jews forced into exile to a wider Christian audience, quoting material from Jewish publications, which claimed that the result could be half a million deaths, and calling her

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<sup>92</sup> Rubinstein and Rubinstein explain that the ukase didn't immediately cause an outcry among British gentiles, "But with subsequent reports that those affected faced probably destitution,...that deportations were proceeding, and that a minimal number of Jews had been engaged in contraband, a great surge of pro-Jewish feeling became apparent" (*Philosemitism* 14). For a more extensive account of the *ukase*, see Abigail Green's biography *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero*. The ukase was suspended several times and eventually revoked altogether due in part to the efforts of the Anglo-Jewish leader Moses Montefiore and his diplomatic visit to Russia.

<sup>93</sup> Tonna was involved in many international Jewish causes during the 1840s. For a more extended account of them, see Hilary Rubinstein's "A Pioneering Philosemite: Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna (1790-1846) and the Jews" (111-113).

readers to use their influence to avert this crisis.<sup>94</sup> After quoting a large section from a Jewish newspaper in her January 1844 issue, Tonna appeals to her audience personally on behalf of the cause:

From our inmost heart, we implore our Christian readers not to lay down this touching appeal, without resolving to do something towards carrying into effect the writer's proposition. Men, indeed, must come forward; but what so powerfully influences man as the intercessory persuasion of woman in a good cause? It was by a woman's wise, tender, humble, yet courageous use of this her natural influence, that the Lord saved the Jews throughout the Persian Empire in the days of Haman: and shall a son of Israel plead in vain for such help as we can give, when the decree of a northern Ahasuerus hangs over the devoted heads of His long-afflicted nation? We venture to say, No; it will not be: and we anxiously await a response to this our direct and confiding appeal. ("The Russian Ukase" 76)

Tonna unites her prose with an excerpt from the Jewish paper in order to advocate for Christian intervention to save Jews from the Russian Tsar's decree. She also makes sure that her female readers do not excuse themselves from her charge by pleading their inability to influence public affairs. While her statements about women's influence follow the typical Victorian pattern of arguing that women can affect public debate only by exercising their domestic influence over their husbands, she also holds up female persuasiveness as the most effective force that can be used against oppression.<sup>95</sup> She cites

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<sup>94</sup> Abigail Green suggests that some of the claims made by the press may have been exaggerated in a climate of increasingly anti-Russian feeling. The Rubinsteins also posit that, because the West was becoming more sympathetic to Jewish civic and political rights, a series of crises for Jewish populations in the East reinforced Western assumptions about that region and fit with the a desire to contain Russia (*Philosemitism* 5).

<sup>95</sup> D.G. Paz sees Tonna's focus on influence as proof that evangelicalism ultimately relegated women to the domestic sphere: "Her emphasis on individual women nurturing right ideas in their male connections in the home context, however, well fits Victorian ideas about domesticity and separate spheres" (272-273). Several other critics, however, have suggested that Tonna's rhetoric is more complex. Beetham points out that: "However, the line between political agitation and exerting influence was not always so clear cut" (50). It is important, she suggests, to notice that the *CLM* "consistently argued not only that Christian women must be politically informed, but that they had a duty to intervene in economic and public affairs—even if the solutions within their power seemed inadequate to the task" (51). Gleadle goes further to suggest that, rather than assuming philanthropy was always the best way to effect change (as many scholars suggest they did), "Tory female paternalism presumed the existence of an energetic, politicized constituency of women who might lobby parliament for legislative change" (103). Thus, they



the story of Esther from biblical Jewish history, in which a woman (the Jewish Esther) persuades her powerful husband (the Persian King Ahasuerus) to reverse a decree that would have destroyed her people. This tale, however, is not only the story of a woman persuading her husband to do the right thing, but the story of a woman directly influencing the policy of a misguided ruler. Tonna equates the Persian King Ahasuerus with Russia's Nicholas I, and Esther with the intervening English. Thus, her commentary is not only a call for women to influence the specific men around them, but also a call for them to use persuasion to sway national policy and public opinion. Women's writing was one such means of persuasion.

The most notable answer to Tonna's call for persuasion came from Grace Aguilar in her poem "The Hebrew's Appeal," first published in the February 1844 issue of the *CLM*. This poem's publication history aptly demonstrates Aguilar's reason for cultivating a relationship with the Evangelical press. Both Rachel Beth Zion Lask Abrahams and Cynthia Scheinberg have noted that Aguilar first tried to publish the poem in a Jewish venue. Scheinberg claims that Aguilar sent it to the *CLM* when the *Jewish Chronicle* took too long to get back to her, and uses this to illustrate her point that many Jewish authors were simply eager to get their work published wherever possible ("Poetry and Religious Diversity" 166).<sup>96</sup> Aguilar's own account of the event reveals that she saw the Jewish press as her natural publication venue, but that she also appreciated Tonna's framing of her poem. In September 1844, she republished the poem in the American Jewish periodical *The Occident*, where she had published a number of other poems. Immediately prior to the poem, she reflects on its history:

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interpreted the idea of influence in an explicitly political way rather than just as influence over individual men.

<sup>96</sup> Abrahams reads this as a sign of Aguilar's increasing confidence as a poet (143). Scheinberg refers to the publication as the *Jewish Chronicle*, while Aguilar mentions having tried to publish her poem in the *Voice of Jacob*. To eliminate confusion, it's helpful to know that, while these two publications began separately, they merged for nearly two years between 1842 and 1844, with the *Voice of Jacob* holding the controlling share. Thus, both are referencing the same publication.

The following poem was written nearly six months ago, when the Russian ukase was first made public, and sent to the only paper in England devoted to Jewish interests—the *Voice of Jacob*,—the writer wishing to prove that at least one female Jewish heart and voice were raised in an appeal for her afflicted brethren. The Editor of the *V. of J.* did not insert it, on the plea of having so much press of matter as to prevent giving it the required space. The *Christian Lady's Magazine* not only accepted and inserted it, but in bold and spirited prose appealed to her countrymen on the same subject. Still a Jewish paper is the natural channel for the public appearance of the poem, and therefore the writer sends it to the *Occident*, believing that though somewhat late, it will not there be disregarded.

In this introduction to the poem's republication, Aguilar feels obliged to justify her decision to publish "The Hebrew's Appeal" first in the *CLM* and to subsequently republish it in *The Occident*. She suggests the necessity of using the *CLM* by pointing out the lack of explicitly Jewish venues of publication in England because the *Voice of Jacob* was (since it had merged with *The Jewish Chronicle*) "the only paper in England devoted to Jewish interests." She then suggests that the natural home for her poem is its current Jewish American venue, *The Occident*. Yet, if the poem's natural home was *The Occident*, where Aguilar had already published a number of poems, why did she first publish it in the *CLM*? While both critics and Aguilar herself suggest that the Evangelical press was an outlet of last (or at least second) resort for Jewish women, much of the effectiveness of Aguilar's poem, which pled for England to intervene with Russia on the Jews' behalf, depended on the poem reaching a gentile, English audience. It is hardly surprising that Aguilar would explain her desire to republish a poem in a Jewish publication by pointing out its appropriateness for that venue, but the *CLM* proved particularly well-suited to Aguilar's desire to stir up the English nation as a whole in behalf of her cause and also answered Tonna's explicit call for persuasion on the subject.

Furthermore, Aguilar subtly compares her reception by *The Voice of Jacob* to her reception by the *CLM* and by *The Occident*. In doing so, she makes clear the partnership that she saw between her own poetic work and Tonna's "bold and spirited prose." Thus, she implies that her poem was doubly effective in presenting a female Jewish perspective

to a Christian audience and in eliciting further writing in behalf of her cause. Notably, she points to her gender as the catalyst for her desire to publish a poem about the Russian ukase (“to prove that at least one female Jewish heart and voice were raised in an appeal”). While it at first seems puzzling that she would cite her main motivation for writing the poem as the need to prove that women in particular were concerned about the ukase, on second look, her comments subtly suggest that female voices were absent and possibly excluded from *The Voice of Jacob*’s discussion of this international crisis. By contrast, Tonna had explicitly appealed to women to let their uniquely persuasive voices be heard in regard to the ukase.

Not only does Aguilar assert the importance of her female voice entering the discussion, but also the importance of a “female *Jewish*” voice being heard. Although she originally published the poem in a Christian venue, she suggests that her distinctly Jewish perspective was both uncompromised by her publication decision and necessary to the cause. She also prompts us to consider how a persuasive Jewish female voice within the *CLM* might frame this issue differently than a Christian female voice advocating for the same action and thus why she might have felt compelled to answer Tonna’s call for advocacy. While Tonna had emphasized Jewish intellectual equality in her discussions of Jewish literature and worship practices, a call for Britain to intervene on behalf of Russian Jews could easily have been poetically constructed to depict helpless Jews rescued by superior yet compassionate Christians. Recalling one such appeal by the Christian poet Elnie (previously discussed in this chapter) suggests that Christians might be asked to pity and protect Jews while simultaneously being praised for their authoritative position. By contrast, Aguilar walks a fine line between evoking pity for the Russian Jews and depicting the strength of the Jewish community as a whole, between asking for England’s protection and asserting that the Hebrew God will protect his people:

Awake! arise! Ye friends of Israel's race,  
 The wail of thousands lingers on the air,  
 On terror's pinions, borne thro' realms of space,  
 'Till Israel shudd'ring; Israel's woe must bear  
 The voice of suff'ring echoes to the skies—  
 And oh—not yet! one pitying heart replies!

List to the groan from many bosoms rent;  
 The wilder sob from weaker spirits wrung,  
 The deeper woe that hath in voice no vent;  
 Yet to the heart in deathly folds that clung,<sup>97</sup>  
 And childish tears flow thick and fast like rain  
 From eyes that never wept, and ne'er shall weep again.

Vain, vain the Mother's piteous shriek of woe  
 By Infants echoed, clinging to her breast:  
 And age infirm, and youth whose high hearts glow,  
 Vain, vain their cry for mercy on th'oppressed—  
 The Ukase has gone forth—a word, a breath,  
 And thousands are cast out to exile and to death.

Ay, death! for such is exile—fearful doom,  
 From homes expell'd, yet still to Poland chain'd  
 'Till want and famine, mind and life consume,  
 And sorrow's poison'd chalice, all is drain'd,—  
 Oh God that this should be! that one frail man  
 Hath power to crush a nation 'neath his ban.

Will none arise! with outstretch'd hand to save!  
 No prayer for pity, and for aid awake!  
 Will SHE who gave to liberty the slave,<sup>98</sup>  
 For God's own People, not one effort make?  
 Will SHE not rise once more in mercy clad,  
 And heal the bleeding heart, and sorrow's sons make glad!

Will England sleep, when justice bids her wake,  
 And send her voice all thrillingly afar!  
 Will England sleep, when her rebuke might shake  
 With shame and terror, Muscovi's proud Czar,  
 And 'neath the magic of her mild appeal,  
 Move Russia's frozen soul, for Israel to feel.

Oh England! thou hast call'd us to thy breast,  
 And done to orphans, all a mother's part,  
 And giv'n them peace and liberty, and rest,  
 And healing, pour'd onto the homeless heart:

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<sup>97</sup> Her second version for *The Occident* is a little clearer: "Yet round the heart her deathly robe has flung."

<sup>98</sup> In *The Occident*, Aguilar footnotes this to indicate that "she" refers to Queen Victoria.

Then, oh once more let Israel's mercy claim,  
And suff'ring thousands bless our England's honor'd name.

And let ONE prayer from Hebrew hearths ascend  
To Israel's God—that HE may deign reply,  
And yet again His chosen race defend,  
And "have respect" once more "unto their cry."  
And e'en from depths of darkness and despair,  
Give freedom to His own, and list their anguish'd prayer.

Then shall we seek, tho' dark our way and drear,  
And hope hath found in misery a tomb!  
And man is silent, mercy hath no tear,  
And love and joy are wither'd 'neath the gloom!  
No! God is near to hear us while we crave,  
And HE will England rouse to shield us and to save. (1-54)<sup>99</sup>

The tensions between Aguilar's appeal for help and her assertion of strength can be seen more clearly by dividing the poem into several different parts. The first stanza introduces a call to action and also points to the author's role in calling for change. ("And oh—not yet! one pitying heart replies!" (6)). She expresses that she herself has been moved by the stories she is about to relate in order to capture her audience's attention. Stanzas two through four describe the situation of the Russian Jews using familiar Victorian emotional appeals. Stanzas five through seven ask England to intervene. The final two stanzas, however, are addressed to the Hebrew people, calling them to unite in prayer and affirming their understanding of God's power and their status as chosen people. This division of the poem highlights the double audience of English gentiles and Jews that Aguilar wished to reach. The tension Aguilar felt between wanting to address two different audiences is dramatized as the poem on one hand offers introspection into the faith of the Jewish community and on the other hand calls on the Christian audience of her "adoptive" nation to protect Jews.

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<sup>99</sup> The revised version of this stanza in *The Occident* reads:

For shall we sink, tho' dark our way and drear,  
And Hope hath found in misery a tomb?  
Though man be silent, Mercy hath no tear,  
And Love and Joy are wither'd 'neath the gloom?  
No! God is near to hear us while we crave,  
And HE will 'bare His holy arm, to shield us and to save.' (49-54)

In the first larger section (stanzas two through four) of the poem, Aguilar notably refrains from describing the victims of the Ukase as Jews. Rather, she appeals to her audience by using images of common humanity. Those who are forced to leave their homes are not (as Elnie might call them) “poor sorrowing Jews,” but rather the elderly, mothers, and infants. In the final line of both the second and third stanzas she breaks out of strict iambic pentameter and adds an extra foot, thus emphasizing the great magnitude of the crisis and the possibility of death in the lines “From eyes that never wept, and ne’er shall weep again” and “And thousands are cast out to exile and to death” (12, 18). She contrasts these disturbing outcomes with the smallness and weakness of their catalyst, providing an ephemeral description of the ukase as “a word, a breath” and pointing to the tsar’s smallness in the sight of God: “Oh God that this should be! that one frail man / Hath power to crush a nation ’neath his ban” (23-24). In this way she skillfully indicates both the magnitude of the ukase’s consequences and the ease with which they might be averted.

Once she has established the humanitarian aspect of this crisis, Aguilar moves on to a more explicit appeal to the English based on flattery of their humanitarian track record (liberating slaves), an assertion of England’s power (“her rebuke might shake / With shame and terror), and a claim for the special relationship between England and the Jewish people (“And done to orphans, all a mother’s part”) (33-34, 38). While the stark factual statement in the last line of stanza four, “Hath power to crush a nation ’neath his ban,” breaks with the pattern of an extra foot in the last line of each stanza, stanzas five, six, and seven resume the pattern of adding an extra iamb to the last line (24). However, unlike these lines in the first section of the poem, which pointed to the magnitude of the problem and an excess of despair, the long lines in the second section express an overflow of hope for what England might accomplish: “And heal the bleeding heart, and sorrow’s sons make glad!” (30); “Move Russia’s frozen soul, for Israel to feel.” (36); “And suff’ring thousands bless our England’s honor’d name” (42). These lines advocate

for the cause by helping the English envision what they could accomplish and how necessary they are to preventing the ukase.

Through the first two sections of the poem, Aguilar focuses on rousing her English audience to action by illustrating what will happen if the ukase goes through and painting a picture of how things will be different if England intervenes, but the final section of the poem reveals her desire to speak to her fellow Jews and to explain their role in the crisis. Even while she appeals to gentile protectors, Aguilar affirms that the Jewish people also have agency in what occurs. The final two stanzas exhort the Hebrew people to join as a community with the words “And let ONE prayer from Hebrew hearths ascend” and call on their God to intervene (43). Thus, while the poem asks the English to actively intercede with the Russians on the Jews’ behalf, Aguilar suggests that, although the Jewish people may not have enough clout in the public sphere to help their Russian counterparts, their domestic worship is integral to the effort. Furthermore, stanza eight suggests that it is God who will “His chosen race defend” rather than their English stepparents (45).

This creates a conflict in the poem between Aguilar’s direct appeal for the English to save the Russian Jews and her assertion that God will save his people. She attempts to resolve the contradiction in her final line: “And HE will England rouse to shield us and to save” (54). Here Aguilar complicates the power structure that she created previously in the poem. At first we learn that the Jews are being oppressed by the Russian tsar, but the English are stronger than him and can save the Jews. The final section reorganizes this structure so that the prayers of the Jewish community will rouse God, and He will in turn rouse the English, who will save the Russian Jews. This reformulation allows Aguilar to ask for gentile help without depicting the Jewish community as subordinate. By contrast, in the revised final stanza that appeared in *The Occident*, Aguilar did not feel the need to explain England’s role, revealing that she reframed the poem for her two audiences. The last line of her second version reads, “And HE will ‘bare His holy arm, to shield us and to

save’” (54). For a predominately American Jewish audience at a time when the British public had already become engaged with the ukase, she emphasizes God’s scriptural promise to save his people, thus reinforcing Jewish faith. But her original poem was an act of advocacy directed at an English audience, so it was imperative to assert that England’s help was indeed needed to save the Russian Jews (even if acting at the behest of the Hebrew God summoned by Jewish prayers). Thus, she balances her desire to mobilize the English with her refusal to suggest Jewish weakness. She also ties her argument on behalf of Russian Jews to the importance of Jewish worship, concluding that human agency is spurred by divine agency, which is entreated by communal devotion.

Although Aguilar claims that the English will be moved directly by God, her poem also functions as a powerful medium of persuasion. In introducing the poem to her journal, Tonna recognizes this power and makes an explicit link between Aguilar’s poem and the actions she hopes her countrymen and countrywomen will take: “The following touching stanzas are by a Jewish lady;--may they move many hearts to a practical response!” (163). Tonna recognizes that if the English are to be roused by God, poetry is the most effective emotional medium. Just as she had united poetry like “The Song of the Shirt” with prose instructing her audience exactly how they should translate their emotional reaction to the poem into practical action, here she again pushes her readers not to let their reactions fall short of “practical” action. Using her position as a Christian editor, she reinforces the active response that Aguilar hopes to gain from the gentile portion of her audience.

While there is little to indicate how the readers of the *CLM* reacted to Aguilar’s poem, we do know that Tonna herself was deeply affected by the Jewish calls to action that she read and included in her magazine. In June of 1844, already suffering from the illness that would be her last, Tonna took on one last public task. Upon learning of the Russian Emperor Nicholas I’s visit to Queen Victoria, Tonna resolved to send him an



appeal.<sup>100</sup> In his memoir, Lewis Tonna states, “She was told that it was impossible—that the Emperor’s visit was strictly a private one to the Queen of England, and that any such step would be indecorous. But these arguments were powerless when a hope, however distant, appeared of relieving, by even a feather’s weight, the load that pressed upon these poor sufferers” (44). Lewis Tonna recounts that, with only two days notice, Tonna wrote a “memorial” (a petition) to the Emperor, hired an artist to write it out on vellum, and hired a carriage, which she used to visit the influential political and religious leaders who were among her friends, collecting their signatures on the document.<sup>101</sup> Lord Ashley (later Shaftesbury) presented the petition to the Russian ambassador who gave it to the Czar (Lewis 195).<sup>102</sup> Hilary Rubinstein adds to this account that it appears Tonna did not place her own signature on the appeal, and the document “almost certainly bore only men’s signatures” (“Pioneering Philosemite” 113). True to her earlier assertions, such as those in her retelling of the Esther story, that women are most effective in their ability to influence men, Tonna felt that it was not appropriate to take a more public role. Yet, Tonna’s use of persuasion extended to the written word, which could be conveyed directly to powerful people far beyond a domestic context.<sup>103</sup> While she may have

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<sup>100</sup> For a detailed account of Tonna’s plans, see Lewis Tonna’s *Memoir of Charlotte Elizabeth* (43-45), and Hilary L. Rubinstein’s “A Pioneering Philosemite: Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna (1790-1846) and the Jews” (112-114).

<sup>101</sup> Lewis Tonna describes these friends as “Bishops, Peers, Privy Counsellors and Members of Parliament” (45).

<sup>102</sup> Donald Lewis describes Shaftesbury’s role in more detail, quoting his diary entry for 12 June 1844. Shaftesbury records that he was initially reluctant to present the petition because he was worried that directly approaching the Czar might not be effective: “The Memorial, however, being laid before me, I could not refuse to attach my name, but on 3 Conditions. 1<sup>st</sup> that no reference was made to any past events so as to imply a censure—2ndly; that no personal interview was to be demanded; 3rdly that it should be presented the last thing before his departure. Address admirably drawn. Committed it in prayer to God, & then sent it to the Russian Embassy. Brunow acknowledged the receipt, stated he had not given it to the Emperor, but would do so at the first opportunity” (195).

<sup>103</sup> In addition to her direct involvement through the petition, Tonna’s journalism and fiction were not far removed from political actions. Donald Lewis points out that journalism and fiction by writers such as Tonna provided a backbone for the Zionist movement because they created public support that stimulated political will. Shaftesbury’s “attempts behind the scenes to influence Palmerston would have

framed her actions as mere influence, they are certainly much more. Her powers of persuasion did not simply convince men to take action, but rather she used influential men as a medium to convey her direct words to a ruler whom Queen Victoria, herself a subscriber to the *CLM*, called the “greatest of all earthly Potentates” (14).<sup>104</sup>

Just as Tonna’s vision of female influence was not restricted to a domestic setting, her persuasive efforts were not restricted to men. The story of Grace Aguilar’s relationship with Tonna as an editor reveals a cycle of mutual female influence. Tonna’s persuasive call for women to take up the cause of Russian Jews propelled Aguilar to publish a beautiful, poetic call to action in the *CLM*, which in turn spurred Tonna’s conviction to use her prose to plead with one of the most powerful men on earth. Aguilar and Tonna’s relationship reveals not only the ecumenical force of shared attitudes toward worship and shared humanitarian causes, but also that these concepts helped to bridge the divide between poetry and prose in the *CLM*. Despite an initially rocky relationship, the prose and poetry in the *CLM* provided mutual calls to action.

### Conclusion

After considering the evolving relationship between poetry and prose in the *CLM*, it is fruitful to revisit a question posed earlier in this chapter: if poetry provided a sacred space within the secular periodical press, what role did it play in the context of the

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come to naught unless they had been matched by efforts to create a climate of opinion at a popular level in favor of the cause—through public meetings, newspapers, journals, and books as well as his own speeches, both in and out of Parliament—but especially by a group of highly effective female novelists such as Charlotte Elizabeth and Catherine Marsh” (209). More broadly, Gleadow suggests that Tory women in the early Victorian period were much more politically involved than has previously been recognized, especially through their dissemination of information: “Female intervention into public debate formed part of a diverse extra-parliamentary culture in which conservative women (broadly defined) could act as conduits and disseminators of political information to wide readerships (116).

<sup>104</sup> The young Queen Victoria wrote to her uncle, the King of Belgium, on 4 June 1844 regarding the Czar’s visit. Rubinstein and Rubinstein document that Queen Victoria received the *CLM* and suggest that her exposure to this publication along with her close friendship with Benjamin Disraeli may have inspired her sympathy for Russian Jewish causes throughout her reign (50-51).

religious press? The contents of the *CLM* suggest that the role of poetry within a religious periodical was a matter of overt debate and discussion in Evangelical circles. Ironically, it was poetry's cultural status as a sacred medium that made it seem threatening to the *CLM*'s early contributors because poetry was associated with attempts to replace doctrinal surety with an emotional attachment to beauty. Poetry, therefore, proved most congenial to Tonna not when it was set apart from or contrasted with the journal's prose content but when the two mediums worked in tandem, with the perceived emotionalism of poetry harnessed by prose for Tonna's practical purposes. In the end, poetry became acceptable in the context of the Evangelical press because of its relationship to religious prose not because it provided a respite from it. While poetry in secular Victorian periodicals may, as Linda Hughes argues, have been set apart in a way that both contrasted with and enabled the secular modernity surrounding it, Tonna envisioned the *CLM*'s poetry as a part of its mission to strike out into the secular world and reform it.

Nevertheless, in coming to terms with poetry as a genre, Tonna and her contributors also recognized poetry as a medium of expression distinct from prose, and it was accepted as a space for worship and contemplation within the prose of the *CLM*. Yet, like a physical house of worship, poetry was not just a space set apart, but also a meeting place where common causes were forged. While poetry in the secular press helped readers to escape the content surrounding it, poetry in the *CLM* did not shut out the social ills and encounters with religious difference that filled the journal's non-poetic pages, but encouraged readers to pause and consider how they approached these issues. Even though the beautiful sounds and rhythms of poetry remained suspect as features that might distract from doctrinal messages, as a religious meeting place, poetry had to be beautiful enough that those who did not profess the same faith might wander in just as Tonna

frequently entered London's synagogues and Aguilar sat "listening to a beautiful organ in one of the gentile shrines."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> William and Hilary Rubinstein reveal that Tonna knew Hebrew and was a great admirer of synagogues: "she was one of the very few Christians of her generation to see the inside of a synagogue let alone, as she did, occasionally join its worshippers in prayer" (*Philosemitism* 135). Just as Aguilar was conflicted about entering Christian worship spaces, Tonna, according to Hilary Rubinstein, had at first feared that "to do so would be tantamount to renouncing Christianity" ("Pioneering Philosemite" 108). Eventually, however, "she overcame that inhibition and grew well acquainted with the liturgy and festivals at London synagogues" (108). Beth Zion Lask Abrahams reveals that Aguilar often went to Protestant services "altering those parts of the prayer-book where she could not join to her belief" (Abrahams 139). Scheinberg notes, "Aguilar often recounts in later writings the value of attending Christian services as a way of clarifying one's own Jewish identity" (150).

CHAPTER TWO  
 “TIME HAS NEED OF ETERNITY”: DORA GREENWELL’S  
 PRESENTIST POETICS AND ADVOCACY FOR THE MENTALLY  
 DISABLED

But Heaven and Earth have been  
 More near, since Earth hath seen  
 Its God walk Earth as Man; since Heaven hath shown  
 A Man upon its throne;  
 The street and market-place  
 Grow holy ground; each face,  
 Pale faces, marked with care,  
 Dark, toil-worn brows, grows fair;  
 King’s children are these all; though want and sin  
 Have marred their beauty glorious within,  
 We may not pass them but with reverent eye;  
 As when we see some goodly temple graced  
 To be Thy dwelling, ruined and defaced,  
 The haunt of sad and doleful creatures, lie  
 Bare to the sky, and open to the gust,  
 It grieveth us to see This House laid waste,  
 It pitieth us to see it in the dust!

Dora Greenwell  
 “The Reconciler” from *Poems* (1867)

In this section of her 1867 poem “The Reconciler,” poet and essayist Dora Greenwell articulates a central tenet of the theology that pervaded her writing: that Christ’s incarnation changed the world once and for all, and that the essential thing for modern Christians to grasp was his first example, rather than his second coming. Greenwell’s work as both an essayist and poet rested on what I call “temporal immanence,” an insistence that Christ pervaded everyday life in the present time. This presentist philosophy suggested that her contemporaries need not focus so much on Christ’s physical presence in the past or on the second coming that many were waiting for, but rather look at the state of the world around them. In “The Reconciler,” Greenwell locates Christ’s immanent presence within needy human populations, implying that the neglect and defacement of these metaphorical temples directly offends the God enshrined in them. In essence, that a failure to respond to poverty, want, and sin in the present renders Christ homeless, “Bare to the sky, and open to the gust.”

Dora Greenwell, a mid-nineteenth-century writer, who is often discussed alongside her contemporaries Christina Rossetti and Jean Ingelow, was known during her lifetime as a poet, essayist, and advocate for the mentally disabled. While contemporary scholars are generally more complimentary of her richly metaphorical theological essays than of her poetry, often describing it as formally and thematically conventional,<sup>106</sup> I suggest that Greenwell's most theologically-engaged book of poems, *Carmina Crucis* (1869), was experimental both formally and in its attempt to articulate a poet's faith journey. Greenwell is an important figure because she wrote so cogently in the genres of both poetry and the essay, and her work across these genres represents the important mid-century transition toward a theology of immanence in Christian poetics. Furthermore, her prose work advocating on behalf of the mentally disabled drew on ideas from her theology and poetry to make a significant contribution to the Victorian understanding of mental disability.

Greenwell's poetry is often read alongside Christina Rossetti's, and her own theological ideas are sometimes obscured by critics focusing on Rossetti's Tractarian poetics. Unlike Rossetti, whose affiliation with the Anglo-Catholic movement was clear, Greenwell was an independent theologian who emphasized the main tenets of Christian faith rather than divisive points of doctrine. *Memoirs of Greenwell*, collected shortly after her death by William Dorling, as well as Constance Maynard's early biography

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<sup>106</sup> Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds, for instance, see Greenwell's verse as largely conventional and cite her relationship with her mother as a possible curtailing force: "The sometimes disappointing conventionality of Greenwell's poetry compared with her prose may have had something to do with this maternal influence and control" ("Dora Greenwell" 275). Much of her later religious verse, however, is more stylistically experimental, and the failure to recognize this may stem from a tendency among recent anthologists to neglect her religious verse. Emma Mason, who gives a comprehensive overview of Greenwell's career in *Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, recognizes the experimental developments in her late-career volumes of 1869, 1873 and 1876: "Greenwell's less conventional later verse follows a mode which the modern reader might recognize as stream-of-consciousness. Her earlier verse, by contrast, is stylistically, if not always thematically, conservative and uses similar motifs to those used by Proctor and Rossetti" (72). Mason suggests that Greenwell's blank verse is "intrepidly imagist" and comes "close to symbolism" (73). Finally, Mason suggests that, while she experimented formally, the topics of Greenwell's poetry often spoke to "typical nineteenth-century themes" (79).

demonstrate that Greenwell's friends were uncertain of her religious sympathies. Emma Mason has recently chronicled Greenwell's attraction to Roman Catholicism while noting that her ideas "cannot be addressed through a simple statement of ecclesiastical affiliation, her faith being multi-layered and open to ideas from many theological systems" (*Women Poets* 55). In fact, Greenwell seems to have deliberately eschewed the doctrinal debates of her time to instead develop a wider philosophical perspective that Janet Gray has seen as a forerunner of Christian existentialism ("Dora Greenwell" 140).<sup>107</sup> Greenwell remained an eclectic thinker, publishing work on diverse religious figures from the Quaker John Woolman to the French Catholic Priest Lacordaire. Admiring and criticizing facets of both Protestantism and Catholicism without fully embracing either, she instead focused on Christianity's present social obligations and its response to secular thought.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> According to the *Westminster Dictionary of Theology*, Christian existentialism is "The use of categories and insights from existential philosophy within a basic Christian framework. It sees Christianity as stressing the need for personal decision and commitment to Jesus Christ by 'a leap of faith' that affects one's whole existence" (McKim 98). Notable figures associated with Christian existentialism include Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Gabriel Marcel, though there are different emphases within this group. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* describes several opposing attitudes toward Christian Existentialism among theologians: "Opponents have claimed that Existentialism, which is anti-metaphysical and anti-cosmological in character, reduces theology to anthropology, dissolves the historical foundations of Christianity, and treats salvation as no more than a self-generated decision in favour of authentic existence. Supporters have claimed that an Existential standpoint is implicit in the New Testament, that to acknowledge the salvation event as part of history only serves to confirm the radical nature of faith, locating salvation not in external events but in an encounter between the hidden God and our personal existence" (F.L.Cross and E.A. Livingstone 591).

<sup>108</sup> Greenwell's denominational affinities were a subject of much confusion among her friends and, subsequently, of debate among biographers. Her friend Elizabeth McChesney, for instance, expressed bewilderment about Greenwell's affiliation: "She loved the Quakers very much, and the Methodists even better because they are such a strongly social community, and always as she used to say 'liked going to heaven in parties'; and yet in a kind of way she loved all the main doctrines of Rome, and would sometimes talk as though she belonged there" (qtd. in Maynard 138). One of Greenwell's brothers was a clergyman at the forefront of the high-church ritualist movement (who later renounced Christianity and became a Positivist), but Greenwell was disparaging of ritualists whom she believed expressed "class-arrogance" (Maynard 143). Emma Mason describes Greenwell's "ardent attraction to the Roman Catholic faith," giving ample evidence of her many positive comments about Catholicism, but perhaps overemphasizing her preference for it (*Women Poets* 51). Greenwell seems to have been attracted to the Catholic view of the sacraments while disliking its approach to church hierarchy. Mason argues that Greenwell sees Catholicism as "doctrinally correct, but fears it is institutionally misguided" (59). Yet Greenwell was more apt to assert that there was little of substance separating the doctrines of Catholics and Protestants: "As to the things

By examining Greenwell's theological essays, her volume of poetry *Carmina Crucis*, and her advocacy for the mentally disabled in conjunction with one another, I will suggest that Greenwell offers an immanent critique of the state of Christianity in order to revitalize its ability to respond to secular systems of thought such as Comte's and to affirm its place alongside scientific and medical discourse in public debates about marginalized populations such as people with mental disabilities. Greenwell's work can be read as a transition between the Evangelical focus on atonement and salvation and the growing attraction to immanence later in the century.

This chapter begins by examining Greenwell's theological works of the 1850s and 1860s, which established the ideas that informed much of her subsequent writing. I particularly focus on her first major theological work, *A Present Heaven*, which was partly inspired by her friendship with Josephine Grey (later Butler), the well-known Evangelical reformer who would go on to fight for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.<sup>109</sup> In it she argues for Christianity's temporal immanence, for a Christianity alive

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most commonly received among us as believers...there is no point essentially at issue between Catholic and Protestant" ("Romanism" 194). What she appreciated about Catholicism was that it contained "the same great truths translated into easier, more popular language" (Maynard 143), in particular how the sacraments could be viewed as "incarnating the supernatural verities" ("Romanism" 196). At the same time, she was attracted to the idea of inward revelation and experience that she saw exemplified in the Quaker idea of the "inner light." In a February 1865 letter to Professor Knight, she expresses her desire to intellectually engage with both Catholic and Protestant theology while noting her emotional attachment to Protestantism: "The more I contemplate the difference, the more I seem to admire, and in some faint degree to enter into what is beautiful in each; *with the head*, I mean, for *with the heart I am altogether Protestant*. However much I may appreciate the value of some great Catholic idea, when I kneel down to pray I am Protestant, with Christ only between me and God, and between me and Christ *faith*—individual faith, the faith which God has given me" (qtd. in Dorling 93).

<sup>109</sup> Leighton and Reynolds suggest that this friendship may have been an inspiration for Greenwell's later involvement in numerous social causes, some of which included education for the mentally disabled, antivivisection, education for girls, the suffrage movement, and women's right to work ("Dora Greenwell" 275). Emma Mason notes that the two women undertook "educative and charitable parish work" together (*Women Poets* 52). Janet Gray also points to this relationship as an important one for Greenwell noting that Grey also introduced her to evangelical thought, which would not come to dominate Greenwell's theology but was important in her development ("Dora Greenwell" 142). Timothy Larsen's *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* performs a useful reading of Butler's Evangelical theology as a backdrop for her reform activities as well as examining her use of biblical language. Nancy Boyd describes the evangelical, though non-sectarian, environment in which Butler grew up and her



and at work in the present world rather than waiting for eternity. This imperative to present social action, I suggest, permeates both her later poetry and activism.

The second part of the chapter examines how Greenwell's theological focus on immanence shaped her poetics and helped her to find a poetic voice that was neither a voice of doubt nor a strictly devotional voice but that expressed human suffering while still affirming faith. Greenwell struggled to find a poetic identity that fit with her theology. On one hand, she suggests that her contemporaries' conception of high aesthetics in poetry relied on "pagan" rather than Christian ideals. On the other hand, she pointed to the intellectual and emotional dishonesty of devotional work that does not acknowledge the full range of human experience. These questions permeate her most ambitious poetic work *Carmina Crucis*, an 1869 collection of poems that explores an individual's journey through spiritual doubt to a confirmation of faith while simultaneously following the poet's search for a poetic voice.

In addition to exploring the tension between high art and devotional writing, *Carmina Crucis* also presents the insufficiency of solely transcendent conceptions of divinity. This series of poems gives voice to a narrator who is trapped between the desire to encounter a transcendent God and the desire to celebrate earthly creativity and improve earthly conditions, clearly demonstrating the tension from which a new poetics of immanence arose. Rather than simply affirming faith, Greenwell creates a poetics of experience that asks her audience to identify with a journey of doubt and suffering as a prerequisite to action. Encompassing the poetry of doubt within a larger narrative of faith, she invites them to acknowledge doubt even as she suggests God's immanence as a response to it. Despite the Christian teleology of *Carmina Crucis*'s narrative progression, for instance, many of its poems can also stand alone as excerpts that are some of the most

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commitments to "emphasis upon personal piety as the mark of conversion, a faith based on scripture and a religiosity centred on social justice" (54).

haunting and memorable articulations of a crisis of faith in Victorian literature. The pause between poems acknowledges the emotional reality and seeming finality of doubt even as the collection's wider narrative structure encourages its audience to look beyond each individual selection. In this way, Greenwell uses the tension between the narrative and lyric qualities of her collection to create a space between devotion and doubt for her audience, what she refers to as "that middle range of feeling" that all readers experience but that most devotional writers fail to acknowledge.

Because this series of poems depicts an inner faith journey, it could be read as reinforcing the privacy of women's religious poetry, but I argue that Greenwell's development of an immanent poetics within *Carmina Crucis* was an important prerequisite for her social engagement. The poet's exploration of her personal attitudes toward God takes her on a journey from doubt, to hope, to action. The series ultimately suggests that an awareness of divine immanence reorganizes artistic priorities, making the poet more alive to the concerns of those who are neglected and dispossessed. By the end of the series, the poet articulates a calling to search out and give voice to the marginalized. Thus, although Greenwell's lyrics are personal in nature, they are not divorced from her public activism. Rather, they were a space in which she worked to define her public mission.

The final part of this chapter examines Greenwell's advocacy for a national asylum system to provide better care and education for the mentally disabled in light of *A Present Heaven* and *Carmina Crucis*. Greenwell's most active work for the mentally disabled occurred during the same period that she was working on *Carmina Crucis*. I suggest that her poetry enabled this activism even though it seldom directly addressed the issue of mental disability. *Carmina Crucis* models the process of learning to identify with suffering and human limitation and thus helps the poet and her audience to affirm a commitment to mediating the experiences of the marginalized. Greenwell turned to nonfiction prose, however, in order to directly appeal to audiences on behalf of a specific

marginalized population. This shift in genre allowed her work to be circulated as part of a public discussion among medical men and clergymen even as they admired the “poetic” style of her prose.

Greenwell’s most significant contribution to the study of mental disability was an 1868 essay for the *North British Review* called “On the Education of the Imbecile,” which she later republished as a pamphlet for the benefit of the Royal Albert Asylum. Greenwell’s essay asks her audience to ponder more than a financial donation. Rather, she articulates the major rationales for a national asylum system to provide education for the mentally disabled while pushing against the rhetoric of Darwinian eugenics that would come to dominate this movement later in the century. In her advocacy for the mentally disabled, Greenwell blended an immanent theology with an ethics that resembles a modern feminist “ethics of care” in its focus on the need for public systems that emulate individual acts of care-giving. “On the Education of the Imbecile” not only reflected her theology of temporal immanence but also her commitment to religiously informed social action, locating Christianity rather than science at the heart of the public debate on mental disability.

### The Issue of Privatization

The feminist scholars who recovered writers like Christina Rossetti, Dora Greenwell, and Jean Ingelow often suggested that religion was a restrictive influence on their poetry both because it reinforced traditional expectations for the content of women’s poetry and because it encouraged a more conventional formal approach to verse.<sup>110</sup> This

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<sup>110</sup> When discussing Greenwell’s religious poetry, critics have often stressed its orthodoxy. In *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, for instance, Leighton and Reynolds suggest that the potential of Greenwell’s religious poems was stymied by conventionality: “Her many religious poems, for which she was best known in her day, bear witness to a certain visionary streak in her sensibility, though these tend towards the orthodox and predictable, contrary to her own often repeated declaration that there should be ‘an essential skepticism in the poet nature’ (1875: 137)” (“Dora Greenwell” 276). Yet, Greenwell’s affirmation of Christian commitments does not represent an unquestioning acceptance of orthodox answers, but a deep exploration of doubt and belief, which becomes apparent when the poems in *Carmina Crucis* are

assessment has been applied particularly frequently to Greenwell who is used as a foil for Christina Rossetti in order to suggest that Rossetti was a more daring poet.<sup>111</sup> Yet Greenwell's verse forms, while sometimes considered sloppy, were also formally experimental as she allowed the emotional content of her poems to dictate form, periodically even using free verse to express religious distress.

More recent work on women's religious poetry by scholars such as Virginia Blain and F. Elizabeth Gray has defended women poets' intense engagement with religious subjects as a potential avenue for subversive thought, including the equalization or reversal of gender hierarchies. In her article "Women Poets and the Challenge of Genre," Blain reads both Rossetti's and Greenwell's use of religion as a way to transcend the confines of their female lives:

it can be argued that, for the truly devout, the realm of religion was a space marked out separately from the everyday, and that, since souls are unsexed, gender hierarchies could be kept at bay in this private space...Such a sense of sanctuary might help to account for at least part of the strong attraction towards religion shown by many women poets of the period. (172)

While Blain convincingly counters the prevalent idea that religiously-engaged verse automatically reinforced gender stereotypes, her emphasis on transcending "the everyday" obscures the extent to which poets like Greenwell used religious poetry to elevate the everyday elements of their lives by connecting them with divinity. As she

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read in the context of the collection as a whole. Orthodox conclusions do not always represent a lack of creativity in reaching them.

<sup>111</sup> In *Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*, Angela Leighton explicitly compares the two writers, sealing Greenwell's reputation as Rossetti's more liberal-minded but less poetically talented counterpart. She suggests that Greenwell may have introduced Rossetti to social issues of the day such as antivivisection, "Yet by comparison with Rossetti's, her own poetry is much more 'deeply pledged' to the metrical and sentimental expectations of the day" (124). She concludes, "Greenwell may have been daring in her opinions, but Rossetti was daring, in contradiction of all her opinions, in her imagination" (125). In "The Sewing Contest: Christina Rossetti and the Other Women," Janet Gray points out a tendency among Rossetti's biographers to distort Greenwell's reputation in order to use her as a foil for Rossetti. In particular, she points to scholarly interpretation of a popular but not very accurate anecdote about a sewing competition between Rossetti, Greenwell, and Jean Ingelow. Gray calls attention to the stylistic breadth of Greenwell's poetry: "from the sentimental to the political to the metaphysical" ("Dora Greenwell" 140).

moved toward a poetics of immanence, Greenwell saw poetry not a space set apart from the everyday, but an activity that translated everyday life into something of spiritual significance. Greenwell's *Carmina Crucis* can be read as a defense of the religious content and everyday subject matter in her own poetry and in the poetry of her fellow women poets.

Furthermore, Although Greenwell's *Carmina Crucis* sets out to tell the "inward" history of a soul (as she wrote to Christian Rossetti) in philosophic and gender-neutral terms, her poetic journey in this series ultimately leads her to affirm the value of art that promotes a public mission.<sup>112</sup> Her refusal to view religion as a "private space," as Blain calls it, caused her to connect poetics with what she perceived as the religious imperative to locate and care for neglected populations such as the mentally disabled.

When Virginia Blain describes religion as a space set apart from both public and routine life, she inadvertently reflects a view of religion that social historians identify as part of a secularization narrative that confines religion to the private sphere. Greenwell, however, explicitly sought to contradict this view of religion in her theological, poetic, and social reform writings. In her chapter on Greenwell in *Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (2012), Emma Mason suggests that Greenwell easily dismissed secular alternatives to religion as ineffectual (63). While Greenwell certainly did dismiss secular answers to social questions, her preoccupation with demonstrating their insufficiency demonstrates that she was quite concerned to convince her audiences of Christianity's relevance to public debate.

Several of Greenwell's prose works respond either directly or indirectly to Comte's assertions that science can form a basis for social order and that human society is progressing away from theological understanding toward a religion of humanity. In the

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<sup>112</sup> Janet Gray, Greenwell's biographer for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, asserts that: "She described this book to Rossetti as an 'inward' history with a connecting thread" (144).

same year that Harriet Martineau translated Comte into English (1855), Greenwell made her theological debut with the book *A Present Heaven*, which eloquently exhorted Christians to recognize the relevance of their faith to present life. She followed this with her most famous theological essay, *The Patience of Hope* (1860), in which she articulated why she believes that solely relying on a scientific framework to determine social principles was insufficient, in essence, why humans need a better understanding of the spiritual life to complement a growing understanding of the laws of physical existence: “The shadow of Humanity falls wide, darkening the world’s playground, and games, be they those of Hero and Demigod, can no more enthrall us. What is Science itself but a gigantic toy, which may delight but can never satisfy the heart, which, even through its sadness and perplexity, has learnt that it is greater than all that surrounds it?” (100). In depicting science as a toy for outsized children, she questioned Comte’s idea that a system of moral and scientific thought could satisfy the human need for religion.

Similarly, while Comte depicted secular humanism as the inevitable byproduct of modernization, in *Carmina Crucis* (1869), Greenwell questions whether the drive toward modernization, the mere march of scientific progress independent of faith, can have any outcome besides frustration and disillusionment: “Humanity stands up in strength and anguish; a blind giant wrapt in an envenomed mantle. / It struggles, but it is not freed; it strides on hastily, age after age, yet it comes not nearer its goal” (41). Here, a mere “striding on,” an illusion of progress, does not bring humanity any reward because, crippled by blindness, it has no sense of motivating purpose. These ideas about the inadequacy of scientific narratives of progress became an important feature of Greenwell’s later activism for the mentally disabled as she claimed that advances in medical and scientific knowledge could not replace Christian ethics as a response to this population.

### Immanence in Greenwell's Theology

In her theological writings, Greenwell consistently suggests that Christians must learn to balance their focus on God's transcendence and their hope for eternity with an awareness of God permeating the common aspects of life and God's presence within the present-day world. By emphasizing the everyday aspects of Christianity, which she believes have been neglected, she encourages her readers to value seemingly small domestic matters often allocated to women and to place greater weight on present action to help those in need. Although these ideas originated in her theological essays, they clearly permeated her poetics as well as she tried to articulate the value of poetry within this theological framework.

In her 1862 book *Two Friends*, set up as a theological dialogue between an unnamed narrator and her childhood friend Philip, now a clergyman, Greenwell expresses the importance of finding God in common life. Although this idea of immanence is explained by the male clergyman Philip, he clearly associates God's embodiment in the world with the everyday household tasks of two women—his sister and his mother:

How often have I felt a sacred power in the common things of life! They set a limit to thoughts that are too vast and oppressive for our mortal nature, and tend, in some way which I cannot analyse, to connect our personal identity with the eternal existence of God. I have known moments when they have become sacramental to me; when they have seemed to bring God before me as a tender parent, whose mercies are over all his works. How often is He made known to us in the breaking of bread; revealed through some slight circumstance; made manifest under some familiar aspect! I remember, last year, when I was recovering from a fever, lying one evening between sleeping and waking, too weak and restless to command my thoughts, which drifted out far beyond every known boundary into that dark confused, *diffused* idea of God, in which He is at once everywhere and nowhere. Gently, gradually I was drawn back by the low tones of my mother and sister pleasantly talking over some little household incidents in the fire-light; their gentle, subdued voices seemed to change the world from the void and chaos of nature into my Father's house; they led my spirit into His Presence who rejoices in the *habitable* parts of earth, and makes his delight in the sons of men. (124-125)

Greenwell calls the idea of God within common life “sacramental,” yet her definition of sacramental encompasses more than church rituals or particular ceremonial events in which an ordinary object is invested with symbolic significance for a brief period. For Greenwell, “sacramental” moments are more frequent occurrences in which the material, finite world reveals the infinite world. By taking the idea of God inhabiting the sacraments and applying it to his presence in common life rather than to particular ceremonial moments, she is really articulating a more broadly immanent theology. Here she suggests that Philip’s transcendent meditations are necessarily grounded by the everyday experiences that the women surrounding him control.

Greenwell’s interest in immanence, however, is more than a celebration of women’s work, it is also an indictment of Christians’ failure to fully commit to ameliorating life on earth. Her first theological essay, *A Present Heaven* (1855), is a treatise on the need to recognize God’s presence in the present time, what I call temporal immanence. She argues for a continuity between the Christian past, present, and future, encouraging readers to locate biblical imperatives in the here and now rather than in the time of the disciples or in a future paradise. This temporal version of immanence provides her with an impetus for social action while also constituting her core strategy to combat secular thought. In a stinging critique of how her contemporaries were responding to “the Gospel,” Greenwell suggests that they have severely limited its message by looking only to its future benefit:

We expect it, of course, to save us; but when,--in this world or in the future one? To save us, but from what,--our sins, or only from the punishment denounced against them? What is it that we mean by this word, so often upon our lips, Salvation? Does it comprehend all that can make either this world or the next one desirable, in the restoration of God’s favor, and the recovery of our lost birthright of happiness in Him; or is our idea of it restricted to that ‘escaping from Hell and going to Heaven,’ to which it has been so truly said the mere ordinary notion of it is limited? (27)

Here Greenwell claims that restoring a relationship between God and humans should not be completely focused on the idea of life after death but on a recognition that God is



present in this world and is waiting for people to make it a better place. She tells her audience that salvation is “a real work, a present work, a conscious work, a far more complete and glorious work, than hands which hang down are able to embrace, and eyes looking two ways are able to behold” (28). Here she implies that by focusing too much on both the past depicted in the scriptures and the future promise of salvation, Christians have incapacitated themselves for their more immediate work. Their “hands,” often used to symbolize a mission to care for the needy, “hang down” because their eyes are not focused on the appropriate moment in time. To counter this, Greenwell suggests that her audience “must never forget that not only Immortality but *Life* has been brought to light by the Gospel” (102).

Greenwell’s call to present action not only reminds her readers of earthly obligations but also goes further to suggest that future salvation should never overshadow present life because the future depends on present action: “the Promise of the Future, fondly as we are inclined to rest upon it, is simply contingent upon that which it only *seems* to exceed in glory,--the unspeakable gift vouchsafed to us in the Present” (*Present Heaven* 100-101). Here, the future promise of Christ’s coming is actually contingent on the realization of what Greenwell calls “Christ in us” (101). Greenwell refuses to acknowledge a separation between this life and a future afterlife or between the past when she believes Christ was incarnated and the present position of Christians. In her discussion of “the Gospel,” Greenwell explains how all of these moments in time are linked in her theology: “there is no moment, either of our present or future existence, through which the facts it reveals do not send a pulsation: it links itself with each grain of the sands of time, with each billow of the ocean of eternity; it has to do with all that the heart and soul of man can conceive and execute, endure and enjoy, NOW and FOREVER” (45-46). While Greenwell emphasizes what she believes is the eternal nature of the Gospel, her sand metaphor reveals that this message is immanent in every moment of time. While the pulsation of the ocean is an eternal rhythm, it is constituted by a series

of individual billows. Similarly, each emotion and experience of a particular human life contains a grain of eternity, a billow that is needed to constitute a larger rhythm.

Although Greenwell's second major theological work, *The Patience of Hope* (1860) cautions that an emphasis on everyday routine can become a prison if it is not connected to a transcendent divinity, she continues her insistence that God is present and active within ordinary life: "Here, through the Spirit of God, acting with Man's spirit in the sphere of ordinary Christian exertion, the blind may still receive their sight, the lepers be cleansed, the spiritually dead be raised to life" (94). Greenwell again confirms the temporal immanence of God's Spirit and links it to Christian social action, which becomes the vehicle to reveal this present power. She startlingly suggests that an immanent God can inspire communities to accomplish acts of service comparable to the miracles of the Bible through their ordinary activities.

The content of Greenwell's theological prose points to the importance of connecting the divine and the everyday, and her contemporaries saw her prose style as a feature that enhanced this purpose. In an assessment of Greenwell's prose ten years after her death, T. Morcom Taylor, writing for *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, suggests that Greenwell's own use of metaphoric prose steeped in common images helped her audience to "realise how truly religion can glorify the seeming trivialities of life, and make the common place sacramental (385). Taylor's assessment of Greenwell is, perhaps, a more astute summation of Greenwell's legacy than some of the subsequent more extended studies of her work or the short entries in anthologies that often gloss over its religious content. Taylor's idea that Greenwell used her prose to elevate the commonplace by connecting it to divinity is quite shrewd but does not fully express Greenwell's attitude toward these "trivialities." Greenwell's writing is not just "sacramental," turning the commonplace into a divine representation, it rather suggests immanence by finding and exposing what she believed were the hidden affinities with divinity that already permeated these elements of life.

### Reconciling Poetry and Religion

Although Greenwell's prose and theology were praised for their intensely poetic and metaphoric qualities, she questioned whether modern poetry itself was a good genre to express Christian thought.<sup>113</sup> On one hand, she expressed distaste for the trite nature of devotional writing that ignored modern complexities. On the other hand, she believed that modern conceptions of high poetics emphasized ideas that ran counter to Christianity. Greenwell's conflicted attitude toward poetry, even as she primarily identified as a poet herself, inspired several attempts to theorize a synthesis between the modern poet's role and the Christian's role, culminating in her search for a Christian poetics through her volume of poetry *Carmina Crucis*.

Greenwell expresses her discomfort with popular devotional writing in *The Patience of Hope*. Many devotional writers, she suggests, lack emotional sincerity because they only express religious certainty and ignore the physical and emotional realities of human life:

in their writings slender allowance is made for all that middle region of feelings and tendencies which, themselves neither good nor evil, blend with and color for evil and for good our whole spiritual life, with which they are linked far more intimately than we imagine. In such writers, we trace but little communion with the joy and sorrow and beauty of this earth (163-164).

Greenwell's complaint about the style of devotional writing mirrors her theological insistence that Christians need to focus more on the conditions of this earth. She suggests that discussions of Christian devotion should be framed in relation to the full range of human emotions and everyday human experiences.

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<sup>113</sup> Emma Mason has examined Greenwell's writing on this topic in greater detail, seeing the relationship between poetry and Christianity as the main issue of her work (*Women Poets* 49). She observes correctly that "Greenwell was driven as a thinker by her interest in, and anxiety regarding, her own capacity to be at once a devout christian [sic] and an aesthetically dazzling poet" (50). At the same time, Mason astutely notes that, while Greenwell's work is continually obsessed with the tension between Christianity and poetry, "Greenwell is always working to neutralize such a dichotomy," to create a space in which she can be both a productive artist and a good Christian (51).

By contrast, Greenwell suggested that poetry as a “high art” had a tendency to feed on and heighten human emotion, which she suggests presents another set of challenges for the Christian. In a 16 January 1867 letter to William Michael Rossetti, she responds to the theory of poetics that he had outlined in a volume on Swinburne’s poetry, revealing the evolution of her own ideas on high poetics as she worked to complete *Carmina Crucis*:

What strikes me (among other things) as entirely new in your essay, and to me more valuable than words can express, is its high sense of the value of art as art. I have been long convinced of the truth of Schiller’s canon ‘that a direct aim is fatal to a work of imaginative beauty.’ Still I think I have always been used to look upon music, finish, and rhythm, as mere aids to the expression of thought and feeling. Now, I see that they are *in themselves* sources of beauty and delight, and to be prized accordingly... The truth seems to be that there are wonders and glories *wrapped up* in the common aspects of nature and life, which art detects and sets free.—How true is what you say of your Sister’s art, that it is the natural *necessary* result of affinity, giving what it finds.

When I am at home and settled, I want to write to you upon the Pagan element, which seems to me to enter *inevitably* into all high and free literature and art. Your Sister does not agree with me in this—nor Miss Ingelow, nor anybody; which makes me feel sure I am right. (247)<sup>114</sup>

This letter contains two notable ideas related to Greenwell’s search for a Christian poetics. First, Greenwell suggests that William Rossetti’s literary criticism has opened her up to a new understanding of poetry’s formal qualities, which she had previously seen simply as tools to enhance communication.<sup>115</sup> She does not embrace a straightforward idea of “art for art’s sake” in assenting to “the value of art as art.” Rather, she agrees with Rossetti that the artistic and formal qualities of poetry resonate directly with the

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<sup>114</sup> In an editorial note, William Rossetti states that Greenwell’s reference to “your criticism” here refers to his volume of criticism on Swinburne.

<sup>115</sup> In fact, Greenwell had made a similar comment in *Two Friends* in 1862, revealing that she had been considering this idea for some time. Philip states, “I have long loved art and poetry, because I saw that they had a power to raise and soften Humanity; more lately I have seen that *they are good in themselves*” (33). In *Two Friends*, however, this is only one point of view in a dialogue that seems to favor a more antagonistic view of poetry and religion.

“wonders and glories *wrapped up* in the common aspects of nature and life.” Thus, the artistry of poetry reveals a divine element hidden within the everyday aspects of nature. In essence, poetry has an affinity for finding immanence.

While this seems to suggest that poetry would be an appropriate vehicle for conveying religious thought, Greenwell’s second idea about poetics in this letter reveals the underlying tension that she struggled with between aesthetic and religious thought. She suggests that poetry that seeks artistic integrity also celebrates the emotional excesses of human life in a way that runs counter to Christianity’s attempts to reign in human nature. In her 1875 essay “An Inquiry As to How Far the Spirit of Poetry is Alien, and How Far Friendly, to That of Christianity,” Greenwell expounds upon this topic at length. True to her poetic prose style, she metaphorically illustrates this tendency to feed on emotion by calling poetry “nature’s parasite...with a rank luxuriance of blossom that does not, like the tree itself, draw its nourishment from earth’s healthy soil; hence its oftentimes livid foliage, its brilliant but hectic bloom” (124). Ultimately, she suggests that the aim of the poet differs from the aim of the theologian: “The poet is a man who sympathises with man, the theologian is a man who sympathises with God (135). By this she means that the poet is someone who demands a hearing for human concerns, while theological writings seek to explain God’s purpose, the very thing that she found overly trite in devotional writing.

Greenwell’s idea that poetry contained a “pagan element” was certainly not as unique to her as her letter claims, as the fears of the Evangelical writers in my first chapter as well as the celebration of this affinity by poets such as Swinburne attest. But Greenwell states in her letter to William Rossetti that the idea of poetry’s paganism was a larger concern for her than for the women poets to whom she was most often compared, suggesting that her work across the genres of poetry and theological prose made her acutely aware of the changes in voice between them. Working out this perceived conflict between poetry and theology was essential for Greenwell who, as Angela Leighton has

pointed out, publically identified herself primarily as a poet, a more prestigious and accepted identity for women than theologian. I suggest that Greenwell's struggle to come to terms with the implications of her identity as a poet propelled her to write *Carmina Crucis*, in which she seeks a synthesis between poetics and theology.

At the same time, her continuing prose exploration of poetry's relationship to Christianity also suggested natural commonalities between the two in their opposition to the materialism that she believed pervaded modern secular thought. In her "Inquiry," she argues that, while high poetry and Christianity are often at odds, they are allies in contradicting this turn toward materialism and its "philosophic form, like that of Comtism, with its self-contained formula of *how*, not *why*" (138). Positing that, as a genre, poetry functions in the mode of "analogy" rather than mere "proximity," she concludes that poetic thought, like religious thought, is especially suited to connect everyday life with larger principles. Arguing that the poet senses the need for more than materialism, she states:

He may feel, to put what I would fain express in stronger and clearer language, that even the mortal requires the immortal to explain, to justify, to interpret it; that time has need of eternity, that limitation has need of infinity, that man has need of his God. (138-139)

She suggests the poet, by using an "analogical" gaze, helps to interpret the material world through the lens of eternity, to find the infinite within the finite. This task that poetry teaches us to perform, Greenwell suggests, helps us to eschew mere materialism while still valuing the material world.

Yet Greenwell also suggests that, while poetry aids religion in combating a materialist worldview, it is unduly "impatient of the everyday and commonplace" (141). The Christian, by contrast, is ideally "conversant with life's homely trials, its obscure, unseen griefs; he is a wiper away of the tears that none other but he and God behold" (141). Thus, Greenwell's own work seeks to find a poetics that can give voice to these "homely trials." Greenwell's attraction to an immanent theology, focused on action in the

present and on locating God within human need eventually helped her to chart an aesthetic course between the devotional poetry that she saw as dishonestly trite and the kind of critically acclaimed poetry that she identified as pagan.

*Carmina Crucis*: an “Inward” History of the Soul

Although several of Greenwell’s prose works suggest that “Christian” and “Poet” are separate (if sometimes kindred) categories, it was in her own poetry rather than in her essays that she sought to discover a partnership between these two primary identities. In *Carmina Crucis* (1869) she begins by depicting the value of high poetry’s perspective (of the permission that it grants the poet to question God and to express doubt) in expanding conventional Christian thought. She then searches for ways to bring Christianity’s commitment to “life’s homely trials, its obscure, unseen griefs” into the genre of poetry, eventually embracing a more immanent view of God through this process (“Inquiry” 141). Although Leighton has argued that Greenwell’s poetry was religiously conventional and aesthetically disappointing because it was “much more ‘deeply pledged’ to the metrical and sentimental expectations of the day” than Christina Rossetti’s, I argue that *Carmina Crucis* was, in fact, experimenting with the conjunction between poetry and religion (*Writing against* 124). The poems in *Carmina Crucis* have only been discussed by scholars as individual pieces rather than as part of a narrative of poetic development.<sup>116</sup> Taken as a whole, however, *Carmina Crucis* develops a dynamic narrative about the conversation between religion and aesthetics.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> In some cases, this has led to interpretations that do not recognize the full thematic content of the individual poems. Cora Kaplan’s interesting psychoanalytic reading of Greenwell’s poem “The Sun-Flower,” which comes from the final section of *Carmina Crucis*, for instance, ignores the religious content of the poem entirely, which is less readily apparent when taken out of context (*Sea Changes* 87-88).

<sup>117</sup> Characterizing her poetic style as limited, Leighton and Reynolds cite Greenwell’s assertion that she had not attempted anything beyond personal or lyrical poetry (“Dora Greenwell” 276). However, Greenwell’s comments are typical of her frequent use of self-deprecation (discussed by Janet Gray in “The Sewing Contest”) and reflect a more disparaging view of lyrical poetry, the poetic genre most often associated with women’s writing, than critics today are inclined to express. Furthermore, in context, these comments, from a 15 August 1863 letter to Professor William Knight just a few months after she had

Greenwell's collection does not begin with a poetics of immanence, but rather illustrates her journey toward it. *Carmina Crucis* explores three stages of a faith journey from doubt to reconciliation to action while also illustrating an artist's evolution from Poet to Theologian to Christian poet. Each of the three parts contains a set of poems loosely linked by common motifs and themes. In the first section, she, like the Poet (with a capital "P") of "Inquiry," shows "the disposition to arraign God himself," giving free vent to questions and doubts ("Inquiry" 132). The second part takes the side of the theologian, one who "sympathises with God" rather than the Poet, who "sympathises with man" (135). In the third section, she tries to reconcile these two perspectives and explain how the Christian poet should go about her art.

Yet, even as Greenwell's poems move toward reconciling the seemingly discordant walks of the Poet and the Christian, she also creates a productive tension between them. In her letters and reflections leading up to the publication of *Carmina Crucis*, she argues that the Christian tradition needs more flexible perspectives than those that come from traditional devotion, that countering secularization does not mean whitewashing doubt or despair, but frankly presenting them to readers. Although the poems in the first section are part of a larger trajectory that ultimately moves toward affirming Christian faith, they also stand alone as individual, excerptable poems, and as such are some of the most haunting and memorable articulations of the Victorian crisis of faith. In contrast to the devotional writers whom Greenwell believes claim God's

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corresponded with him about the title of *Carmina Crucis*, express her renewed desire to attempt a broader project: "I see, however, before me, if I live, 'lofty enterprises' opening lately. Even my thoughts continually turn to a great poem, I mean a long one, wherein to concentrate that which is now diffused in scattered songs; an ambition to which, *even in thought*, I have not risen since, when young, I first began to write... Since then, I have never aimed or dreamed of anything more than the lyrical and subjective, knowing my own deficiency in objective force, formative power, and above all in imaginative strength; so that there is something very sweet to me even in the suggestion as a mere 'beautiful possibility' of being able to achieve something more built-up, complete, and comprehensive" (qtd. in Dorling 74-75). The resulting project was *Carmina Crucis*, which is both a longer work and a collection of lyrical, subjective pieces. By combining these two genres, Greenwell creates a hybrid effect that I argue contributes to her depiction of religious struggle.



perspective with too much ease, the first section of *Carmina Crucis* articulates a wide spectrum of human emotions.

Furthermore, in the years leading up to the publication of these poems, Greenwell went beyond arguing that doubt can be a productive phase of Christian life to argue that Christian artists and thinkers must be willing to continually inhabit a place of intellectual uncertainty. In an 1866 letter to Professor Knight, a Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of St. Andrew's and one of her favorite intellectual correspondents,<sup>118</sup> she suggests that the devout mind is limited by an inability to step outside of the Christian worldview and points out some of the consequent weaknesses in Christian thought that stem from this inflexibility of mind: "A Christian is too deeply pledged to a foregone conclusion to be bold and fearless in tracking out ultimate truth. He shrinks—*he cannot but shrink*—from issues that are, or seem, at variance with all that is most dear and sacred to him" (qtd. in Dorling 102). Because Christians are so fixated on a specific teleological narrative, they exclude all ideas that do not immediately seem to fit. This weakness, Greenwell argues, is the reason that the best social actions do not always arise from Christian perspectives. Tolerance, she points out sadly, did not originate in Christian thought:

I think the great reason of this want of elasticity and fairness in the religious mind is owing to its not being sufficiently ready to admit...that Christianity does not profess to answer all questions, or to remove all difficulties; being itself, if one may say so reverently, the greatest of difficulties; a fact, as I have tried to say somewhere, out of harmony with the facts by which it is surrounded. A Christian is not bound to make all things in earth and heaven square and fit. (qtd. in Dorling 102-103)

These ideas of exploring areas of thought that do not play directly into the Christian worldview and embracing the difficulties of Christianity itself suggest that sometimes a

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<sup>118</sup> Professor Knight gave Greenwell's letters to Dorling, and he included many excerpts from them in *Memoirs of Dora Greenwell*. Knight also became known in literary circles as the "most prominent and respected of Wordsworth's Victorian editors" (*Women Poets* Mason 3).

seemingly secular perspective (like the Poet's) might add value to and enhance the quality of Christian thought.

A year later, in another letter to Knight, Greenwell applied these same ideas to her work on *Carmina Crucis*. In the letter, she asks Knight for his opinion on some of the poems for this volume, quite likely from the first section, and expresses her desire for honesty in Christian thought including an honest expression of Christian difficulties:

I am very anxious for your opinion of the enclosed. They form part of 'Carmina in Via Crucis,' and depict a quite real phase of mind; and I have grown lately to think, that as Christians, it is no use, (in fact unworthy of the servants of Him Who came to testify of the truth,) to be everlastingly special-pleading, if one dare say so, for God, and blinking one's true and felt difficulties. (qtd. in Dorling 118)

Although her theological essays, almost by necessity of genre, provide a defense of Christian life, in this letter, she articulates a different purpose for *Carmina Crucis*. Because this work is a collection, the pauses between poems provide a space for Greenwell to acknowledge the emotional reality and seeming finality of doubt and grief for those experiencing it even as the collection's larger narrative structure encourages its audience to look beyond each individual section. In this way, she uses the tension between the narrative and lyric qualities of her collection to create a space between devotion and doubt for her audience.

Greenwell uses the interaction between individual poems and the whole collection of *Carmina Crucis* to mirror the interaction between the experiences of individuals and the larger context of Christian thought. In a letter to Christina Rossetti, Greenwell described *Carmina Crucis* as "an 'inward' history with a connecting thread," suggesting that the collection represented both inward, emotional honesty and a teleological Christian narrative (Gray, "Dora Greenwell" 199). At the same time, her characterization of the collection as an "inward history" points to the particularity of this journey, and Greenwell believed that a concern for the particularity of human experience united both the Poet and the Christian: "Poetry, even in its largest, fullest utterance, deals always with

the concrete; so, too, does Christianity; and the tenderness of each to human love and to human grief, is infinite (“Inquiry” 135-136). Ultimately, by seeing “concreteness” as a definitional feature of poetry Greenwell suggests the potential for poetry to participate in social activism and for poetry to explore divinity through immanence.

The first section of *Carmina Crucis* explores the “Pagan element” in art both thematically and through the voice of the poet. The content of the poems emphasize doubt and despair using Romantic fall imagery, while the voice of the poet confidently questions and “arraigns” God, simultaneously heightening emotional experiences rather than seeking to assuage despair. Each of the collection’s three parts opens with a poem called “L’Envoi.” While this term generally refers to the concluding section of a long poem, often containing a moral, Greenwell uses these poems to introduce the themes and messages of each section.<sup>119</sup> In addition, these opening poems focus on the poet’s evolving state of mind, revealing parallels between the artistic journey and the faith journey in *Carmina Crucis*. In the first “L’Envoi,” Greenwell uses Victorian floriography to link the speaker’s choice of flowers with the poet’s mode of expression.

Bring me no snowdrops cold,  
 No violets dim with dew,  
 But flowers of burning hue,  
 The rose, the marigold,  
 The steadfast sunflower bold,  
 Before His steps to strew.  
 Grey lavender and musk,  
 With clinging woodbines dusk,  
 Bring jonquils, and the frail narcissus bent,  
 Bring odours, incense bring,  
 That I may rise and sing  
 A song which I have made unto my Lord and King. (1-13)

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<sup>119</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “envoi” as, “The action of sending forth a poem; hence, the concluding part of a poetical or prose composition; the author's parting words; a dedication, postscript. Now chiefly the short stanza which concludes a poem written in certain archaic metrical forms.”

The poet eschews flowers that, according to Victorian dictionaries of floriography,<sup>120</sup> denote gentler emotions such as hope, consolation, faithfulness, and modesty, emotions that would have been very acceptable for a Victorian Christian poetess. Instead, she asks for flowers that stimulate the senses (“of a burning hue” and of a “fragrant scent”) and which were also tied to more vivid emotions such as pain, grief, love, and devotion or pride.

Because “L’Envoi” introduces the entire first section of *Carmina Crucis*, the poet’s choice of flowers and subsequent characterization of her song in the poem foreshadow the strident voice of “high poetry” that Greenwell adopts throughout this section to demonstrate the relationship between this voice and religious faith. Although the poet frames her “song” as one that she is creating for God, she also confidently claims ownership of her creation as one that “I have made.” Furthermore, she takes a commanding position, ordering others to bring her the tools she needs, even going on in the next stanza to tell the air to be silent in order to accommodate her song.

Having established the tone of the section, Greenwell introduces the natural backdrop and motifs that will dominate it:

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<sup>120</sup> Beverly Seaton discusses the development of the Victorian language of flowers. She importantly notes that, “Instead of a universal symbolic language, the language of flowers was a vocabulary list, matching flowers with meanings, differing from book to book” (2). These books were intended as gift books for “the genteel female reader,” though Seaton believes it unlikely that they were often used practically (2). While the language of flowers was not uniform, looking at several British flower dictionaries from the mid-nineteenth century, we can see that there was quite a bit of overlap in the meanings different dictionaries assigned to flowers. In Henrietta Dumant’s 1852 *The Language of Flowers: The Floral Offering*, the following meanings correspond to the flowers Greenwell discusses: snowdrops, hope; violets, modesty or (if white) innocence/candor; rose, love; marigold, grief; sunflower, false riches; lavender, mistrust; musk, weakness; jonquils, desire; narcissus, self-love. In Anna Christian Burke’s 1856 *The Illustrated Language of Flowers*, the following similar meanings are assigned: snowdrop, hope; violet, faithfulness, watchfulness, modesty, or rural happiness (depending on the color); rose, love; marigold, grief; sunflower, adoration (dwarf sunflower), haughtiness (tall sunflower); lavender, distrust; musk, weakness; woodbines, fraternal love; jonquils, I desire a return of affection; narcissus, egotism. This suggests that there was a general consensus about the kind of emotion with which each flower was associated. The language of flowers was also strongly associated with women’s religious devotion: “Next to the language of flower book, the most popular type of sentimental flower book was the prose work with religious and moral themes” (Seaton 2). Thus, by using the “language of flowers,” Greenwell was referencing both a general language of feeling and a language associated with women’s piety.

And let the air be still;  
 Summer and death are silent! now I hear  
 No stir among the hedge-rows once so shrill  
 With song, no cuckoo near;  
 But o'er the field a lark  
 Hangs like a quivering spark  
 Of joy, that breaks in fire  
 Of rapture and desire;  
 And from the wood a dove  
 Moans between grief and love,  
 While none doth of her hidden wound enquire.

The heavens above are clear  
 In splendour of the sapphire, cold as steel,  
 No warm soft cloud floats over them, no tear  
 Will fall on earth to tell us if they feel;  
 But ere the pitiless day  
 Dies into evening grey,  
     Along the western line  
     Rises a fiery sign  
 That doth the glowing skies incarnadine. (14-32)

In both of these stanzas, Greenwell paints a picture of nature that is cold, silent, and unresponsive but then suddenly changed. The bleak and silent fall landscape contrasts with the rich emotional outbursts of nature's boldest singers: the lark and the dove, whose songs represent the contrasting yet similarly intense emotions of rapture and grief. Although these figures for the poet break through their bleak backdrop, the second stanza ends with nature's indifference to the singer. The dove may moan, but "none doth of her hidden wound enquire," begging the existential question of whether any higher power exists to hear the words the poet crafts for Him.

This pattern of intense emotional expression triggered by the earth's bleakness in the fall and never fully assuaged by nature continues throughout the first section, providing the imagery for a thematic discussion of doubt. Furthermore, the narrator of these poems frequently conflates this lack of natural response with God's indifference. The "clear as steel," tearless sky of the third stanza becomes a stand-in for human fears that God does not care or does not exist. At the same time, "L'Envoi" and the poems that follow foreshadow a coming change: "Along the western line / Rises a fiery sign / That doth the glowing skies incarnadine" (31-32). Although the sky seems inscrutable, its

change from pitiless blue to red seems to indicate a coming connection. Indeed, the color red punctuates the first section at important moments representing pain, grief, and blood. While these things often have negative connotations, here they also reveal an emotional connection between humans and God.

The internal struggle of doubt in the first section is best exemplified by the poem “November,” which critics have often passed over to deal with the more straightforward depiction of doubt in “Desdichado,” the poem following it. “November,” however, is a crucial poem to the collection’s exploration of poetic voice because it reveals the emotional depth and honesty available to a poet willing to probe an internal struggle with doubt. Greenwell presents this struggle as a dialogue between the speaker’s skeptical, rational self and the speaker’s discouraged heart punctuated by italicized, chorus-like statements. This form of narration suggests a deeply divided self. Yet, rather than creating an internal dialogue that generates new possibilities, the logical speaker’s interrogation of the heart simply spurs the heart to greater despair, suggesting the inadequacy of this sort of response to doubt:

Poor heart of mine, dost mourn  
 To see the rose-leaves shed  
 Fall on their earthly bed?  
 To see the day outworn  
 Fade out into the dead  
 Chill eve so soon? dost mourn  
 Above the wither’d leaf, the blighted corn?”

“I mourn not for the sped  
 Swift daylight in its close,  
 I mourn not for the fled  
 Fair spirit of the rose,  
 That pass’d not till it fed  
 With fragrance all the air  
 Of June; a sweeter care  
 Was mine than buds in thickest green enclose,  
 A dearer hope than lives in aught that dies and blows.”

“I mourn not for a trust  
 Misplaced, a broken troth:  
 Life healeth life that even from the dust  
 Will stir and bloom; I mourn

A sweeter hope withdrawn,  
I miss the sealing of a firmer oath."

*"Who can endure this frost?  
Who can endure this cold?  
The harvest's blighted gold?  
The buried seed corn lost?  
A time of sweeping rains, of bitter grief,  
The dews are thick on earth and light the fallen leaf."*

"And didst thou think through prayer  
To pierce this heavy air?  
Through patience to unwind  
The cere-cloths of the mind?  
Through love to breathe away  
The grave-damps of decay,  
Through love, through faith, through prayer,  
Didst hope upon some fair,  
Fond, future day to find  
Earth purer, Heaven more kind?  
Behold! the heavens are strong, the earth is old,  
And all that comes between is dim and cold.

"A fall of wither'd leaves,  
The voice of one that grieves,  
That grieves nor yet prevails—  
For prayer that makes with Hope  
A covenant, yet fails  
For ever of its scope;  
For Faith's lone lamp that pales,  
Still raised above the dark  
Lone wat'ry waste; for Love that finds no ark,  
But still with patient breast  
Broods on until its nest  
Is fill'd with wint'ry flakes of cold despair;  
For Christ that still delayeth  
For Life that still gainsayeth  
The spirit's trust; for dark despair that sayeth,  
'Where is the promise of His coming? Where  
The answer to thy prayer?'  
Behold, the heavens are strong, all things remain  
As they have been at first, and hope is vain."  
*"A time of sweeping rains, of bitter grief,  
The dews lie thick on earth, and red the blighted leaf."* (1-61)

The self-interrogation in the poem's first stanza forces the heart to reveal in the following two stanzas that the source of its grief is not the outward decay of nature, because the seasons are fulfilling their purpose, nor is it sad because of human relationships gone awry, because these can be healed by a natural process. Rather, she mourns the loss of a "dearer hope," a religious hope.

Because the heart has already revealed that the poem is concerned with a loss of faith rather than the literal decay of nature, in the fourth italicized stanza, Greenwell makes us pause over the possible symbolic significance of the italicized speaker's seemingly opaque factual utterances about the bleakness of fall. The italicized speaker comments from a position outside of the dialogue between the heart and the rational speaker, telling us that this one heart is not alone in her feeling of despair, for "*Who can endure this frost?*" (23). The seasonal fall images become a way of explaining the universality of the speaker's experience while at the same time suggesting its temporal limits. This is only "a time," a season.

In the fifth stanza, Greenwell emphasizes the inability of the rational self to pose a solution for the heart as the poem's skeptical voice mocks the heart's hopes in a series of rhetorical questions. In particular, this voice portrays love, faith, and prayer as misplaced idealism or nostalgia in an overflow of "f" alliterations "Through love, through *faith*, through prayer; / Didst hope upon some *fair*, / *Fond future* day to *find* / Earth purer, Heaven more kind?" (my emphasis 35-38). This mockery is all the more sharp because it lampoons the heart's caressing, nostalgic use of the "f" sound in the second stanza to describe the "fled, / Fair spirit of the rose" that "fed / With fragrance all the air" (12-14). The rational self offers no alternative to this nostalgia but rather a violent barrage of couplets in iambic trimeter, (the tightest, most regular rhyme scheme in the poem), that inexorably march toward the two concluding lines of pentameter, a statement all the more powerful after a series of questions: "Behold! the heavens are strong, the earth is old, / And all that comes between is dim and cold" (39-40). Faced with the indifference of an earth and heaven that do not respond to human concerns, a single heart cannot hope to sway God.

Ultimately the skeptical speaker cannot maintain a cold, rational attitude when faced with God's seeming indifference, for even as it mocks the heart, it uncovers and experiences the reason for the heart's grief. The punctuation between stanzas five and six



indicates that they are from the same speaker, but this voice drops its biting tone to join the heart in mourning, thus collapsing the difference between the two voices. While the heart's reply to the rational voice in the second and third stanzas puts off the revelation of why the heart mourns, instead telling us all the things that it does not grieve for and thus focusing our attention on the emotion of grief itself, the final stanza lists the true reasons for mourning in a series of images personifying the abstract concepts of Hope, Faith, Love, and Life, the same ideals the skeptical self had mocked in the previous stanza. Here, Greenwell redeploys fall imagery to depict each of these in the process of perishing because an expected boon does not arrive or a promise is not fulfilled: Faith is a lamp that is going out but is still held up, Love is a bird tending its nest, but finding no chicks. Greenwell enhances this sense of fruitless waiting with her metrics; three lines in a row that should be iambic contain an extra syllable at the end: "For Christ that still delayeth; / For Life that still gainsayeth / The spirit's trust; for dark despair that sayeth" (53-55). These lines slow the poem's tempo as the speaker nears her conclusion, suggesting that she has been waiting one beat too long and can do it no more.

Despair takes over in her final question, in which she explicitly links the images of waiting to the promise of Christ's coming: "Where is the promise of His coming? where / The answer to thy prayer?" (56-57). The enjambed line emphasizes the questioning word "where" by both starting and ending on it. The answer to this question seems to come in the skeptical speaker's final lines which reformulate the concluding refrain of the fifth stanza: "Behold, the heavens are strong, all things remain / As they have been at first, and hope is vain" (58-59). This statement, denying the possibility that life will get better, contextualizes the speaker's despair as part of a long history of non-intervention from heaven. Yet, although there is no direct reply to this position within "November," the skeptical voice does not, in fact, have the final word.

The final lines come, rather, from the italicized speaker, whose seemingly opaque use of fall images in this case yields another way to interpret the main speaker's despair:

*"A time of sweeping rains, of bitter grief, / The dews lie thick on earth, and red the blighted leaf"* (60-61). These lines are yet another repetition of an earlier refrain in the poem, but while they at first seem exactly the same as the end of the fourth stanza, there is one key change. The earlier line states, *"The dews are thick on earth and light the fallen leaf"* (28). The change from "light" to "red" is significant given that the color red has a symbolic presence throughout the first and second parts of *Carmina Crucis*. Red represents pain but also the antidote to the indifference of the cold blue heavens. Red, essentially, foreshadows Christ's painful death and sympathy with human suffering. Although the tone of the italicized speaker remains mournful in the final lines, these lines point to a context that the main speakers are unaware of and hint that despair is not the final word. While the skeptical speaker believes that humans march forward amidst an irrevocably unchanging earth, the italicized speaker's use of seasonal imagery suggests that this time of despair is only a season that will inevitably pass and give way to renewal. The final lines broaden the perspective of the heart and the skeptical speaker, embroiled in an inward struggle, to tell us that this is only "a time" of rains and grief, not an eternity. At the same time, this speaker wisely suggests that everyone is susceptible to the emotional difficulties of this time: *"Who can endure this cold?"* Thus, we are not asked to judge the skeptical, despairing speaker for expressing doubts, for these are doubts we must all face; rather, the poem asks us to recognize that we exist as part of a larger story.

Although many of the poems in the first section of *Carmina Crucis* focus on doubt, they approach this topic from different perspectives. Greenwell, thus, uses a variety of strategies to help her audience understand positions of doubt, sometimes asking them to emotionally identify with a speaker who doubts and sometimes explicitly explaining the attitude Christian communities should adopt toward those in doubt. While "November" plays different voices off of each other, creating an uneven metrical pattern and conflicted narrative, "Desdichado," one of the poems that has been used most often

to illustrate Greenwell's style, maintains a unified and emotionally distant perspective, which is also reflected in the regular metrical structure and rhyme scheme of the poem.<sup>121</sup> While the speaker's more distant perspective makes her descriptions of the doubter's plight seem almost smug, I suggest that the purpose of this poem, which invokes an audience of Christian believers, is to appeal for Christian sympathy toward the doubter.

Weep not for them who weep  
For friend, or lover taken hence, for child  
That falls 'mid early flowers and grass asleep,  
Untempted, undefiled.

Mourn not for them that mourn  
For sin's keen arrow with its rankling smart,  
God's hand will bind again what He hath torn,  
He heals the broken heart. (1-8)

The first line of "Desdichado" seems to echo a well-known Bible verse from Romans, which reads, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (*KJV*, Romans 12.15). The line's enjambment startles the reader by seeming to negate this biblical injunction: "Weep not for them who weep." After the first two stanzas, however, we find that Greenwell is extending rather than contradicting this command, setting aside the Christian's normal candidates for empathy to suggest that those most in need of it are people who have lost faith in God. After being told in the first stanza not to pity those who merely suffer misfortune while remaining pure, Greenwell's audience might expect

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<sup>121</sup> Janet Gray notes that in several *Carmina Crucis* poems, including this one, Greenwell uses a signature four-line stanza that she invented. It generally follows an ABAB rhyme scheme, begins with a line of iambic trimeter followed by two lines of iambic pentameter, and concludes with a line of iambic trimeter. Gray also analyzes the effect of this stanza form: "The stanza reads as an incomplete synthesis of the ballad meter of folk verse and the longer, literary poetic line. It has an unsettling evocative effect; something seems to have been left out" ("Dora Greenwell" 144). Anne Jamison points out that this poem also reveals the extent of Greenwell's immersion in the latest French ideas and literature: "no modernist (or modernist scholar) asked to imagine the British intellectual on the cutting-edge of reception of new trends in French poetry—the critic or reader who, at midcentury, would be likely to know of Gérard de Nerval, whose fame in his own country was established only somewhat later—would conjure the image of Dora Greenwell...but Greenwell alone among all her contemporaries seems to have written a poetic response" to his sonnet "El Desdichado," a poem that laments "God is dead!" (119).

to hear that they should, rather, pity those who are sunk in sin. Yet Greenwell rejects typical Victorian moralizing by assuring her audience in the second stanza that God has power to heal the broken heart and turns instead to focus on the more modern existential plight of those who see chaos as the world's guiding principle because they do not believe in God.

In the third stanza, she asks her audience to extend their compassion beyond its usual bounds toward those who doubt. Greenwell expresses the plight of the unbeliever as an inability to be at home.

But weep for him whose eye  
Sees in the midnight skies a starry dome  
Thick sown with worlds that whirl and hurry by,  
And give the heart no home; (9-12)

In subsequent stanzas, the unbeliever becomes homeless first in the universe, then on the earth, and finally even within the self. Thus, even as Greenwell suggests an attitude of sympathy toward those in doubt, she implies that there is no way for individuals to understand their place in the world without religious belief.

The New Critical bias toward tight metrical writing along with this poem's clear articulation of the Victorian crisis of doubt has made it one of Greenwell's most admired poems. Yet, failing to address this poem in the context of *Carmina Crucis* as a whole distorts our understanding of Greenwell's poetics. By itself, the poem suggests a compassionate, yet removed attitude toward the modern non-believer, but many of Greenwell's less metrically regular poems focus instead on the anguished personal fall-out of this crisis. In contrast to "Desdichado," the final poem of the section, "Oh, Amiable, Lovely Death!", turns away from tidy metrics as Greenwell refuses to tame the chaotic emotions of the speaker's doubt.<sup>122</sup> Her employment of rigid metrics in

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<sup>122</sup> Greenwell herself admitted that she often adapted her style to the content of her poems rather than the other way around. One such statement is found in her previously-quoted 16 January 1867 letter to William Michael Rossetti: "I have always been used to look upon music, finish, and rhythm, as mere aids to the expression of thought and feeling" (247). In the first section of *Carmina Crucis*, the metrics (or lack thereof in some cases) have a significant bearing on the speaker's state of mind in each poem.

“Desdichado” only serves to highlight the way in which she allows the metrics of the first section to break down as it comes to a close.

Remarkably, for a mid-Victorian lyric poem, “Oh, Amiable, Lovely Death!” is completely written in free verse, the rhythmic effect of each line maintained only by caesuras.<sup>123</sup> Greenwell has been dismissed by critics alternately because of her lack of poetic consistency and because of her conventionality.<sup>124</sup> Yet here her experimentation with poetic form reveals a pioneering attitude toward poetry, suggesting that the weight of modern concerns might no longer be bound within traditional forms. As Kristie Blair has pointed out in her book *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion*, the Victorians tended to associate regular rhythms with faith and irregular rhythms with doubt. Greenwell takes this to an extreme, allowing her metrics to lapse into free verse in the face of complete religious despair. Like her prose, this piece is held together by metaphorical language and a series of haunting images. Thus, she appropriates the style of her theological prose while still maintaining an open poetic space to express emotion and pose difficult questions.

“Oh, Amiable, Lovely Death!” explores what happens to the soul after death. In each section, a first-person speaker explores a different Victorian theory about the soul’s experience after death: the speaker of the first section looks forward to being reunited with a spouse; the second section imagines losing individual consciousness and being

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<sup>123</sup> Emma Mason uses this poem as an example of the “marked transformation of her poetical mode throughout her writing of the 1870s, attesting as it does to a modern, experimental phase in her career” (*Women Poets* 78-79).

<sup>124</sup> Janet Gray explains the reaction of contemporary critics to Greenwell in her *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entry: “Frequent criticisms from her contemporaries were that her writing seemed unfinished, that she exaggerated conflict and failed to achieve a transcendent principle. Her most compact verse invited comparison to the poetry of the seventeenth century metaphysical poet George Herbert, but her vacillating poetics caused some admirers to consider her just below first-rate, a lesser poet than Rossetti because of her unevenness” (“Dora Greenwell” 147). We might now, however, see this inconsistency and lack of closure as innovation, particularly in her attempt to explore inner turmoil through rhythmic variations.

re-incorporated into the earth; in the third section, the speaker longs to understand the world from God's perspective, but the fourth and final section expresses a complete loss of faith in all of these theories because the way the earth functions does not seem to match with the promises of heaven. Greenwell expresses this doubt in a series of metaphors and seemingly unanswerable questions. Notably, these questions conclude the entire first section of *Carmina Crucis*:

And if in life there is decay and harsh illusion, why should we look  
to death to be more just, and kind?

Why should God's faithfulness be made known in the grave, or his  
loving-kindness shown in the land where all things are forgotten?

On earth is hate and discord, and we say these things are but for a  
day, *but if for a day why not for ever?*

If light reigned would it endure the darkness even for a moment?  
and if love is vanquished now, why should we deem that it shall  
triumph hereafter?

Humanity stands up in strength and anguish; a blind giant wrapt in  
an envenomed mantle.

It struggles, but it is not freed; it strides on hastily, age after age,  
yet it comes not nearer its goal.

In the universe, there is care and love abroad, the traces of a  
fashioning and guiding hand.

The pink sea-shell is flushed with beauty, warm, rose-tinted,  
myriad-hued, a chamber for exquisite delight.

The flower of the field is happy, it needs neither shelter nor love,

For it is at peace with all around it, with the dews, the sunshine,  
with the earth's dark kindly breast.

Things unbeloved are safe and cared for; the limpet fastens upon  
the storm-beaten rock, the moss and the lichen seek out the grey  
desolate wall.

But the life that was formed for love and joy is blighted, and the  
heart of man wanders and hath not found its home. (81-92)

In this final section, the audience is not asked to question the conclusions of the despairing narrator, but rather, to recognize the inadequacy of the typical responses to

these questions. This poem implicitly critiques the Christian focus on what will happen after death. This speaker has lost faith in God because there is no response to human suffering in the present. Thus, none of the poem's earlier theories about the afterlife have any effect on this speaker. The speaker cannot locate an immanent God on Earth and therefore cannot envision any kind of better heaven. In the context of the secularization debate, Greenwell is suggesting that the church's failure to respond to present social suffering has played a role in the loss of faith. This poem, then, re-iterates Greenwell's idea that Christianity must make a turn toward temporal immanence.

### Part II of *Carmina Crucis*

In the second section of *Carmina Crucis*, Greenwell takes on what she considers to be the voice of a theologian, attempting to answer the doubts presented in the first section. At the same time, she abandons her stridently high poetic voice, claiming that the artistic qualities of this section are entirely subordinated to its theological purpose. In this section, Greenwell suggests that the limited human perspective of slow earthly time can create a myopic focus on suffering that is partially dispelled by theological understanding. At the same time, at the end of the section she presents a Christ who is still immanent in the world and begins to suggest how Christians and artists should engage human suffering. Thus, she suggests that neither the "Poet's" nor the "Theologian's" view is complete. Rather, there must be a dialogue between the voice of questioning and the voice of certainty in order to promote present action.

"L'Envoi" for the second section presents the shift in poetic position using images that clearly illustrate the subordination of artistry to theological message. It contrasts sharply with the first section's "L'Envoi" both in its flower imagery and in the relationship it depicts between God and the speaker:

My root of life is in Thy grave,  
This flower that blooms above  
I have no care to keep or save,  
Its hues are dim, its stay is brief,

I know not if its name be grief,  
Oh! let it pass for Love.

Oh! let it pass for Love, dear Lord,  
And lift it from Thy tomb,  
A little while upon Thy breast  
To yield its scent and bloom;  
In life, in dying to be blest  
It needs but little room! (1-12)

The flower imagery here plays a double role. On one hand, it represents a shift in perspective from valuing visible life on earth to looking at the eternal root (a winter image which permeates this second section). On the other hand, flower blossoms were clearly linked to the writer's poetry and artistry in the first L'Envoi. Unlike the vivid colors and pungent scents that Greenwell summons to represent her art in that poem, here she describes her flower as "dim," and small, thus suggesting that her artistry is of little importance in and of itself. Furthermore, the humility of both the flower and her address contrast sharply with the first "L'Envoi" in which she confidently introduces her work, claiming ownership of "A song that I have made unto my Lord and King." By contrast, in the second L'Envoi, the flower (poetry) is not only less important than the root (the subject of Christ's death), but emanates from this point rather than from the speaker herself. Furthermore, its only value is the pleasure that it brings to God, and the speaker humbly pleads with God to recognize it and accept it as an offering. At the same time, this vision of poetry is so diametrically opposed to the one she outlines in her first section, that it creates an artistic tension within *Carmina Crucis* that she seeks to partially resolve in the final section.

The heart of section two, in terms of both organization and ideas, is the poem "Summa Theologiae," Latin for "the sum of the theologies." This poem attempts to respond directly to the questions of "Oh, Amiable, Lovely Death!" about how one can trust and wait for the answers of an eternal deity in the face of human suffering. In the second half of this poem, Greenwell reframes God's slowness to answer as patience and carefulness while also forcefully claiming her knowledge of human suffering as a reason



to speak directly to God, echoing the earlier voice of the first section. Ultimately she is unsatisfied with the answers that justify a transcendent God's willingness to wait and must affirm God's immanence and embroilment in suffering in order to accept Christian answers:

He saith to us, "Awhile,  
A little while and ye shall see me." Lo!  
On this our earth quick bitter harvests grow;  
So must Love's patience slowly reconcile,  
Pain, pleasure, death, together banded, mow,--  
And reap, nor care to gather in their sheaves,--  
It is my God alone who waits and grieves;  
Slow is his agony, his guerdon slow. (48-55)

In this stanza, Greenwell compares God's methods to the methods of "Pain, pleasure, death, together banded" using the familiar Biblical imagery of the harvest. She describes this earthly harvest as "quick and bitter," thus taking something that might seem positive, an immediate response to human experience, and turning it into something ominous. The very quickness of these immediate reactions make them cruel because they provide no satisfaction, they mow so quickly that they do not even bother to gather in the sheaves and thus bring no relief to human suffering. The speaker describes God, by contrast, as a very different kind of farmer "who waits and grieves." His slowness does not indicate indifference to human pain, but rather a carefulness that finds the perfect time. Furthermore, by describing God's grief over the harvest of earth, Greenwell suggests that the wait is painful for God as well as for mankind, that God participates in a shared suffering.

Yet, this answer is not yet good enough for the speaker who revives the demanding poetic voice of *Carmina Crucis*'s first section in order to call attention to human suffering:

Yet for no other sign  
I ask; I read within no other book,  
When I within my God's deep heart would look  
I turn not to his earth nor heavens that shine  
And burn from age to age, yet speak no word:  
Let my God speak to me! for I have heard

Strange voices on the earth, strange marvels seen;  
 While the blue, silent heavens look'd on serene,  
 And the white moon-beam brought its message clear,  
 Man's goodly frame was in the market sold  
 By men, and woman's smile made cheap for gold,  
 --Yet Thou, oh God! didst buy the soul more dear! (56-67)

Here, Greenwell's speaker cries out to a more personal God when faced with the serene heavens "that speak no word," suggesting that she is not satisfied with a primarily transcendent deity. She startlingly claims authority to speak to God and to be given a direct answer: "Let my God speak to me!" This contrasts sharply with an earlier poem in this section, "The Cross," in which a religious seeker quotes Moses's words "Let not God speak unto me, lest I die!" (57). Thus, it is all the more dramatic when the poet here eschews any answers that do not come directly from God. Notably, she claims this authority not because of her own needs and suffering but because she has borne witness to her community's suffering. Thus, she suggests that the poet can play the role of advocate for a wider community, giving her the right to speak to God directly and demand an answer.

Greenwell chooses her examples of suffering carefully in this stanza in order to implicate systems of commercial thought in issues of human oppression. Both of the ills she cites, slavery and prostitution, at their root rely on the economic valuation of people. Rather than simply asking God to justify why he hasn't intervened, Greenwell is also asking for an alternative system to determine human worth. She concludes by realizing "Yet Thou, oh God! didst buy the soul more dear!" (67). On one hand, this conclusion seems to dismiss human bodily suffering in favor of God's future promise to redeem the soul. On the other hand, by using the verb "buy" to characterize God's actions in contrast to the "selling" humans are engaged in, she suggests a reorganizing of the system in which God turns around and buys the human soul to protect it from the men who would sell it. Thus, she affirms a God who places himself in opposition to all casual commerce in human suffering.

In the final stanzas, Greenwell seeks to resolve much of the first section's imagery by replacing it with an incarnational understanding of God that goes hand in hand with her argument for an immanence-focused Christianity:

So let the earth be old,  
 And, like a wicked Fate, from off her reel  
 Spin evil changes,--let the skies in cold  
 Clear splendour arch us in a vault of steel;  
 The heavens are far away, yet God is near;  
 I find a need divine  
 That meeteth need of mine;  
 No rigid fate I meet, no law austere;  
 I see my God who turns,  
 And o'er his creature yearns,--  
 Upon the cross God gives, and claims the tear.

And from this soul His love,  
 The slighted human soul that men despise,  
 Shall yet work out a wondrous work, above  
 All wonders of His earth and seas and skies;  
 Love, love that once for all did agonize,  
 Shall conquer all things to itself! if late  
 Or soon this fall, I ask not nor surmise,--  
 And when my God is waiting I can wait!

Christus crucifixus  
 Dei potentia ac Dei sapientia! (68-88)

Here, Greenwell returns to the imagery of the first section, explicitly mirroring the steel cold sky and the unshed tear found in the first "L'Envoi." In that poem, Greenwell described the sky: "The heavens above are clear / In splendour of the sapphire, cold as steel, / No warm soft cloud floats over them, no tear / Will fall on earth to tell us if they feel" (25-28). Similarly, in this poem, the sky remains cold and clear, and the image of steel becomes even more ominous as it arches over humankind, seemingly trapping the reader in a "vault of steel." Yet the speaker remains undisturbed by this state of affairs because she has discovered an immanent version of God who inhabits the world ("The heavens are far away, yet God is near").

The key turning point in the whole collection of *Carmina Crucis* comes when the tear that was withheld in the opening finally falls. The poet claims that, through the cross, God both gives the tear (suffers himself) and claims the tear (takes on human grief as his

own). This focus on the cross fits Greenwell's insistence throughout her work that Christ's sacrifice remains the central idea of Christianity rather than ideas about the second coming or an afterlife. It is, however, significant that she places this moment at center of her collection rather than leading up to it as an ending. By doing so, she leaves room to discuss the implications of this moment for both the artist and the church. The end of "Summa Theologiae" could easily be read as a willingness to ignore human suffering, but Greenwell does not allow her narrative to end with the triumph of this poem because she does not see the cross as a stopping point. Rather, she sees it as the starting point for engaging in social activism, an idea that she makes clear in the poem following "Summa Theologiae," "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb."

While "Summa Theologiae" confirms that it is appropriate for the Christian to wait for God's answer, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb" demonstrates how Greenwell uses the depictions of an immanent Christ to inspire present social action even in the context of uncertainty about the future actions of a transcendent God. The poem has three sections, each based on a different set of metaphors, but I will focus on the middle section here because it responds most directly to the images and ideas of "Summa Theologiae." In the first section, Wisdom personified invites the audience to partake in a feast, but one at which the wine imbibed by the guests represents taking part in Christ's suffering.<sup>125</sup> Reverting to the imagery of harvest used in "Summa Theologiae," the second section summons Christ's followers to join him in his harvesting mission despite bitter weather and a poor crop. Although these stanzas begin by urging patience, they move quickly to counseling action despite a lack of ideal conditions:

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<sup>125</sup> The poem's epigraph links this feast to the last supper during which Jesus utters the words that Christians use as the basis for communion. The epigraph reads: "The Master sayeth, Where is the guest-chamber, that I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" At the same time, the poem's title connects the feast to "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb" in Revelations. These two biblical references are deliberately blended in the poem, suggesting a feast that is still tinged with suffering rather than a triumphal one.

Be patient! from the north  
 The wind blows keen, the garden little yields  
 Of pleasant fruits, yet hath our Lord gone forth  
 To walk among the fields.

His steps have left the flowers,  
 He feeds no more among the lilies sweet,  
 A husbandman he toils through long cold hours,  
 With wounded hands and feet.

Come, reap with Him, for white  
 These fields and ready, thrust the sickle in;  
 The harvest stands but thicker for its blight  
 Of death, woe, want, and sin.

Come, glean the blasted ear  
 With Him, nor be the wither'd grass forgot  
 That waves upon the house-tops thin and sere,  
 By mower gather'd not. (17-32)

While “Summa Theologiae” suggests the need for patience in waiting for a transcendent deity whose slow timeline makes it appear that he does not care to intervene in human suffering, in this poem Jesus is already out in the fields working hard despite the difficult conditions, where he calls his followers to join him. The paradox in this section is that there is more need to harvest because of the blight that is in the field (sin, grief etc.), because there are fewer who care to reap this harvest. The harvesting process Greenwell depicts also highlights Jesus’s insistence on gleaning and gathering in all of the crop, however little promise it seems to show. The meticulous nature of this harvest suggests a commitment to every individual that the harvest represents. As the section moves on Greenwell explicitly points out that the harvest represents a wide array of people in need whom the reader is called upon to aid:

To many a marish place,  
 Choked with the living wreck that on earth’s fair,  
 Cold bosom drifts awhile and leaves no trace,  
 I bid your steps repair.

Unto the darken’d mine  
 I call you now, unto the burning plain,  
 To cells where fetter’d spirits moan and pine,  
 Where madness shakes its chain.

I bid you to the drear,  
 Dark house, unloved of all, where want and age,

Sit day by day,--and turn without a tear  
Life's saddest, weariest page.

In homes unblest where care,  
Grown fierce and reckless, turns at last and rends  
The hearts she broods on; I would meet you there,  
Oh, friends, beloved friends! (33-48)

Christ orders his followers into these sad places at the beginning of this section, but not only does he tell them to go out to meet the needs of those around them, he also says that "I would meet you there." This suggests that Christ can be found amidst need and suffering. It further suggests that if his disciples begin a process of caring for the needy now, they will be met by God in their efforts.

The third section of the poem brings one last metaphorical shift that depicts the union of the personified concepts Love and Grief. This marriage harkens back to the poem's title "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," which is a metaphorical event in Revelations that depicts the consummation of a union between Christ and the Church. Yet, rather than dealing explicitly with the prophesy of Revelations, Love and Grief are united when Christ's disciples follow the instruction to meet the needs of those around them. Thus, Greenwell urges that her readers can initiate a process that will culminate in a larger future eradication of suffering.

### Part III of *Carmina Crucis*

In the final section of *Carmina Crucis*, Greenwell seeks to demonstrate how the Christian should behave in response to the revelation of an immanent God. This response applies not only to the Christian's actions in the world, but also to the poet's role, which looks out beyond personal doubt and belief to engage the world. Although the second section of *Carmina Crucis* depicts several images of people clinging to the cross and refusing to leave it once they have found it, Greenwell uses the third section of *Carmina Crucis* to re-enter the world she despaired of in the first section. Although Christ's atonement remained the central idea of Christianity for Greenwell, she argued that the church must move beyond emphasizing the cross to use it as inspiration to seek out the

marginalized. Greenwell's friends noted that she admired varying religious views from the Catholic respect for sacraments to the Quaker idea of an inner light.<sup>126</sup> At the same time, she critiqued what she viewed as the myopic focus on future salvation that pervaded Evangelical culture, and her work can be read as transitioning toward the focus on immanence within British Christianity that became even stronger by the end of the century.

Greenwell's focus on the present implications of salvation was not merely a call for Christians to prioritize the present, but also a call to question attitudes toward social justice. Whereas Evangelicals had often seen philanthropy as a way to win converts to salvation, Greenwell saw a striving for social justice as a response to Christ's action that would in turn usher in Christ's kingdom on Earth. On 24 May 1865, she wrote to Professor Knight expressing her desire to see the church move one step beyond preaching God's grace to articulate a message of social justice:

...it seems to me that everything in Christianity, even the blessed Cross itself, stops too short, if we stop short at it, and do not let it lead us back to the Father,--that *righteous Father*, Whom our Lord declared that He alone knew, and would reveal to a world that knows Him not. It often seems to me that Christianity has still a great advance to make in this direction; when we consider the deep unrighteousness, such as slavery in its various forms, still tolerated in many Christian countries, also in almost all forms of political and commercial thought; what a denial there is of the great primitive principles of justice and morality...Did you read that fearful, almost incredible account of the death, say the murder from neglect, of a pauper in one of the principal London workhouses? Then what a lamentable state of things is revealed by the commission to inquire into the dwellings of labourers in the south. I could not have believed in such cruel carelessness on the part of our landowners and gentry...Have you seen also some

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<sup>126</sup> Even Greenwell's friends were uncertain about how to categorize her religious commitments as she seemed to value both the sacramental component of Catholicism and the emphasis on unmediated personal encounter typical of low-church Protestant and Quaker thought. Dorling records a conversation with Greenwell's American friend Elizabeth McChesney which describes Greenwell's ecumenical bent: "In speaking of the Sacraments of the Church, I have heard her, in reverent, tender tones, dwell upon their sacredness and power, until she seemed a Romanist: and then, in hours of close personal communion with her, I have heard such confession of the nearness of the individual soul to God, that Church and Sacraments faded away before the shining of that 'Inner Light.'" (qtd. in Dorling 240).

accounts, going the round of the papers, of children in the Eastern Fen Countries, working in the fields in gangs, driven by a ganger, and sleeping away from home?...and the poor man, even when legally free, is oppressed because of his poverty, which can drive to as hard tasks as any overseer. I often wish the Church would preach up the great relative duties of life; (99-100).

Greenwell's observations not only recognize the overt oppression of child abuse and slavery but also the ways that systems of commerce are implicated in human degradation. As Greenwell's letter suggests, for her, God's action does not trivialize the bodily suffering of humans, but rather demonstrates how Christians can place themselves in opposition to social injustice by using "the Cross" as a starting point rather than an end goal.

The third section of *Carmina Crucis* does not appeal overtly to its audience on behalf of one particular social cause. Instead, it allegorically illustrates the mentality of the poet who has accepted the cross as an answer to suffering but is now attempting to re-capture her appreciation for the physical world and her social mission within it. Whereas the first section of *Carmina Crucis* uses images of autumn, and the second section uses winter imagery, the final section employs the images of springtime moving into summer. The plants and flowers that were absent in the second section thus re-appear in the third, re-introducing a symbolic landscape of flowers that indicates the poet's renewed interest in the material world. Greenwell once again links these flowers to the creative act of writing poetry and to individual human strivings, while their resurrection from the ground also brings to mind the idea of hope through Christ's resurrection.

Yet, although the poet of this section has embraced both the central theological ideals of the second section and the value for aesthetic experience in the first section, she must still explore what her new mission as a poet will be and, especially, what subjects she should take on. I argue that Greenwell's poem "Christ's Garland," from the third part of *Carmina Crucis* attempts to answer this question allegorically.<sup>127</sup> On a literal level,

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<sup>127</sup> Emma Mason finds this poem to be "cheerily devotional," and thus out of place in the "ominous sense of struggle against worldly pursuits" in the rest of *Carmina Crucis* (*Women Poets* 79).



the poem contrasts Christ's choice of flowers for his garland with "the world's," "the lover's," and "the child's" choices while the poet explicitly aligns herself with Christ's choices. Given Greenwell's equation of flowers with different forms of poetry as well as this poem's placement in the progression of *Carmina Crucis*, however, the subtext of the poem is the speaker's attempt to understand the ideal subject matter for the Christian poet who is no longer focusing inwardly on doubt. Following the trajectory of this poem helps us to see Greenwell's Christian revision of the Romantic (particularly Wordsworthian) attitude toward poetry and how she attempts to reconcile her poetic and religious identities.

I would suggest that, in this poem, each flower represents the subject matter that a different type of poet chooses. Greenwell begins by personifying "the world" as a person who chooses to pick a rose. She describes the rose as embodying all of the characteristics most valued by society:

The world with stately tread  
 Moves down the terrace walk,  
 To pluck, from garden bed,  
 From off its dainty stalk  
 The rose, the silken rose—the rose whose splendour  
 Is but the luxury of light grown tender;  
 The rose, that makes the very summer round her  
 More warm, more blissful only to have found her;  
 The golden sunbeams in their falling bless her;  
 She breathes, she blooms, she dies in joy; her duty  
 Is to be fair and glad; her life is beauty;  
 Love wooes her, wins her, pleasure will not leave her,  
 The sharp thorn guards her well, but does not grieve her,  
 To all she giveth free, yet none bereave her. (1-15)

The choice of a rose represents choosing subject matter that is aesthetically admired by all. Physically, the rose is naturally attractive and, through a combination of pleasant circumstances and nurture has grown even more attractive. It is also an easy choice for

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While this poem is certainly not one of the most impressive stand-alone poems in *Carmina Crucis*, it does, I suggest, offer an important attempt at thematic resolution in the collection and is emblematic of the final section's tone.

“the world” that doesn’t have to even leave the “terrace walk” to find the rose, and thus can continue to maintain its “stately tread.” Our attention is drawn to the last three lines of this stanza both because it contains three rhyming lines and because they all contain an extra syllable. Each of these lines emphasizes how good circumstances could have gone awry for the Rose but have not. Potential difficulties, such as her thorns, act instead as her guards. She lives in the heart of society and is admired by all. This stanza, then, represents a poet choosing a subject that is universally acknowledged as aesthetically pleasing, but also which focuses on physical beauty and outward appearance.

At the beginning of the second stanza, Greenwell brushes the rose aside refusing to take it as her own subject:

Ho for the rose! but by the bitter sea,  
Torn by the vexing gale, and by the spray  
O’er-wash’d, the rosemary  
Lives on from day to day  
With deep strange scent, that yet  
Cleaves, like a vain regret;  
Unblessing she, unblest’d,  
Unwoo’d and uncaress’d,  
Yet fair enough, my Lord, for Thee and me. (16-24)

Greenwell contrasts the Rose’s rich and protected life with the Rosemary’s dire circumstances, which barely allow it to survive “from day to day.” The Rosemary is neither easily accessible nor especially beautiful, both physically and emotionally isolated, yet Greenwell asserts that the Rosemary is valued by God and by her as much as the Rose is valued by society at large. This idea resonates strongly with Christ’s interest in the people society has left behind in poems such as “Marriage Supper of the Lamb.” Greenwell’s refrain, “Yet fair enough, my Lord, for Thee and me,” which appears several times in the poem indicates her identification with Christ’s valuation and her new found desire to search out both everyday subjects and marginalized subjects.

In the next stanza, a new poet, “the lover” demonstrates his preference in flowers:

The lover seeks some fair  
Exotic bloom that breathes through leaf and stem  
Its soul upon the heavy weighted air,

The myrtle dark, the rich geranium,  
 Are his; all blossoms delicate and rare;  
 His too are violets dim,  
 And sweet and hid! for him  
 The sweetbrier, and the woodbine dusk that run  
 Their wild warm souls in one,  
 Till in their clasp and in their kiss unending,  
 None knows, so close, so kind, so sure their blending,  
 Which is the sweeter, which of them the fairer,  
 And which of bliss is giver, which is sharer;  
 But by the common way  
 Grow flowers that are not gay  
 Nor sweet like these, and if ye chance to name them  
 Weeds, only weeds, ye will not seem to blame them;  
 Weeds, only weeds, perchance, these flowers may be,  
 Yet fair enough, my Lord, for Thee and me. (25-43)

Unlike the world, “the lover” is willing to seek out his flowers, but only because they are particularly exotic or possess startling emotional characteristics. Again in this section, there are several lines that overflow their metrical boundaries to express the unique and fortunate nature of these plants: “Till in their clasp and in their kiss unending, / None knows, so close, so kind, so sure their blending” (34-35). These flowers are notable for their strong passion, but Greenwell again contrasts “the lover’s” choice with hers. This second contrast shows that God (and by extension, the poet) finds value in common flowers, not necessarily just those, like the Rosemary, who face particular difficulties, but also those that seem to be utterly unremarkable, that have been brushed off by society as “weeds.” Interestingly, this stanza moves from addressing society to the more intimate address to God in the last line.

Finally, Greenwell turns to a young child, perhaps as a reference Romantic poetry’s obsession with the child’s gaze and taking natural subjects from everyday life. The child is a flower collector/poet who might be likely to appreciate “weeds” and other flowers that society finds unremarkable. Yet Greenwell also suggests differences between the child’s approach and God’s.

The child beneath his feet  
 Finds flowers, so many flowers,  
 He counts by them his fleet,  
 Bright days’ unlingering hours;  
 So many, that for best

He takes the nearest still,  
 And still hath flowers, his breast  
 And clasping hands to fill;  
 He seeks the moor where burns  
 The furze; the scented plume  
 Of meadow sweet, the bloom  
 Of May, the hedge-row ferns;  
 And all his flowers are cool  
 And fresh! above the pool  
 They lean, or in the peasant pasture blow,  
 Yet by the ruin's edge,  
 And on the crater's ledge,  
 And by the glacier underneath the snow,  
 Upon the dreary hill,  
 On cottage window sill,  
 Are other flowers unsought, unsung that be,  
 Yet fair enough, my Lord, for Thee and me! (44-65)

The shorter lines help us to get into the mode of the child's simplistic and enthusiastic assessment of flowers. He can't tell the difference between them or make judgments about them, but gets excited about what is closest at hand. Yet even the child's lack of social bias is no answer to finding flowers, because the child is not seeking for what has been left out, but merely grabbing all within his reach, and his reach doesn't extend very far. Again, the poem contrasts the child's method with God's program of finding the unsought and the passed over. In the second to last line, Greenwell characterizes these flowers not only as unsought but also "unsung." This adjective immediately evokes the artist's role in promoting social reform. While the philanthropist may seek out and help those left behind, it is only the artist who can make their story known and thus provide the impetus for further seeking. As her roles of social reformer and poet merge, she concludes that the socially-engaged artist's job is not to reflect society's views back to it or to extol the things it already admires, but to bring attention to and create a voice for the marginalized.

This vision of the poet's relationship to the unsought and seemingly unimportant permeates the end of *Carmina Crucis*. The collection's final poem, "Veni, Veni Emmanuel," takes up the popular topic of Christ's second coming. Yet, as in "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," the poem does not use the idea of the second coming to

diminish the significance of current social endeavors. Rather than depicting Christ's return as initiating a selection process between the worthy and unworthy, Greenwell offers a vision of Christ perfecting life on earth to make it joyful and pleasant for a wider range of people and creating a more inclusive environment in which all life can prosper. Thus, the poem both affirms God's care for the marginalized and suggests how her contemporaries can anticipate the values that will be enacted at Christ's return. In the final section, Greenwell describes how she believes Earth will function after Christ's return:

Thy reign eternal will not cease;  
 Thy years are sure, and glad, and slow;  
 Within Thy mighty world of peace  
 The humblest flower hath leave to blow,

And spread its leaves to meet the sun,  
 And drink within its soul the dew;  
 The child's sweet laugh like light may run  
 Through life's long day, and still be true;

The maid's fond sigh, the lover's kiss,  
 The firm warm clasp of constant friend;  
 And nought shall fail, and nought shall miss  
 Its blissful aim, its blissful end.

The world is glad for Thee! the heart  
 Is glad for Thee! and all is well,  
 And fixed, and sure, because **Thou art**,  
 Whose name is called Emmanuel. (109-124)

Given the images of dying flowers earlier in *Carmina Crucis* and their connection to human despair, it is significant that here we see a flower reaching full bloom.

Furthermore, Greenwell asserts that in God's ideal world, the "humblest flower," will be given as much room and care as any flower, harkening back to her commitment in "Christ's Garland" to locate and care for neglected flowers. Although, in this second section of *Carmina Crucis*, the poet instructs readers not to focus exclusively on the things that are generally valued in the material world, this final poem affirms the worth of individual human life and emotions to God. Greenwell ends not only by affirming God's commitment to the world, but also by affirming belief in God. The last stanza contains a

subtle word play: “and all is well, / And fixed, and sure, because **Thou art**, / Whose name is called Emmanuel” (122-124). In these lines, “because **Thou art**” could mean that the earth now shares God’s qualities of being fixed and sure or it could mean that the earth is now fixed and sure because it knows God exists. The word play, then, both affirms God’s faithful character and the poet’s own belief in such a God’s existence.

In Greenwell’s version of the second coming, Christ’s perfection of the earth is not a purge but a way of “making room” for all to flourish. Thus, the ending of Greenwell’s collection explicitly registers her opposition to a version of human progress that creates hierarchies of value for people. Rather than the Social Darwinist vision of eliminating the imperfect through the selection of the best, her poem reveals an expansive vision of society in which all of humanity finds its perfect end, a world in which “The humblest flower hath leave to blow.” This understanding of God’s value for all life lies at the heart of Greenwell’s own career as an activist, which focused on the issue of education for those with mental disabilities. Her work for that cause can be seen as a literal way of “making room” for every earthly flower to develop.

“The humblest flower hath leave to blow”: Greenwell’s  
Advocacy for Asylum Reform

To understand the full extent of the faith journey in *Carmina Crucis*, we must look at Greenwell’s involvement in social reform at the time she was writing it. The conception and composition of *Carmina Crucis* extended over a number of years in Greenwell’s career from at least the early 1860s to its publication in 1869.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, she was engaged in one of her most active periods of advocacy, espousing the cause

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<sup>128</sup> Greenwell was writing to Professor Knight about the title of *Carmina Crucis* as early as 30 March 1863 (Dorling 73), and a version of the poem “The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth” from the third section appeared in the periodical *Good Words* as “Soul Gardening” in 1862. In the spring of 1867, Greenwell sent several poems from the collection (probably from section one based on her description of them) to Professor Knight for his comments, which suggests that the project was in full swing (Dorling 118).

with which her name became associated: asylum and educational reform for those with mental disabilities. Her 1868 essay on this topic “On the Education of the Imbecile,” which was well-received by the clergy and the medical community, resonates strongly with both the language and underlying ethics of care that she adopts in the final sections of *Carmina Crucis*.<sup>129</sup> Although in *Two Friends* Greenwell had expressed the fear that an interest in poetry might distract one from attending to concrete religious and social duties,<sup>130</sup> in her poetry and advocacy of the late 1860s, she resolves this tension as she uses poetry and prose in tandem to explore both a personal and public ethics of care stemming from an immanent theology. Greenwell’s biography also supports the idea that she found a balance between her commitments to poetry and social action as she reached the pinnacle of her poetic career and her social engagement almost simultaneously.

Greenwell’s search for the role of the Christian poet in *Carmina Crucis* ultimately affirms that poetry can promote an identification with suffering and thus create an impetus for action. Although she saw *Carmina Crucis* as a volume that depicted a

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<sup>129</sup> The terminology for mental disability is notoriously slippery both in terms of identifying how historical terms were used and in deciding which designations are currently appropriate. Greenwell uses the term “imbecile” in her title, which around this time was used for those who had a less profound disability, but she frequently uses the term “idiot,” generally denoting a more profoundly disabled person, interchangeably with it, though she also sometimes discusses profound disabilities as well. The designation “idiot” was very much in flux, which accounts for blurry use of terminology. In *Idiocy: A Cultural History*, Patrick McDonagh explains this shift: “while at the start of the nineteenth century ‘idiocy’ is often a general term applied to a number [sic] mental conditions, in 1913 ‘idiocy’ is itself formally subsumed under the broader concept of ‘mental deficiency’ ... and no longer functions as a general denominator” (20). McDonagh also usefully cautions against the assumption that we can easily equate historical categories with current categories of mental disability: “People who are now designated ‘mentally retarded,’ ‘intellectually disabled,’ ‘developmentally delayed,’ ‘learning disabled’ or ‘cognitively impaired’ have—as the multiplicity of current terms suggests—been subject to a staggering number of labels and epithets over the years, and the condition denoted by any one term may not be absolutely (or even remotely) identical to that denoted by another, especially as each term is the product of a specific social and cultural environment” (12). Idiocy, argues McDonagh, is not a purely objective category, but one which has been socially constructed.

<sup>130</sup> In *Two Friends*, Philip, the young clergyman, recounts an anecdote in which reading Keats distracts him from his parish duties among the poor. Ashamed at his difficulty in shaking off Romantic reverie as he tends to an older woman, he notes that “my heart was with Endymion, and I had to tell the story of Christ” (45-46).

process of “inward” development while she saw her essay as an explicit act of public advocacy, her poetry exposes the emotional journey that is a prerequisite for public action, a journey in which Greenwell developed a voice of advocacy by speaking authoritatively to God about human suffering. While she views her essay as the most effective medium to propose specific action, her poetry establishes an ethics of care for the marginalized that forms the basis for this appeal. Ultimately, her poetry seeks to affirm a valued place for all within human society in order to usher in a world that reflects heaven in the present, a world in which “The humblest flower hath leave to blow, / And spread its leaves to meet the sun, / And drink within its soul the dew” (112-114). Likewise, her essay seeks to establish a society in which the disabled also have the opportunity to develop through education. In the final section of *Carmina Crucis*, Greenwell envisions her poetry as a search for the voiceless, for “other flowers unsought, unsung that be, / Yet fair enough, my Lord, for Thee and me!” (64-65). She implies that her mission is to call attention to those whom society neglects. Greenwell’s advocacy for the mentally disabled corresponded directly with this mission. For her, the particular plight of this population was the difficulty many faced in advocating on their own behalf. Thus, while her poetry dramatizes a search for the voiceless, her prose attempts to directly mediate on their behalf.

Greenwell’s ideas on religious social reform crystallized around a particular population in 1867 when James Diggins, a member of the Royal Albert Asylum’s board, introduced her to the asylum’s project. The Royal Albert Asylum in Lancaster would admit its first patients in 1870.<sup>131</sup> Unlike the vast majority of asylums in England,

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<sup>131</sup> The initial donation for the asylum was made by a Quaker businessman in 1864, and a fundraising committee was set up to raise more funds that same year; land was purchased in 1866; building began in 1868; patients were admitted in 1870 (“Timeline”). The Royal Albert underwent a number of name changes that, as Mark Jackson points out, help to reveal some of the shifting attitudes toward the mentally disabled: “The asylum in Lancaster, initially referred to as the Northern Counties Asylum for Idiots, changed its name in 1866 to the Royal Albert Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles of the Northern Counties. In 1884, it became the Royal Albert Asylum for the Care, Education and Training of Idiots, Imbeciles and Weak-Minded Children and Young Persons of the Northern Counties. In 1900, in line with



however, this institution was founded to educate children with learning disabilities. Ideally, after seven years they were reintegrating into society having gained useful skills and greater independence (“About the Royal Albert”).<sup>132</sup> Greenwell became a staunch advocate for the asylum rather than simply a charitable donor, finding two avenues for her advocacy. Learning from Diggins that he hoped to further his asylum project by rousing interest on behalf of the imbecile with more “attractive literature on the subject,” she agreed to help elicit stories from popular authors and edit them as a series (148).<sup>133</sup>

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other institutions, the Lancaster asylum again altered its public image, becoming the Royal Albert Asylum: A Training Institution for the Feeble-Minded of the Northern Counties” (33). The Royal Albert was one of five regional voluntary asylum institutions established between the 1840s and late 1860s. In his study focused on the Western Counties asylum, David Gladstone states that these asylums “represented the main institutional provision specifically for people with learning disabilities and were, along with smaller private establishments, Poor Law workhouses and the county lunatic asylums, an important short- or long-term alternative to family care” (Gladstone 134).

<sup>132</sup> The online archive *Unlocking the Past: A Royal Albert Hospital Archive* set up by the CSV (Community Service Volunteers) with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund provides an overview of the Royal Albert’s history and an archive of oral histories, photographs, and interviews from those who lived and worked there. It also provides access to official reports from the Royal Albert, which continued to exist as an institution (albeit much altered from the original) until 1996. David Gladstone notes that, when they were first founded, these voluntary asylums tried to admit only those deemed educable idiots, admit them at a young age, and keep them for no more than five years and not beyond the age of fifteen (141-142). The policy of admitting young inmates and keeping them for a short time gradually eroded due to various late-century pressures: “the declining employment opportunities outside the Institution; the need of the Asylum itself to retain trained workers to produce goods themselves and transmit their skills to those who were younger; the shifting discourse on mental deficiency that occurred in late Victorian England” (142). As the voluntary asylums became more self-sufficient in their production of food and goods for sale, however, selecting inmates who were deemed educable became even more important to the survival of these institutions (148).

<sup>133</sup> As Janet Gray has pointed out in “The Sewing Contest,” Greenwell seems to have asked Rossetti for a contribution, but Rossetti felt unable to supply one. In an undated letter, which the editor of Rossetti’s letters places in June 1868, Rossetti replied to Greenwell: “Thank you for it [a letter] and for the pretty touching story accompanying it. I wish I could do aught towards helping fellow creatures so helpless: but I cannot tell you the poetical barrenness that has crept over me this long while past. Thus as my pen produces nought, may my purse at least contribute a trifle and pay for a copy of the volume you propose to issue should you succeed in compiling and publishing it? Perhaps you will kindly remember me as a subscriber for one copy should it see the light; and further I shall feel at liberty to trouble you with a written trifle should I be so fortunate as to produce one after all” (309). As an editor, Greenwell revealed her attitude toward writing fiction for a cause, counseling the writers that “Any allusion of a *direct kind* to the Asylum, in a little story of this kind, destroys its simplicity by making you feel it is written for a purpose. This, in anything literary, must always be avoided, as carefully as you would avoid the old-fashioned ‘moral’ at the end of a fable” (qtd. in Dorling 150).

Her second, and more direct, contribution was “On the Education of the Imbecile,” which was published by the *North British Review* in 1868, and republished as a pamphlet by the Royal Albert. Having immersed herself in the history of education for the mentally disabled and the most recent works in the fledgling discipline of psychiatry, in her essay Greenwell sought to spread these ideas among intellectuals while also arguing for the moral imperative of public action to ameliorate conditions for the mentally disabled. Noting the ignorance of a medical man who compared the disabled to animals, Greenwell wrote to Diggins: “I hope soon to send you another five pounds, but I think far more is to be done now by *diffusing information*, which I try to do” (qtd. in Dorling 147). Thus, she identified her primary role as raising awareness about a largely voiceless population.

Although Greenwell’s work on mental disability is only beginning to be recognized by contemporary scholars, when “On the Education of the Imbecile” was first published, Diggins noted that it was “widely circulated among the clergy and medical men of the North of England” (qtd. in Dorling 151). He also suggests that the essay’s afterlife did not end with the admiration of a few readers. Rather, “The essay was quoted by some of the most eminent men in the North, who have at public meetings or in the pulpit pleaded the importance and Christian obligation of efforts to ameliorate the condition of the imbecile” (qtd. in Dorling 152). By impressing men with a platform to influence public opinion, Greenwell clinched a much wider audience for her views than those who happened to read *The North British Review* or her pamphlet. Diggins also attributes a large portion of the essay’s success to Greenwell’s writing style, particularly noting her “poetic treatment” of the subject (151).

When Greenwell wrote her essay in the late 1860s, asylum care for the mentally disabled had a more positive resonance than it does today given the prevalence of negative images currently associated with the Victorian asylum and late-twentieth-

century moves toward deinstitutionalization for the mentally disabled.<sup>134</sup> In *Mental Disability in Victorian England: The Earlswood Asylum 1847-1901*, one of the only full-length studies of mental disability in the mid-Victorian period, historian David Wright notes that “it is well worth remembering that the origin of the Victorian idiot asylum was informed by an optimism over the reintegration of the mentally disabled back into society” (202).<sup>135</sup> Greenwell’s writing on asylums came during (albeit toward the end) of this optimistic period. Thus, rather than a pre-cursor of the late-nineteenth and early-

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<sup>134</sup> At the same time, a number of historians have pointed out that the failure of community care to live up to all of its aims at the end of the twentieth century has led to renewed historical interest in nineteenth-century institutions. David Gladstone argues that the aftermath of closing long-stay hospitals in the twentieth century has led to an increased scholarly interest in the history of institutional care as well as “concern with the effectiveness and adequacy of community care for those discharged from the long-stay institutions” (134). David Wright sounds a similar note. “At the close of the twentieth century, when institutional and community care appear to have equal problems, there seems little to be gained from condemning the Victorians for their own imperfect responses to difficult social situations. Just as the rise of asylums did not herald a new era of progressive humanity, neither has the recent rapid closure of long-stay hospitals led to a smooth reintegration of the mentally disabled into society (9). Likewise, Anne Digby points to issues of inadequate funding and social stigmas, arguing that institutionalization was one factor in the social isolation of people with mental disabilities but has too often been seen as its sole cause: “Changing the locus of care may be helpful in the longer term in positively asserting the similarities between human beings, rather than in underlining a sense of difference by physical separation. But a radically revised social construction—a reinvention of social perceptions—of those with a learning disability is also needed if fundamental improvements in lifestyle are to be permanent” (18).

<sup>135</sup> Wright explains that this Victorian optimism about education for the mentally disabled was a major shift from the discourse surrounding “idiocy” prior to the nineteenth century, which emphasized the idiot’s ineducability and even defined idiocy as the inability to be “improved” (137). He argues that this attitude toward education came from a combination of the post-Enlightenment optimism about human progress, Victorian faith in the individual, and the Nonconformist equation of “spiritual improvement” and “self-help” (153). Gladstone similarly notes this optimism: “The prominence accorded to the twentieth-century ‘warehouse’ model of institutional care means that it is difficult now to recapture the sense of positive optimism that pervaded the origins of the voluntary asylums in mid-nineteenth-century England” (138). Patrick McDonagh, however, sees the rhetoric surrounding idiocy and education in the 1840s through 60s as less pervasively optimistic. He argues that the movement to educate the idiot “vigorously transformed the innocent idiot into an unreclaimed being who could be educated and woven into the Victorian social fabric; supporters of educational asylums drew upon traditional imagery to work upon the sentiments of readers (who were, notably, also important sources of funding), while at the same time portraying the uneducated idiot as a subhuman brute who could be reclaimed for humanity by the dedicated work of caring physicians and educators” (22). While McDonagh’s analysis still acknowledges optimism about education, it also suggests that illustrating the need for education meant creating a more negative image of the character of those with disabilities as well as fueling anxieties surrounding the untrained and uninstitutionalized “idiot,” thus paving the way for the extremely negative rhetoric about mental disability in the late nineteenth century.

twentieth-century desire to segregate deviants, Greenwell's attitude toward mental disability might more accurately be categorized as a forerunner of the mid-twentieth-century special education movement.

The Royal Albert Asylum embodied the growing awareness in the late nineteenth century of what we now consider special education techniques. In an 1873 pamphlet, C. Miller describes a visit to this asylum during which he views contented inmates receiving instruction in literacy, farm work, craftsmanship, and the arts, all overseen by patient teachers in an appealing natural setting. As propaganda for the Royal Albert, this pamphlet was likely an overly rosy depiction, and in practice, segregating the learning disabled for years did not always prove the best way to acclimatize them to life outside the asylum.<sup>136</sup> Still, asylums often provided improved physical conditions and care for this group.<sup>137</sup> As Wright notes, "The Lunatics Act of 1845" stated that all insane individuals, a category that included the mentally disabled, should be confined in asylums, but the enforcement of this law focused on those who were designated "curable" or "dangerous." This left the mentally disabled without provision, and workhouses were

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<sup>136</sup> Gladstone points out that the goals of those who ran voluntary asylums were two-fold: educating individuals to be both "economically independent" and "morally competent" (138). They sought to accomplish this through "moral training and task-centred learning in an environment that emphasised health, nutrition, exercise and the creation of habits of discipline" (138). While asylums tried to develop educational methods specifically tailored to individuals with mental disabilities, Wright points out that the segregation resulting from asylum life often undermined these educational goals by re-enforcing the otherness of those with mental disabilities. In addition, a lack of worldly experience did not equip patients to deal with everyday life outside of the asylum (153-154).

<sup>137</sup> Wright argues that asylums such as the Royal Albert did not generally replace family care, nor were they places where unwanted family members were "dumped." Rather, Families facing difficult economic periods often strategically turned to asylums on a temporary basis to assist in the care of children with mental disabilities (82). He describes asylums as "a resource used strategically by poor households intent on overcoming periods of impoverishment. Asylums were often only one dimension in a lifelong endeavour to care for the dependent and the disabled, even during the apex of asylum provision" (197). Gladstone also points out that voluntary asylums filled an important niche: "For a considerable section of the population private madhouses were too expensive while the Poor Law workhouses were socially unacceptable. For them the voluntary institutions represented an alternative to the only other available source of help: that of care provided by family or kin" (140).

the default solution for those whose families could not care for them (13).<sup>138</sup> Using similar statistics to those quoted by Greenwell, Wright extrapolates that in 1850 only 1,000 “idiots and imbeciles” were part of the asylum system, while 10,000 insane individuals (mostly idiot and imbecile) were confined in workhouses or boarded out with non-relatives (19-20).<sup>139</sup> Thus, Greenwell is not suggesting that mentally disabled children should be taken away from supportive family environments, but rather that they should be offered a better safety net and the chance for an education that some had deemed unproductive. Constance Maynard, an early biographer of Greenwell, suggests that Greenwell would have encountered these “pauper lunatics” during charitable visits to local workhouses, initiating her interest in a large-scale safety net for this population (84).

The only alternative for those without families willing or able to support them was entering a philanthropic institution, such as the Earlswood asylum and the proposed Royal Albert Asylum, which would not have nearly enough room for all applicants. Greenwell admired efforts like those of the philanthropically supported asylum, but noted their limitations of both space and consistency in caring for a large number of eligible individuals. Thus, she turned to advocating for a larger-scale public system. Only later in

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<sup>138</sup> Anne Digby documents this turn to the work houses: “Under later Poor Law orders of 1844 and 1852 idiots and imbeciles were allowed outdoor relief, but many found their way into the workhouses, some as short stay inmates called ‘ins and outs,’ and others as very long-stay ones. A survey of long-standing inmates of workhouses in 1861 found that the idiotic and epileptic formed a principle category” (6). Digby notes Poor Law authorities were often motivated to retain all “lunatics” (a category which at the time included the mentally disabled) who were not particularly troublesome or violent in the workhouses because they were much less expensive than asylums (7).

<sup>139</sup> Gladstone uses a different set of statistics to illustrate how few “idiots” were in care specifically designed for them. His statistics also suggest a larger number of individuals in institutions, possibly because he includes additional institutions such as prisons: “Only 3 per cent of the estimated 29,542 idiot inmates of institutions were in special idiot asylums” (140). The rest were in workhouses, lunatic asylums or prisons. Furthermore, “Gelband’s research has suggested that the number of mentally retarded paupers outside institutions nearly equaled the number of those of that category who were in institutions of all kinds” (140). In the 1860s, however, Poor Law Boards began to limit outside relief provided to families for the care of individuals with mental disabilities, pushing more into the workhouse.

the century, with growing concern over degeneration did the government decide to take a more active role in asylum care, seeing the mentally disabled “as a predominately medical rather than educational priority” (Jackson 13). Greenwell, by contrast, advocated for public intervention for primarily educational reasons.

In “On the Education of the Imbecile,” Greenwell both advocates for systemic changes that she believes will improve the lives of the mentally disabled and argues that an ethic of care for these individuals will bring British society closer to fulfilling the divine mandate to create a world more like heaven where “nothing is lost.” First, she urges the creation of a national public asylum system to house the mentally disabled rather than a system relying solely on individual philanthropy or the poor laws. Stray charity, she suggests, is not enough to meet the needs of this population, nor does a lack of collective action fit with Britain’s identity as a “Christian nation.” Second, she advocates for education of “imbeciles and idiots,” identities which had once been technically defined by the idea that they were uneducable. Citing the work of early-nineteenth-century French theorists such as Itard and Voisin and of her contemporary Seguin, all of whom are now well-known for their contributions to the field of special education, she argues for the value of education programs within asylums while also suggesting that innovations in education for the mentally disabled could be fruitfully applied to general education, particularly in its use of the arts.

Greenwell clearly continues the tradition of *A Present Heaven* in “On the Education of the Imbecile” as she re-asserts that Christians must not merely prepare to leave the world for heaven, but rather prepare the world for Christ by striving to create a world resembling heaven. While Greenwell promises a reward for those who help the mentally disabled, the reward is not simply an individual salvation:

Yet, though the idiot may truly be numbered among that portion of humanity, ‘blind, and halt, and maimed,’ who can never recompense their benefactors, such devoted generosity will surely meet a due reward, and will find it in that ‘better resurrection’ to

which their good deeds contribute so largely—the restoration of humanity *as a whole*, to intelligence, to faith, and to God. (98)

At first Greenwell seems to use a rhetoric of future salvation, suggesting that those who care for the mentally disabled will be rewarded in a “better resurrection.” Yet she identifies this reward not as a personal salvation but as “the restoration of humanity *as a whole*, to intelligence, to faith, and to God” (98). By depicting a “better resurrection” that encompasses the well being of an entire community, she suggests that salvation is really a process that brings current endeavors to their full fruition, not an event that negates current suffering through the promise of a single future event. Thus, those who work for the good of the mentally disabled will be rewarded by seeing how their work advances the ethics of society as a whole.

Unlike most of her contemporaries, Greenwell not only argued for the creation of a public asylum system, but also questioned the efficacy of private philanthropy. Although she admired philanthropic endeavors that broke new ground, such as the Royal Albert Asylum, she questioned private philanthropy’s ability to provide widespread relief for an entire population.<sup>140</sup>

It is kind no doubt in the individually charitable to subscribe sovereigns, to fill purses, to weary their friends to give them a vote for Earlswood for the benefit of this or that idiot who has come across them in a chance way, but this is a question that ought not to be left to philanthropy. It is one worthy of a nation’s heart. (80)

In this passage, she points to the inevitable holes in a philanthropic system that relies on “chance” encounters rather than systematic care, thus demonstrating the need for a public system to meet the needs of a larger population.<sup>141</sup> She suggests that the moral burden of

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<sup>140</sup> David Gladstone demonstrates that voluntary asylums supported by philanthropy often did have financial crises. While the Royal Albert was relatively well supported, the Western Counties Asylum, a similar institution on which Gladstone bases his research, was in and out of financial difficulties, leading him to conclude that “the financial experience of the various voluntary asylums of nineteenth-century England was by no means comprehensively successful” (141).

<sup>141</sup> Greenwell’s critique of philanthropy is similar to the critiques levied by those who advocate an ethics of care. Virginia Held sums up this position: “Bubeck, Kittay, and many others argue forcefully that care must be seen as a public concern, not relegated to the private responsibility of women, the inadequacy and arbitrariness of private charities, or the vagaries and distortions of the market” (18).

caring for the mentally disabled belongs to the nation as a whole, both putting this issue squarely in the public sphere rather than in the hands of private individuals and suggesting that social obligations are not met when charitable individuals fulfill their own need to help the visibly needy, but when a commitment is made to a comprehensive program of reform that will extend to all who need care.

While many contemporary Westerners think of religion in public discourse as the conservative “legislation of morality,” Greenwell promoted a liberal ethic of care based explicitly on Christianity’s relevance to public debate.<sup>142</sup> Contemporary scholars of secularization, rather than viewing secularization simply as the waning of religious practice, see it as the marginalization of religion in public discourse. Both Talal Asad and José Casanova, for instance, suggest that secularization relied on redefining religion itself: “according to our modern construction ‘religion’ (at any rate in its worldly forms) consists precisely of those beliefs-sentiments-practices which are not essential to our common politics, economy, science, and morality” (Asad, “Religion and Politics” 6). Casanova suggests, however, that one way religious institutions and individuals have pushed back against the privatization of religion is “by refusing to concentrate on ‘finding answers to religious questions uncontaminated by secondary considerations stemming from the economy, the polity, the family, or science’ (41). Greenwell’s rhetoric on disability clearly pushes against the formation of a secular public sphere that does not include religion in public debate and the idea that religion had no bearing on medical and scientific topics. In “On the Education of the Imbecile,” she sets herself in opposition to secularization on two fronts: first, she insists that Christian principles should result in collective public action rather than merely private philanthropy to ameliorate the living conditions of the mentally disabled. Second, she argues that the

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<sup>142</sup> Greenwell once complained that she was “almost the only *liberal* lady in Durham” (Dorling 55).



scientific and medical discourses that were just beginning to dominate the discussion of mental disability might sometimes complement, but could never replace a religious framework for shaping a public response to mental disability.

Even though Greenwell herself was involved in collecting donations for a privately run asylum, her comments on the inadequacy of philanthropy demonstrate her desire to promote a presentist Christian ethics as part of public policy rather than private conscience. Although scholars such as F. K. Prochaska and Martha Vicinus have argued that philanthropy was a gateway for women's work in the public sphere, Greenwell points to private philanthropy's insufficiency to help groups whose plight did not seem particularly attractive to the general public. In *Memoirs of Dora Greenwell* a close friend sums up Greenwell's personal attitude toward philanthropy explaining that Greenwell was particularly attracted to causes that did not receive enough public attention: "The more peculiar and touchingly difficult the conditions of suffering were, and the farther they were removed from the observation and concern of the great world, the more pertinaciously did she endeavour to discover their origin, and to administer a remedy (qtd. in Dorling 143). This suggests that Greenwell saw her own charitable work as finding marginalized populations. Greenwell had a negative attitude toward forms of philanthropy that she believed were not whole-heartedly committed to alleviating suffering: "She was totally unacquainted with simmering emotions of a philanthropic kind. For merely *fashionable* philanthropy, she felt something that was more than disgust, she loathed it (143-144). This reminiscence shows Greenwell's contempt for public benefactors whose interest in popular causes suggested greater concern for finding personal fulfillment than for responding to social needs. By contrast, she views her own philanthropic responsibility as bringing greater public awareness and resources to neglected causes. Her often negative comments about philanthropy are not meant to devalue women's on-the-ground charitable work, which she participated in as well, but

rather to suggest that caring for vulnerable populations is a social imperative, not a middle-class hobby.

In “On the Education of the Imbecile,” Greenwell promotes a liberal Christian worldview that refused to relegate either religion or social responsibility to the private sphere of philanthropy. She suggests that when a community sees private charity as its primary means of ameliorating the condition of vulnerable populations, it cedes its collective conscience to the less effective and inconsistent whims of individual do-gooders. Furthermore, this failure of public conscience has led to a crisis of care:

It is time that England, who for her 50,000 imbeciles has as yet provided asylums for just *one thousand*, to ask whether we are to continue to allow the weakest, the least fortunate among us, to drift hither and thither as chance and fate direct, the very *flotsam* and *jetsam* of humanity, or to decide whether as a nation we will seek to emulate the wise and loving economy of our Divine Founder, and strive to heal that which is sick, to bind up that which is broken, to bring back that which is driven away, to gather up of these fragments and leavings of human existence, ‘so that nothing be lost.’ (80-81)

In this section, Greenwell forces her audience to make a choice, to recognize that doing nothing or continuing with an inadequate philanthropic system leaves the “imbecile” to chance rather than to God. She uses the double sense of the word “economy” to contrast her view of the “Christian nation’s” responsibilities with the kind of commercial thought she critiques in her letters and in *Carmina Crucis*. The “economy of our Divine Founder,” which Greenwell exhorts readers to follow here is a form of management and conservation, of husbandry that cultivates resources “so that nothing is lost,” rather than the sort of commercial wealth that discards anything that does not seem immediately profitable. Significantly, the phrase “so that nothing be lost”<sup>143</sup> refers to the gospel of John’s account of Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000. In this story, after Jesus has miraculously

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<sup>143</sup> This language comes directly from the account of the feeding of the 5,000 in the Gospel of John: “When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (*KJV*, John 6.12).

multiplied a few loaves and fishes to feed the crowd, he orders his disciples to collect any leftovers. Greenwell interprets this as a reminder that societies should not waste any of the resources they are given (in this case human potential). She seems to remind her readers that the food for 5,000 originated from a very small amount of resources, so these leftovers might also have hidden potential in the right hands, and at the least will benefit a few.

In her call for a public system that accomplishes what she saw as the Christian goal of allowing no human life to be left behind, Greenwell uses language and metaphors that explicitly mirror poems in *Carmina Crucis*. This overlapping language links the specific call to action in her essay with the poetic calling she identified by the end of *Carmina Crucis*. In “Summa Theologiae,” for instance, she similarly contrasts human commerce with divine economy, and God’s husbandry of resources represents his care for each individual. The metaphorical machinery of the earthly harvest leaves behind many stalks in contrast to Christ’s gentle gleaning of the piece. In the passage of her essay quoted above, Greenwell similarly exhorts her audience to follow God’s example in caring for the “leavings of human existence.” Likewise, in “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb,” Christ calls his disciples to find “the living wreck that on earth’s fair, / Cold bosom drifts awhile and leaves no trace” (34-35). Here, “the fragments and leavings of human existence,” the potential “flotsam and jetsam” of human society similarly “drift hither and thither as chance and fate direct” because there is no system in place that fulfills Christ’s injunction.

Greenwell used her ideas on theology and ethics to raise the stakes of the debate on care and education for the mentally disabled. As she tells her audience in the beginning of her essay, “The question which we are now considering...is not one of mere philanthropy.” Instead, she asserts, “It is an inquiry which bears, and that in no indirect way, not only upon education in general, but upon legislation, upon morals, upon the general relations of human beings with each other, and even upon the nature of moral

accountability with God” (78). In this way, she challenged her audience not to be satisfied with a single financial contribution but to confront legal and social structures that did not promote mutual responsibility. She suggests that relegating her topic to the realm of “mere philanthropy” will disconnect it from the public’s moral imagination. Instead, she insists that it should remain pertinent to the nation’s collective social conscience.

The similarities between Greenwell’s approach to care for the disabled and a modern-day ethics of care helps to illuminate her contribution to the mid-Victorian discussion of mental disability, a contribution that relied on female experience, an interconnected vision of society, and the assertion of moral responsibility for the dependent. Philosopher Virginia Held defines an ethics of care as the idea that “prospects for human progress and flourishing hinge fundamentally on the care that those needing it receive.” An ethics of care emphasizes “the responsibility to respond to the needs of the dependent” (10). Greenwell’s objections to private philanthropy as the primary system of care for the mentally disabled astutely anticipate modern theorists who advocate an “ethics of care” rather than a “virtue ethics,” which is mostly interested in the motives and attitudes that make an individual (such as a caregiver) virtuous. Although an ethics of care might take the caregiver’s attitudes into account, it also considers the results of caring and whether the needs of those being cared for are met. Greenwell makes a similar distinction within a Christian paradigm, arguing that individual philanthropy is morally inadequate because it focuses on the virtue and religiosity of the caregiver rather than the efficacy of care and the progress of society toward creating a present heaven.

A feminist ethics of care also calls attention to the interdependence of individuals. This emphasis highlights the inadequacies of “[m]oralities built on the image of the independent autonomous, rational individual,” such as Kantian and utilitarian ethics, when faced with the morality needed to address human dependence (Held 10). Eva Kittay, for example, argues that a system of liberal individualism fails to acknowledge

everyone's dependency at certain stages of life and the permanent dependency of groups such as the severely disabled.<sup>144</sup> Thus, she calls for a society that values and acknowledges acts of care giving while using them as a model for larger social systems that support dependents and care givers. Similarly, Greenwell's essay points to the emotional and financial strain faced by families seeking to provide care and suggests that they should have recourse to a larger care-giving network. She states:

in the idiot, and in those most nearly connected with him, are to be found, if anywhere, the persons who need all the help and support and comfort which the stronger members of the Christian family are bound to furnish to the weak and heavily burdened ones. Nor must we forget, in considering this great subject, that we were men even before we were Christians. (100)

Greenwell suggests that the moral obligation within a family to care for a disabled member is a prototype for the moral obligation of a society to provide support to the families of dependents and their caregivers. Her acknowledgement of the work involved in care giving activities and her application of insights from family care relationships to society as a whole and its institutions also align with a feminist ethics of care. Although an ethics of care is grounded in women's experience of care giving, those who espouse it are not satisfied with "confining the ethics of care to the private sphere while holding it unsuitable for public life" (Held 16). Similarly, for Greenwell, ethical treatment of the mentally disabled means systematizing support for them and their families within institutions and laws.

Although Peter McDonagh, one of the only scholars to provide some discussion of Greenwell's involvement in the debates on asylum care, has also followed the rhetoric

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<sup>144</sup> Kittay argues that "[i]nevitable dependencies, the dependencies of our early years, old age, disability, and illness, however, have been privatized, so that we have come to discount them and the integral part of social life they in fact constitute" ("When Caring is Just" 271). She suggests that our conception of independence is itself a "fiction, regardless of our disabilities" that obscures the centrality of "relations of dependency" in society (278). To remedy this, she calls for "a public conception of *doulia*, by which the larger society supports those who care for the 'inevitably dependent'" and those who have been "excluded by the contractual model of reciprocity" (270).

of family in this essay, he interprets it primarily as a patriarchal and paternalistic discourse. While Greenwell uses the traditional Christian imagery of a heavenly father, I would argue, however, that she simultaneously demonstrates an awareness of the real challenges facing female caregivers, a role which she experienced as a long-term care provider for her ailing mother.<sup>145</sup> In the context of an ethics of care, her reliance on family metaphors is an apt way to equate the kind of support we give to family members with the obligations of a larger community.<sup>146</sup> Greenwell's work represents a departure from the lack of concern about provision for the mentally disabled that characterized governance on this issue in the mid-Victorian period while at the same time pushing against a widening late-century discourse of eugenics that was beginning to dominate interpretations of expanding medical knowledge on mental disability.<sup>147</sup>

Greenwell's essay came just prior to a crucial shift in attitudes that put medical discourse rather than religious obligation at the center of the asylum debate. Social

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<sup>145</sup> Greenwell was the main caretaker for her invalid mother after her father's death in 1854 until her mother's death in 1871, which left her free to move to London and associate more with a literary circle there. In Dorling's *Memoirs of Dora Greenwell*, her friend Thomas Constable extols Greenwell's love for her mother (162), but Constance Maynard suggests that, although "they were fond of each other," there were some tensions in the relationship, which was "under a perpetual sense of difficulty and the old lady could say very sarcastic things" (98). Leighton and Reynolds suggest that some of this tension may have been owing to Greenwell's liberal opinions, which her conservative mother did not share ("Dora Greenwell" 275). In her *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entry on Greenwell, Janet Gray notes that Greenwell's mother "often refused to give Greenwell money for fear that she would give it away" ("Dora Greenwell" 142).

<sup>146</sup> McDonagh explores both the imperialist imagery Greenwell uses to portray the idiot as "unmapped territory to be colonized" and the way she combines it with Christian rhetoric of family (217). Greenwell certainly uses the rhetoric of exploration, but this is tempered by her assertion that science will never fully comprehend the human mind. McDonagh points out that Greenwell's attempt to see "idiots" as "potential partners in society" came as society was moving away from this model toward ideas of degeneration (218).

<sup>147</sup> Both Matthew Thomson and Mark Jackson give detailed accounts of the factors that led to this shift. Thomson, for instance, argues that eugenicist thought was not the only factor leading to the 1913 act. He also cites discussions surrounding the emergence of universal elementary education in 1870 and reforms to the prison system as major factors: "This shift is best explained, not by the pressure of an organized eugenics movement—none yet existed after all—but by the way the problem of mental deficiency provided a focus for a series of more general moral, social, and demographic anxieties" (20).

historian Mark Jackson describes the state's growing involvement in institutional segregation of the "feeble minded" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to depictions of the mentally disabled as "the perpetrators of crime, the incubators of disease, the primary source of poverty, promiscuity, alcoholism, insanity, and national degeneration, and the negligent parents of hordes of illegitimate children" (2). These attitudes culminated in the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act, a law that increased state influence over institutions like the Royal Albert Asylum, which was forced to accept more long-term adult patients and to move resources away from education and training ("About the Royal Albert").<sup>148</sup> This ironically fulfilled Greenwell's dream of a national asylum system, but radically reversed her goals for asylum care.<sup>149</sup> Greenwell's work was in line with 50 years of progressive and optimistic thinking on education to equip the mentally disabled for ordinary life and re-integrate them into society, and she feared that the medicalization of the public discourse on mental disability was displacing a rhetoric of care and education.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> The mental Deficiency Act of 1913 "provided for a division of those with congenital defects or impairment from a very early age, into idiots, imbeciles, and the feeble-minded. It proposed an institutional separation so that mental defectives should be taken out of Poor Law institutions and prisons into newly established colonies" (Digby 11-12).

<sup>149</sup> David Gladstone describes the change in rhetoric about asylums that occurred in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: "There was considerably less emphasis—politically and professionally—on improvement and an increasing discourse on containment which structured the form of the 1913 legislation" (142). Although educational asylums were started by activists optimistic about "improvement," Anne Digby describes how institutions eventually contributed to the shift from optimism to pessimism and fear of the mentally disabled: "Once created, for whatever combination of altruistic and self-regarding motives, institutions both highlighted and themselves created problem populations. By the mid- and late-nineteenth century the optimism of early reformers had been succeeded by a pessimism in which feeble-minded inmates were seen as inherently problematic. As long-stay, 'chronic' inmates they assisted in the silting up of the asylum through impeding its curative potential. At the same time, as recidivists in prison populations, they contributed to what was perceived as an alarming growth of Victorian criminality. In these circumstances it was predictable that the prevalence of the feeble-minded should become an important strand in contemporary debates on social degeneracy, and hence on eugenics." (5-6).

<sup>150</sup> David Gladstone describes this change broadly as "the shifting discourse on mental deficiency in Victorian and Edwardian England which moved from a conscientious commitment to individual improvement to a *fin de siècle* pessimism redolent with images of degeneration" (136). In his more nuanced account of *fin-de-siècle* attitudes, Mark Jackson describes the factors that led to "notions of the feeble-

Confronting the growing medicalization of the public discussion on disability, Greenwell insists that a religious understanding of disability still has a place in the public debate. She asserts the limits of science and medicine: “When we have learnt all that is at present known about brain and cell, and nerve and tissue, we shall find that we have extended, and not in any degree exhausted, the study of the rational, affectionate man” (74). Although Greenwell embraced some of the most recent developments in scientific and psychological thought in the late 1860s that would later be incorporated into the eugenics movement, such as the idea that the mentally disabled were more susceptible to criminality, she juxtaposed these ideas with an insistence on the need for an ethics based on an understanding of God’s immanence within all human life.<sup>151</sup> She argues that the “image of God” is buried deep within every human mind, and thus that medical knowledge cannot replace a spiritual understanding of the mind (94).

Even as scientific thought was moving to categorize the mentally disabled as degenerate and encouraging society to safely cordon off this “deficient” population from their uncontaminated peers, Greenwell was placing them into a religious framework that blurred the categories of “perfect” and deficient.<sup>152</sup> Comparing those with disabilities to those considered “normal,” she states:

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minded as a discreet, pathological but manageable menace” (3). In particular, he documents the growing concern about those in the “borderlands” between the “normal” population and the more profoundly disabled population. The desire to categorize and cordon off the mentally disabled partially arose from fear of those who might blend in more readily.

<sup>151</sup> One way in which Greenwell engaged the most recent thinking on disability was through her interest in psychiatrist Henry Maudsley’s popular physiological or organicist theory that mental disorders were caused by physical defects. Wright explains that the “organicist understanding of mental handicap was central to the medical model of idiocy—that physical defects of unknown origin were preventing the true expression of the idiot mind. Idiocy was being recast as a *disease* of the mind...the medical model of idiocy would fall easily under a Social Darwinist belief in the hereditary nature of disability” (154). While Maudsley was concerned about degeneracy in the British population (Thomson 20), Greenwell interpreted his theory to mean that the soul of a mentally disabled person is imprisoned within the body. She wanted to use this insight to further educational techniques and to remind her audience of the intrinsic value of the entrapped soul.

<sup>152</sup> Greenwell’s depiction of disability as a continuum was in line with medical attitudes toward disability in the 1860s and sharply different from the kind of categorization that followed later in the



For, taking man at the standard he was evidently originally designed to meet, what are any of us, even the most gifted, but beings to whom something is wanting, people of whom it may be truly said, to quote the ordinary North-country expression in speaking of the imbecile, that we are not all there. ..in His mind alone is drawn the clear perfection of the outline each was originally designed to fill. (76-77)

For Greenwell, the distinction between the mentally disabled and the rest of society blurs when compared to all of humanity's failure to live up to God's "outline." Calling her observation an "analogical inference," Greenwell suggests that the human condition itself is a form of disability. By placing everyone on a continuum of disability, she implies that the mentally disabled cannot be set aside as dangerous or less valuable.

At the same time, she uses this connection between the mentally disabled and those of "sound mind" to suggest that strategies developed to educate the disabled could be applied to the general population. As Greenwell notes, and as later theorists such as Maria Montessori confirmed, many tenets that were being developed for special education such as focusing on principles rather than memorizing facts, incorporating the arts into education, and providing positive reinforcement were equally applicable to general education.<sup>153</sup> In particular, she notes the importance of the arts:

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century. In 1866, Dr. P. Martin Duncan and William Millard published a manual about the classification and training of the mentally disabled based on their experience at the Eastern Counties Asylum. They believed a more specific system of classification would aid in the administration and education at these institutions. However, their scale was "continuous and fluid" and emphasized that "defectives could also move between classes" (Jackson 30). Their classification helped to introduce the idea of the "feeble-minded" individual, who straddled the boundary between "normal" and the less profoundly disabled "imbecile." The term "idiot" described the more profoundly disabled individual. Maudsley, however, would go on to insist on the importance of studying these borderline individuals, pathologizing the feeble-minded: "The ready conflation of mild degrees of mental defect with criminality, promiscuity, and poverty not only served to legitimate calls for special schools and homes for the feeble-minded but also effectively fractured the continuous scale of deficiency carefully constructed by Duncan and Millard, into discrete classes" (Jackson 33).

<sup>153</sup> Maria Montessori, who worked with mentally disabled children early in her career, was also influenced by Itard and Séguin, some of the same nineteenth-century French theorists cited by Greenwell. Wright notes the connection between Montessori's ideas and the ideas of those promoting educational asylums: "The systematic institutional training of idiot children represented a watershed in modern educational theory, decades before the more famous theories of Marie [sic] Montessori became indelibly associated with child development" (153). Mark Jackson also points to some similarities between educational techniques for the mentally disabled in Britain later in the century and Montessori's methods, but believes they developed independently: "In particular, Montessori's reliance on Séguin, and her

Seguin says that he has in all cases found that those among his pupils who have made the most progress have been those most brought into relation with works of art, and adds that the energetic stimulant, which *the poetic element* gives life, is too little taken into account in general education,--a subject upon which, it is scarcely necessary to say, researches like these cast valuable light, for in Voisin's words, "we are still dealing with man although under a different aspect." (original emphasis 97)

Greenwell suggests that "*the poetic element*" is a way to reach into the mind by stimulating the senses, creating an avenue for other types of learning. Poetry and the arts become an educational tool not because of their intellectual content, but because they appeal to the senses, providing an "energetic stimulant" that opens up the mind to new experiences. At the end of this section, Greenwell again highlights the essential similarities between the mentally disabled and the rest of society. This not only allows her to suggest how general education might improve by borrowing ideas from special education, but also to once again contradict the medical discourse of "deficiency" that threatened to undermine her ideas about the value of education for the mentally disabled.

### Conclusion

Greenwell's insistence on the essential similarity between the mentally disabled and the rest of society not only supports her argument for education and an ethics of care but also allows her to embrace poetry and the other arts as educational tools. For, if "*the poetic element*" is the key to opening the minds of the mentally disabled, Greenwell reasons that it must perform the same function for everyone. It is perhaps as a form of education that we can best understand Greenwell's own poetry in relation to her prose. While Greenwell, in her previously noted letter to William Michael Rossetti, clearly states her opposition to poetry with a "direct aim," this did not mean that she thought poetry was merely a means of private expression. While *Carmina Crucis* is certainly not

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emphasis on development, on educating the senses and exercising the body, and on the role of work in a prepared environment, were comparable to principles adopted in England. However, it is unlikely that Montessori's methods had a direct impact on English special schools and classes until the second decade of the twentieth century" (Jackson 171).

a direct treatise on a social cause, it can be viewed as a form of emotional education that Greenwell believed opened her audience's minds to human suffering and created an identification with the marginalized that she hoped would lay the groundwork for future engagement with causes like her own activism for the mentally disabled.

Greenwell's theological understanding of temporal immanence was an underlying thread behind both *Carmina Crucis* and "On the Education of the Imbecile." While her theological journey in *Carmina Crucis* leads her to recognize the need for an immanent deity, this is not her stopping point. Rather, she finds that an immanent Christ insists on action in the present, despite religious uncertainty about the future. While *Carmina Crucis* depicts Greenwell's journey toward an immanent understanding of Christ and her discovery of a social mission, "On the Education of the Imbecile" uses immanence as a rhetorical tool to challenge her audience. On one hand, she reminds them of the imperative to ameliorate suffering in the present, questioning the efficacy of philanthropy alone as a response. On the other hand, she asserts that all people have equal value because they contain the image of God.

Greenwell's essay insisted on the importance of her theological perspective in the public discussion of mental disability, and she used it to confront legal and social structures that did not promote mutual responsibility as well as to question the emerging scientific understanding of the mentally disabled as degenerate and deficient. Greenwell's ideas on the ethical necessity of caring for this marginalized population put her at the cutting edge of educational theory and link her to the current feminist development of an ethics of care.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### EXPANDING CATHOLIC COMMUNITY: ALICE MEYNELL'S VISION OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD

In 1883, Alice Meynell, a poet, essayist, and critic much admired by her contemporaries, described her impressions of several exhibits at the Royal Academy and the Grosvenor Gallery for the audience of *Merry England*, a Catholic monthly that she edited with her husband.<sup>154</sup> These winter exhibits were noteworthy for showing the sketches and developmental studies of the “Old Masters,” and Meynell found this display of artistic drafts fitting for the times: “For this is an age which takes an intelligent interest in processes” (“Story of a Picture” 189). Yet, although the Grosvenor Gallery, unlike the Academy, was known for its innovative approach to exhibition display, Meynell faulted the exhibit for being inaccessible to laypeople; it “said much both to artists and public, but said it explicitly to artists only—vaguely to the public. Without some commentary such displays of the notes and stages of study are hardly intelligible” (190).<sup>155</sup> These two comments are emblematic of both Meynell’s own artistic aspirations and the ethos of the journal in which her comments appear. Her complaint that the exhibit was not clearly

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<sup>154</sup> The Grosvenor Gallery, run by Sir Coutts Lindsay and his wife Blanche, was strongly associated with the Aesthetic Movement and, according to Colleen Denney, was known for its commitment to showing new artists and new media. She describes it as “an exhibition site that embraced challenge and change at the end of the century, both in the artists it represented and in the ways their works were displayed” (Introduction 1). Denney notes that the gallery was open between 1877 and 1890 and attracted a cult-like following “due in part to its innovative display aesthetics and its cachet of privileged society rituals” (*At the Temple* 15). Although the summer exhibits for which the gallery was known best featured contemporary artists, the winter exhibits often presented earlier art. Allen Staley gives an overview of the gallery’s winter exhibits, including the first two in 1878 and 1879, which featured the drawings to which Meynell refers. He notes that, in the catalogue for the first exhibit, “Joseph Comyns Carr claimed that in presenting old-master drawings to a larger public beyond ‘a limited and learned circle of amateurs,’ the exhibition marked an ‘epoch in Art exhibitions,’ and most of the critics seem to have agreed” (59). In her study of Meynell’s art criticism, Meaghan Clarke notes Meynell’s interest in art across the spectrum of tradition and innovation: “rather than iterating accepted art historical teleologies that pit the traditional against the avant-garde, her texts articulate an overlapping panoply of artists and shows” (34). This accords well with her interest in reinterpreting historical art for a modern audience.

<sup>155</sup> Meynell’s essay goes on to try to remedy this lack of commentary by reprinting and discussing Sir Frederick Leighton’s studies for *And the Sea Gave Up the Dead Which Were in It* from his recently released drawing book.

annotated reveals her commitment to publicly-engaged and accessible art, while her awareness of the public's fascination with process shows an astute assessment of her audience's changing tastes. For Meynell, exhibiting artistic process both enhances an industrial society's appreciation for the production of art and makes artistic genius comprehensible enough to inspire more everyday creations. Viewing a work's progress teaches "the lesson that Genius itself has no immunity from the waste of often ineffectual labours, and from the weariness of thrice-attempted toil" (196). This revelation not only serves as an encouragement to industriousness, but also democratizes the act of creation. For, while the product of the great artist may far exceed that of an amateur or a student, the process of creation is ultimately the same for both.

Meynell's belief in the importance of uncovering creative process, however, was not confined to her art criticism.<sup>156</sup> The artistic mission and religious purpose of her magazine *Merry England* were inextricably linked with the magazine's mission statement promising simultaneously to help its readers appreciate "literary literature" or "artistic art" and to inspire them to hold religion "more dear" ("Manifesto" 8). Significantly, Meynell's interest in depicting the creative process figures most prominently in her explicitly religious writings, and her artistic method often blends with her theological vision of a participatory and creative Catholicism, suggesting that her interest in artistic process influenced her theology. Indeed, her essays and poems describe religious experience as something that is constantly being developed rather than as a repeated tradition. Furthermore, she depicts engagement with God as a necessarily creative act, not just for herself as an artist, but for anyone seeking such encounters. Her poetry is permeated by depictions of a God who is not yet fully formed, a God directly accessible

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<sup>156</sup> Several scholars have noted Meynell's interest in process. Beth Newman contrasts what she calls Meynell's "anti-momentous temporality" with Walter Pater's interest in the ecstatic moment and the modernist epiphanic aesthetic (499). Similarly, F. Elizabeth Gray notes that Meynell's communion poems ask us to consider the process by which Christ is created in transubstantiation by questioning when exactly the elements of bread and wine become Christ's body and blood ("Making Christ" 175).

within physical processes. Thus, far from being hierarchical, Meynell's version of Catholicism offered direct divine experience to every seeker. In her poetry, Meynell both models the idea that engaging God is a direct creative process and invites her audience to participate, often even employing a third-person plural narrator to illustrate the need for everyone to grapple creatively with Christ and to emphasize the communal nature of this process.

Meynell's mid-to-late-career religious poetry is particularly notable for depicting a God manifested within human processes, and who is therefore intimately engaged with evolving human life rather than static or removed. As Tracy Seeley as well as Mark Knight and Emma Mason have noted, Meynell is fond of incarnational imagery.<sup>157</sup> Yet, her depictions of incarnation go beyond typical representations of Christ's life to reflect a more broadly immanent approach to God. For her, incarnation is not a one-time miracle; rather, God is embodied, even enmeshed, in natural processes. Christ develops inside of Mary's belly and lives as a child dependent upon the earth; God grows in the fields as the grains for communion bread; he is a "wayfarer" who accompanies a seeker rather than waiting at the journey's end; he walks out of the busy, "muttering city" to meet a reformer, rather than descending from a more removed location. Her imagery, thus, places the idea of an immanent and directly accessible God more squarely at the center of Catholic theology.

Taking this as my starting point, I want to suggest that Meynell provides a prototype for understanding the work of poetic immanence in late-nineteenth and early-

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<sup>157</sup> Knight and Mason connect her understanding of incarnation to sacramentalism: "its understanding of a God who is really present (rather than just echoed) in the material world is sustained by Meynell's regard for the doctrine of the Incarnation" (*Nineteenth-Century Religion* 202). Recently in "'The Fair Light Mystery of Images': Alice Meynell's Metaphysical Turn," Tracy Seeley has suggested that Meynell's incarnational turn reflected a debate about embodied spirit at the turn of the century, a return to the ethos of the metaphysical poets: "Meynell's emphasis on the human side of the divine incarnation is more than an inflection of orthodoxy. It also places her amidst a *fin-de-siècle* insistence on body and spirit as necessarily entwined (671).

twentieth-century thinking. Meynell's focus on immanence places Christ at the precise pressure points that many scholars claim propelled secularization at the turn of the century: responses to urban poverty, women's alienation from traditional domestic roles, new views of humanity's relationship to nature, an awareness of religious pluralism. Meynell touches on all of these issues in her contributions to *Merry England*; yet when they appear in her poetry, they are not presented as threats to religion, but as questions that open up a creative space within it. Through her poetry, Meynell suggested to her contemporaries that they need not eschew religious uncertainty or ignore social change. For, out of this disorientation, she wrests a creative engagement with religion, an opportunity to reinterpret God in a way that is understandable to a person with modern sensibilities.

Meynell's turn to the immanent imagery that pervaded her poetry by the 1890s grew not only from her interest in artistic process, but also from her earlier journalistic endeavor to assert Catholicism's adaptability in the face of what she deemed "modern challenges," conditions of everyday, urban life that she believed might impede what she saw as the instinctual impulse toward religion but need not ultimately inhibit religious experience. Meynell's attempt to grapple with religion's relationship to modernity<sup>158</sup> enhanced the impressionistic sensibility of her writing (her interest in fleeting moments, awareness of a world in process, and incorporation of new techniques and technology).<sup>159</sup> A closer look at Meynell's work within *Merry England*, which she edited

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<sup>158</sup> The term "modernization" as I use it throughout my discussion of secularization refers to a trend that sociologists track through a number of time periods rather than specifically to the modernist movement in the early twentieth century. Callum Brown and Michael Snape note, "Though widely seen as a subordinate offshoot of the wider sociological concept of modernisation, secularisation has outshone its 'parent'" (1). While, as I will discuss below, those who oppose secularization theory often critique the way it has been linked to the concept of modernization, Meynell asserts that modernity need not be a threat to religion.

<sup>159</sup> In *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, Ana Parejo Vadillo refers to Meynell's techniques as impressionist noting that Meynell's experience of London was characterized by her position as a passenger on various forms of mass-transit like the trains, and her descriptions of the city often use impressionism to capture her experience of the city as always in motion. Vadillo contends, "All of

with her husband Wilfred from 1883-1895, and to which she contributed regularly, reveals her commitment to shaping a Catholicism that embraced technological and aesthetic innovation, while preserving religion's status as her audience's central loyalty and motivation.<sup>160</sup>

Meynell's career as a journalist has started to receive the attention it deserves, though much of it has yet to be explored. Talia Schaffer, Tracy Seeley, and F. Elizabeth Gray have recently begun to delve into Meynell's literary criticism and reviews, but as of yet there has been little exploration of the relationship between Meynell's essays in periodicals and the development of her poetry. In discussing the shift between Meynell's first volume of poetry, *Preludes*, in 1875 and her poetry from the 1890s on, Seeley notes that the gap between Meynell's poetry publications corresponds with the height of her journalistic career, suggesting that Meynell's work as an essayist and critic was influential in shaping a new poetic ethos.<sup>161</sup> Yet discussions of Meynell's journalism such as Seeley's primarily focus on her weekly contributions to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the 1890s, with little mention of her earlier and more formative work in *Merry England*,

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Meynell's urban lyrical writings are grounded in the relations between movement, vision, and the city" (103). In her book *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, Jesse Matz explores the idea of literary impressionism in relation to early Modernist prose style, pointing out how it can call attention to deeper ideas rather than simply skimming surfaces. She argues that literary impressionism does not "choose surfaces and fragments over depths and wholes but makes surfaces show depths, makes fragments suggest wholes, and devotes itself to the undoing of such distinctions" (1).

<sup>160</sup> *Merry England*, which cost one shilling, was begun in partnership with Burns and Oates, but was owned solely by Wilfrid Meynell after the first year. Although it had many well-known contributors, the Meynells themselves also provided much of the content. Wilfrid adopted a number of pseudonyms including "John Oldcastle" "Francis Phillimore" and "A.C. Opie" to obscure the extent of his contributions (Badeni 73). The Meynells were especially busy with their journalism at this time as Wilfrid also edited *The Weekly Register*, "a Catholic periodical which was chiefly concerned with ecclesiastical affairs," and Alice engaged in "book reviewing, proof-reading, and translations of papal encyclicals" for the paper (70). In addition, she contributed to a number of periodicals, including *The Spectator*, *The Saturday Review*, *The World*, *The Scots Observer*, *The Tablet*, *The Magazine of Art*, and *The Art Journal*. (70).

<sup>161</sup> In "'The Fair Light Mystery of Images': Alice Meynell's Metaphysical Turn," Seeley primarily focuses on how Meynell's attraction to the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets in her literary criticism for the *Pall Mall Gazette* shaped her later poetry.



even though the run of this magazine from 1881-1893 also comprised a significant portion of the gap between Meynell's poetry publications. I would suggest that it was within this explicitly religious context that she developed the approach to modern subjectivity that would permeate her later poetry.

Meynell's attempt to define Catholic modernity did not simply influence her subsequent choice of poetic subjects, but also her forms of narration and expression. As she returned to her poetic career after her most active years as a journalist, she introduced a narrative stance that deliberately emphasized its limitations of perspective and comprehension.<sup>162</sup> Through this narrative voice, Meynell suggests that the experiences of urban poverty, modern motherhood, scientific questioning, and philosophical pessimism form a subject that requires new modes of relating to both religion and art. Her speakers are literally impeded both by a restricted visual range and by a sense of being in motion, physical limitations that she links with a narrative of religious uncertainty.<sup>163</sup> What makes Meynell's depiction of perceptual limitation and religious uncertainty so significant, however, is her consistent suggestion that this restricted point of view assists in rather than hinders the rediscovery of God. The kind of subject who perceives only the

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<sup>162</sup> Maria Frawley has similarly noted Meynell's interest in illustrating modern modes of perception in her poetry, though she focuses on the dialogic qualities of this poetry about the mind. Frawley suggests that "her poems study the dynamics of the mind, both as it processes experience and, more crucially, in its consciousness of this act" ("Tides of the Mind" 64). Frawley also astutely argues that Meynell's turn to using first-person perspective does not, as had been suggested by earlier scholarship, indicate the primarily personal nature of her poetry, but rather "signifies a commitment to representing the complexities of subjective experience and the multidimensional qualities of personal utterance" (67). Building on this idea, I suggest that using a first-person voice is particularly helpful to Meynell in illustrating how modern religion is processed as subjective experience and that her expansion of the first-person voice to a first-person plural illustrates the importance she placed on helping her audience to articulate the nature of complex religious experience.

<sup>163</sup> Vadillo has examined "Meynell's urban aestheticism in the interplay between her use of the lyric and her observations, as a passenger, of the conditions of modernity in late-Victorian London (*Women Poets and Urban* 79-80). She notes the importance of a subjected and limited point of view to conveying this experience: "An impression is not a full comprehensive vision of a scene but a subjective perception of it, a perception that is tied up with movement" (107). I suggest that Meynell applies this technique not only to her external voyages through the city, but also to her internal voyages of faith.

proximate must necessarily discern God within everyday life if s/he is to locate divinity at all.<sup>164</sup> Consequently, Meynell matches her new narrative style with an increasing fixation on God's embodiment in the human world. In this way, Meynell's poetry joins her argument in *Merry England* that an immanent and interactive God lies latent in Christianity.

In her later religious poetry, Meynell's use of a limited narrator evolved as she asked her audience to identify more closely with her poems' narrators. She increasingly uses first-person plural ("we") speakers who as a group are afflicted by the same disorientation and uncertainty that plagued her singular narrators. In these plural poems, her narrators sense that their perceptions and comprehension are limited, implying that the sense of religious uncertainty she illustrates represents a widespread state of mind that calls for a corresponding reevaluation of religious needs. At the same time, she invites readers to participate in religious process by depicting an inclusive, plural narrator already engaged in creating and recreating a more accessible image of God. These poems seek not only to reveal a God present in life's processes, but ask Meynell's audience to participate in forming him rather than simply witnessing the process. By encouraging others to join in the creative process of shaping a savior, Meynell suggests the importance of communal rather than individual experience in constructing a religion that responds to modernization.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, Meynell's poetry suggests that God is directly accessible

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<sup>164</sup> Several scholars have pointed out Meynell's focus on the small and everyday. In an early (1979) recovery of Meynell, Sr. M. Laurence notes that "The power of observation and the enthusiasm that Alice Meynell possessed was used for preference upon the infinitely small; the grain of sand, the bird, which is a mere point in the vastness of the blue sky, the smallest plant, even the stone that is sent flying by the passing foot" (213). While Meynell has sometimes been accused of limiting her writing to a narrow range of "small" topics, Beverly Schlack questions this depiction of limitation in Meynell's poetry by pointing out that she looked for "the big in little things" (113).

<sup>165</sup> F. Elizabeth Gray has examined how Meynell constructs community in her poetry about communion, arguing that "[b]y emphasizing the participatory function of uttering religious language, Meynell can incorporate feminist and socialist ideals within a Christian context" ("Making Christ" 161).

to a wider range of people through everyday experiences. In this way, her poetry of limitation also becomes a poetry of invitation.

This poetic invitation to participate creatively in a communal religious process is significant during a period when scholars have suggested the increasingly private nature of both artistic endeavor (especially poetry) and religious experience.<sup>166</sup> By contrast, both Meynell's poetry and essays are particularly concerned with the place of religious writing in public life, and they insist on the social responsibility of the religious artist. In her essays, Meynell consistently suggests that Catholics should pay more attention to the physical and mental hardships of poverty while also critiquing authors who gloss over these issues. Furthermore, when she calls attention to issues of poverty in *Merry England*, she goes beyond an easy advocacy of philanthropy to show the necessity of learning about the perspective of those who endure poverty. Similarly, her poetry seeks to broaden the definition of religious community by including those whom one of her poems describes as "the unready, the perplexed, the cold," not just as the recipients of needed instruction or charity but as essential co-creators.

Meynell's approach to poverty in *Merry England* also reveals her desire to reshape society's image of women's religiosity. Her essays argue against representations of religious womanhood that focus on philanthropy as a way to enhance femininity rather

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<sup>166</sup> Terry Eagleton repeats the most common view of Victorian poetry as largely private: "In Victorian England, this sense of the imagination as a political force gradually faded... It had retreated from the public forum to the parlour" and became "the preserve of personal feeling" (14). Isobel Armstrong calls attention to John Stuart Mill's 1833 essay "What is Poetry?" as a starting point for the discourse of poetry as private. His assertion that poetry "is feeling confessing itself to itself" and is meant to be "overheard" rather than "heard," according to Armstrong "seals a distinction between poetry and the external world which, defining the poetic as the solitary work of the speaking subject over and against communality, was to have consequences for the rest of the century" (*Victorian Poetry* 137). Hilary Fraser links the privatization of poetry with the privatization of religion and suggests that the privatization of poetry was completed by aesthetes such as Wilde and Pater who "deny the notion of the answerability of the artist to his audience" (6). Many assertions about poetry, especially lyric poetry, as a genre of private feeling, however, ignore the ways in which personal revelation can be political. Emma Mason concurs with this critique: "Many women poets, however,...did not oppose the political to the personal, instead regarding social action as being motivated by the subject's ability to feel" (*Women Poets* 3).

than as a response to real need, and she sharply critiques authors who depict women's engagement with religion as particularly ladylike and unengaged with social concerns. By contrast, Meynell's poetry compares religious encounters to the messy process of childbirth, and her essays point to women whose poverty does not give them the luxury of ladylike devotion. Thus, the socialist, Catholic ethics that Meynell espouses in *Merry England* also serve a feminist purpose.<sup>167</sup>

Meynell's argument for the socially responsible artist, her recognition of the disorientation of the modern subject position, and her depiction of a more intimate God all helped her to represent Catholicism as a religion that could evolve in order to respond actively and creatively to modernization. Although she seems clearly aware of the narrative that modernity and progress must necessarily challenge religious belief and practice, her attitude toward modernity, which suggests that it can act as a creative force within religion, implicitly critiques the attitude among her contemporaries that religious decline was inevitable. Her criticism of the position that modernity inevitably leads away from religious belief and engagement is similar to the critiques that many present-day scholars are making of "the secularization thesis" that emerged from twentieth-century sociology as a narrative that does not simply describe a statistical decline in church attendance but also depicts religious decline as inevitable. Examining these current

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<sup>167</sup> Meynell's activism in a large range of causes, particularly feminist ones, has been well documented. Beverly Slack lists many of these: "She was active in humanitarian causes (the prevention of cruelty to animals); involved in social issues both general (the war and pacifism) and particular (the amelioration of conditions in the London slums); president and vice-president of suffrage societies, writer for suffrage papers and marcher in the processions; elected in 1914 to the Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature, and President of the Society of Women Journalists" (111). June Badeni further discusses her suffrage activities (210), and several critics have pointed to the ways in which feminist attitudes permeated her prose. Talia Schaffer asserts that "[s]he wrote passionate feminist literary criticism" (*Forgotten Female* 165), and Tracy Seeley ponders the importance of suffrage to Meynell's journalism: "Meynell's long-held belief in the valour and value of women became energized by the struggle for suffrage. Although opposed to window-smashing and other radical forms of protest, she became a Vice-President of the Women Writers' Suffrage League and a representative of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society; she spoke at drawing room talks, attended rallies and wrote her most politically explicit journalism in support of the vote for women" ("Alice Meynell, Essayist" 125).

critiques will help to expand our understanding of Meynell's engagement in a similar, albeit earlier debate.

Contemporary scholars across a number of disciplines are beginning to question the uniformity and historical inevitability suggested by the secularization thesis. Secularization,<sup>168</sup> as a theory about the historical waning of religion, has, from its inception, been connected with a set of assumptions about "modernity." In "Secularization: The Orthodox Method" (1992), Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce note this connection: "Stated briefly the secularization thesis asserts that modernization (itself no simple concept) brings in its wake (and may itself be accelerated by) 'the diminution of the social significance of religion'" (11). While Wallis and Bruce go on to explain the aspects of modernization involved in their theory, they largely dodge the concerns raised in their two parenthetical remarks: the question of modernization's complexity as a concept and the question of whether the designation "modern" is only granted to societies that appear to be undergoing secularization. Neglecting these issues has left proponents of the secularization thesis open to critiques that question the causal link between modernization and secularization as well as the teleological valance of the term "modernity" in this model. In *Formations of the Secular* (1995), Talal Asad takes up the issue of causality: "Volumes have been written on the idea of secularization and its alleged centrality for modernity. Is it worth saving? The secularization thesis in its entirety has always been at once descriptive and normative" (181). Following José Casanova's lead, Asad points to a tautology within the classic definition of secularization: modernization supposedly brings about secularization, but societies that

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<sup>168</sup> Gordon Graham helpfully distinguishes between the debates on Secularization and Secularism even while noting that they are sometimes interconnected. The debate about secularization "is primarily a subject for historians and sociologists of religion" who discuss the "nature, extent, and cause" of the process by which Christianity was marginalized in Europe (30). The debate about secularism "is a philosophical one" that seeks to weigh the relative merits of rational enquiry and religious faith (37). The secularization debate, then, is not a debate about the philosophical merit of religious faith, though scholars discussing secularization have sometimes been accused of taking on these overtones.

do not follow the pattern of secularization are designated as not being modern. This circularity in the secularization thesis, according to Asad, renders it normative: “in order for a society to be modern, it has to be secular and for it to be secular it has to relegate religion to nonpolitical spaces because that arrangement is essential to modernity” (182). Indeed, Wallis and Bruce’s definition as stated above does imply that secularization is simultaneously an outcome of and a condition for modernity.<sup>169</sup>

While Asad primarily examines the way that the secularization thesis affects our view of non-Western societies, it has also been criticized for its monolithic approach to history. In a recent (2010) response to these criticisms, Bruce asserts that, properly stated, the secularization thesis is an entirely descriptive rather than prescriptive model of history.<sup>170</sup> Yet historian Jeffrey Cox suggests that the term “secularization” is too laden with associations to reinvent it as a neutral term: “the word secularisation is inherently invocatory, and the story invoked is inherently teleological and causal, whether it is applied to the mid-Victorian age or the late-twentieth century” (“Towards Eliminating” 20). This leads Cox to call for “a new concept of religious change in the modern world” rather than a simple revision of the secularization thesis (17). These objections to the secularization thesis see it as a master narrative that creates the illusion of a unidirectional historical trajectory and of uniformity within that trajectory. In contrast to this sort of

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<sup>169</sup> While Asad’s main concern is the place of religion in contemporary global politics, historians and sociologists have leveled similar critiques. Historian Jeffrey Cox lauds sociologist David Martin’s “persuasive attack on the link between the modern and the secular that is at the heart of the concept of secularization” (“Towards Eliminating” 15). Cox claims that “if the word modern means anything” we must also recognize the modernity of various contemporary religious movements around the world (15).

<sup>170</sup> Bruce concludes: “The caricature of secularisation that Stark and his colleagues ritually slay in every new publication is a grand narrative but one of their own imagining. The real secularisation paradigm is a somewhat dull and plodding series of explanations of documented changes in the social significance and popularity of religion in the western world since the Reformation” (“Secularization in the UK and USA” 216). Jeffrey Cox, on the other hand argues, “Secularisation is best understood less as an empirical theory subject to confirmation or refutation than as a master narrative, a large organising story, rooted in centuries of rhetorical engagement about the direction of modern history” (“Towards Eliminating” 17).

historical narrative Meynell's essays assert that both social and individual histories are largely cyclical. Just as an individual's religious emotions and artistic creativity wax and wane, so too must social attitudes toward religion, and Meynell suggests that remaining conscious of these rhythms tempers the illusion of finality or directionality that comes with every shift in thought.<sup>171</sup>

The secularization thesis has also been criticized for its static definition of religion.<sup>172</sup> Examining texts such as Meynell's poetry reveals how religion finds new ways to become relevant in an environment that values process and change above repetitions of tradition. French sociologist Danièle Hervieu- Léger's work is helpful in seeking a different way to define religion.<sup>173</sup> She argues that religion is best defined as a "chain of memory." This definition of religion, as a tradition that does not merely replicate itself but instead traces its roots back through an evolutionary chain provides, a more dynamic model for scholars trying to explain the changing social role of religion. It suggests that religion, even as it requires a link to past belief, equally requires movement and innovation in order to survive. Hervieu- Léger's definition of religion gives us a useful way to talk about Meynell's engagement with tradition and her decision to depict God and religion as always in process.

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<sup>171</sup> Meynell's famous essay "The Rhythm of Life," which became the title essay of her 1893 essay collection and was published first in 1889 in *The Scots Observer* and later that year in *Merry England*, exemplifies this attitude. The essay describes the cyclical quality of nature, creativity, and even religious emotion. Often cited to help explain Meynell's commitment to strictly metrical verse and as an example of her interest in the female body, it focuses primarily on the conjunction between cycles of religious emotion and cycles of poetic creativity. She suggests that the great poets "knew that presence does not exist without absence; they knew that what is just upon its flight of farewell is already on its long path of return" (322). These ideas help her to put the narrative of God's absence in "modern" life in terms of a dialogue between loss and rediscovery, absence and presence.

<sup>172</sup> In his evaluation of religious engagement in urban industrial society, historian Callum Brown points out this weakness in the secularization thesis: "It is when we fail to fully acknowledge that religion can acquire new ways in which to find social significance that the plausibility of secularization is undermined as a theory of explanation in industrial society" ("Revisionist Approach" 39).

<sup>173</sup> Hervieu-Léger seeks to create a more complex definition of religion that avoids reductively assigning it a functional or substantive purpose.

Although Meynell's own work makes the case for religion's compatibility with the changes of modernity, the literary scholars who first recovered Meynell's work often accorded with the secularization thesis in asserting the incompatibility of progressive politics and religious conviction. I want to point to two dichotomies that have dominated literary criticism on Meynell but which, while they still shape approaches to her work, are beginning to be debunked. One is the attempt to contrast her political activism with her religious poetry. While many early critics were attracted by Meynell's feminist, socialist, and (early in her career) pacifist sympathies, they suggested that her political activism had little influence on her poetry or that it was at odds with her religious ideas. Angela Leighton, for instance, argues that the influence of late Victorian aestheticism on Meynell can be seen in the fact that her "poetry tends to occupy a separate sphere from her political activities" (*Writing against* 255). This comment has been much critiqued by subsequent Meynell scholars. Both Sharon Smulders and Maria Frawley, for instance, argue that Meynell's poetry was indeed political. Yet Smulders still characterizes Meynell as someone who was split between her radicalism as a feminist and pacifist and her conservatism in her religious convictions and her ideas about poetic form (*Pacifism, Feminism* 159).<sup>174</sup> These portrayals of Meynell as someone whose activism and artistic potential were somehow restricted by her Catholicism are convincingly contradicted by F. Elizabeth Gray, who argues that Meynell saw no opposition between her religious and political commitments, and that her Catholicism in fact "grounds Meynell's feminism and her socialism" ("Making Christ" 160).<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> This position is not unique to Smulders. Even scholars who acknowledge that Meynell's religious convictions did not keep her from actively engaging in feminist political causes often assume that she faced a tension between these and her religious convictions or that her commitments to both were paradoxical. Beverly Schlack, for instance, seems surprised to find that "her feminist awareness" "permeated even her religious poetry" (123). She suggests that Meynell's poetry is imaginative despite her Catholicism: "The unique quality of her poetry depends on a characteristic temper of thought which (her Catholicism notwithstanding) is unorthodox, independent, and highly imaginative" (113).

<sup>175</sup> Meynell's artistic process was similarly integrated with her religious beliefs. Ashley Faulkner suggests that "Further research into Meynell's work would be rewarding, not least because of the ways she



The other dichotomy in the discussion of Meynell's work is a tendency to split her oeuvre between her poetry, often characterized as Victorian, and her essays, often characterized as Modernist. On one hand, there is a long-standing debate about whether Meynell's poetry, with its strict formal qualities but modernist themes, should be categorized as aesthetically backward-looking or forward-looking.<sup>176</sup> Tracy Seeley and Talia Schaffer have recently sought to soften the gap between Victorian and Modernist interpretations of Meynell's work by placing her in the artistic vanguard of the turn-of-the-century.<sup>177</sup> Meynell's essays, on the other hand, are almost universally categorized as

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sublimely ignores what for us are often self-evident boundaries between religious studies and the humanities" (86). These very boundaries have inhibited the study of Meynell's religious work.

<sup>176</sup> Talia Schaffer notes a split in critical perceptions of Meynell: "Today critics tend to see Meynell either as someone writing progressive work on women's issues or as an insufferable coy Victorian lady penning precious effusions about the state of her soul" (*Forgotten Female* 161). At the same time, critics who analyze both her politics and her poetics often depict her as having a split personality. G.K. Chesterton's assertion that Meynell was "A Radical in her opinions and a Tory in her tastes" has persisted in scholarship on her poetry (11). John S. Anson added to Meynell's reputation as old fashioned in 1986, describing her use of rhyme and refrains in "The Shepherdess" as a corset (36). Writing in 1996, Paul Moeyes categorized Meynell as one of the backward-looking poets "whose work has no innovative qualities and in on [sic] way reflects the concerns of the society they were part of," although he also suggests that this is not necessarily negative (149). Vanessa Furse Jackson also examines Meynell's debt to Romanticism and her explicit renunciation of Modernism, seeing this as the "ultimate restraint upon her poetry" (460). Sharon Smulders shifted away from viewing Meynell as entirely backward-looking, re-affirming Chesterton's view while also noting how conservative form might enhance radical political ends. She examines Meynell's "effort to turn conservative aesthetic practice to modern feminist use" ("Looking 'Past Wordsworth'" 36). Maria Frawley similarly notes the modern nature of Meynell's subject matter, examining the relationship between Meynell's poetry and "emerging modernist interests in psychology" (63 "Tides of the Mind"). In another article, Frawley seeks to enhance Meynell's "modern" reputation by claiming that "Meynell helped to establish what might be thought of as the discourse of modern maternity" ("Modernism and Maternity" 32). The other split in Meynell criticism is the tendency to highlight the "modernity" of Meynell's prose by contrasting it with her poetry. Rachel "O'Connell exemplifies this trend: "If, in her poetry, Meynell reflects primarily on the paradoxical pleasure and freedoms of submission to authority, particularly that of the Catholic church, in her essays she celebrates extraterritoriality, a mode of quiet rebellion and wayward marginality" (65-66). Instead, I will highlight the ways in which Meynell's poetry takes part in the impressionism usually used to describe her prose and suggest the debt that her poetry owes to her career as an essayist.

<sup>177</sup> Seeley states, "Alice Meynell deserves to be read as a complex poetic and critical voice who slipped out of the Victorian world and into the twentieth century, by the way of the metaphysical poets and through the mystery of images, alongside her *fin-de-siècle* peers" ("Fair Light" 680). She suggests that, Meynell's early poetry was misinterpreted because her readers "missed her ambivalence toward her Romantic models" (665). Seeley and Schaffer also place Meynell firmly in the *fin-de-siècle* milieu as an essayist. Seeley asserts, "One of the premiere essayists of the *fin-de-siècle*, the era which revived the

moving toward Modernism, and critics such as Maria Frawley have pointed out the trap of trying to separate the two halves of her work: Frawley asserts that by tracing “Meynell’s thinking about thought” through the whole canon of her work, we can see the relationship between her prose and verse (“Tides of the Mind” 64). This and similar moves to juxtapose Meynell’s essays and poetry have exposed a number of previously neglected preoccupations in her work, but there has been little discussion of how Meynell’s generic cross-pollination enhanced her artistry.

I will argue that Meynell’s commitments to aesthetic modernity, Catholicism, and social activism are not simply compatible, but that her work represents an important late-nineteenth-century attempt to shape a religious ethos that was not threatened by “modernization.” Her work as a poet, essayist, and journalist highlights a growing awareness of the narrative that religion and modernity might be opposed. Yet, eschewing nostalgia, Meynell confronts and ultimately embraces the challenges of modernity as a mechanism to broaden the scope of aesthetic and religious understanding. Meynell locates Christ not simply as the conqueror of modern difficulties, but within the experience of these challenges: within compassionate unbelief, within scientific discovery, within maternal pain, and within philosophical questioning. By extension, she envisions Christ within a world of process, not simply as a transcendent teleological goal. In this way, she suggests that religion, like art, must be an active, creative, and accessible process in order to remain relevant to the same public that was so drawn to the drafts of famous painters. Meynell’s increasing focus on an immanent Christ was a way of positioning religion as a vital feature of modern life.

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familiar essay after the age of Victorian polemic, Meynell clearly belongs in accounts of the decade” (“Alice Meynell, Essayist” 105).

“Manifesto of *Merry England*”

Many scholars have noted Meynell’s long period of (seeming) poetic silence after publishing *Preludes* in 1875.<sup>178</sup> However, during the nearly twenty years between her first and second volumes of poetry, Meynell continued to show the public glimpses of her poetry in periodicals while sustaining an extremely active career as an essayist, journalist, and critic. Scholars such as Tracy Seeley have begun to establish links between Meynell’s work as a critic, particularly for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and her subsequent poetry, noting for instance how her own poetry was influenced by her critical work on the metaphysical poets, and Talia Schaffer and F. Elizabeth Gray have examined her essays in the *Pall Mall* gazette and her work as a literary reviewer.<sup>179</sup> Yet the significance of Meynell’s role as a religious essayist and editor during this time has not been fully examined.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> June Badeni suggests that this pause in Meynell’s poetry publication may have been due partly to child bearing and rearing and to the need to engage in a more profitable form of writing, but she also suggests that it was likely premeditated (71-72). In “Presenting Alice Meynell: The Book, the Photograph, and the Calendar,” Linda Peterson shows that Meynell’s contemporaries could interpret this silence as part of a pattern of great artists who underwent a period of absence from public life followed by transformation. She examines the techniques that Meynell used to re-launch her career and make it fit with *fin-de-siècle* celebrity culture when she published *Poems* and *The Rhythm of Life* in 1893: “Released simultaneously and reviewed together, the two books complemented each other in design and thus apparently in content; they encouraged readers to consider the prose and poetry ‘in dialogue’” (171).

<sup>179</sup> Schaffer describes Meynell’s essays for the *Pall Mall Gazette* as “not really essays, they are not quite prose poems, and they are certainly not journalistic advice columns, though they share components of these three” (*Forgotten Female* 161).

<sup>180</sup> In *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, Linda Peterson points out the importance of Meynell’s early journalism, which she sees as “an apprenticeship essential to becoming a professional woman of letters” (175). While Peterson gives an extensive overview of Meynell’s career and describes the importance of Meynell’s work for the *Scots Observer* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* in her literary development, Peterson does not mention *Merry England*. Instead, she suggests that Meynell’s turn toward explicitly religious verse might have been catalyzed by a desire to distance herself from the Wilde Trials and her association with the *Yellow Book*’s editor John Lane. While this could have been a factor, much of Meynell’s religious verse also grew organically from her Catholic journalism. Another important assessment of Meynell’s journalistic career comes from F. Elizabeth Gray who discusses Meynell’s creation of her persona as a literary reviewer who avoided the typical Victorian rhetoric of both gushing and slashing: “In her capable and broad-ranging reviewing, Meynell neither slashed nor swooned; instead, she wielded an idiosyncratic and scalpel-like scorn” (“Literary Reviewing” 74). By the mid-1890s, Meynell had turned herself into a “revered literary authority” (86).

Meynell and her husband Wilfrid founded and edited the Catholic monthly *Merry England* from 1883 to 1895. This publication provides an important glimpse into the ethos of turn-of-the-century Catholic intellectuals, and F. Elizabeth Gray has established *Merry England's* importance in encouraging a group of Catholic female poets for whom Meynell was the leading figure.<sup>181</sup> I will suggest that this journal is important because of the Meynells' attempt to assert the vitality of Catholic traditions while also acknowledging the new ethical challenges of a world that they perceived as changing rapidly. Although *Merry England* does not contain the large breadth of Meynell's prose that can be found in her later contributions to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, this journal represents a formative moment in Meynell's career when her efforts to improve public taste, advocate social justice, and promote a Catholic worldview converged and propelled her poetry in a new direction. I will focus on her work that appeared in the journal as well as exploring how her development within it informed her subsequent poetry.

Since this particular journal originated with the Meynells, it offers a unique look at their construction of Catholicism's place in late-nineteenth-century England. The

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<sup>181</sup> According to F. Elizabeth Gray in "Catholicism and Ideal Womanhood," as both hosts and editors, the Meynells were at the center of a Catholic literary circle. Vadillo also notes that Meynell was the main figure in a literary *salon* that including Agnes Tobin and Katharine Tynan who contributed to many Catholic journals including *Merry England* ("New Woman Poets" 30). *Merry England* also published work by important Catholic figures such as Coventry Patmore, Cardinal Manning, and Katherine Tynan. Furthermore, the works of Francis Thompson, Lionel Johnson, and Hilaire Belloc were published for the first time in its pages, leading Anne Kimball Tuell to describe it as "a nursing place where young Catholic genius might be planted and become full of growing" (68). While several scholars have noted the importance of this journal in introducing new literary talent, it also played a significant role within Alice Meynell's own career. She regularly contributed essays, literary and art criticism, and a few poems to the journal during the gap between her first and second volumes of poetry. In her memoir, Viola Meynell recounts the founding of the journal: "My father had ideas that needed further activity, and with the hopefulness of a boundless possibility *Merry England*, a monthly magazine, was launched in 1883. Characteristic of one of my father's enthusiasms, the first number had a portrait of Disraeli for frontispiece, and all the ardour of the new magazine was in support of the social revolution of the Young England Movement, the revival of the peasantry, the abolition of the wrongs of the poor, the spread of art and literature...My father, to conceal the variety and extent of his own contributions, had to adopt not one pseudonym but several, My mother also wrote constantly" (68).

journal's title, *Merry England*, was a term that harkened back to medieval England.<sup>182</sup> It was most commonly used by the Victorians to describe an idealized agrarian society, though many Victorians who used the phrase conveniently ignored the Catholic association of a pre-reformation England. The Meynells, however, used the term to evoke the images of both ideal social relations and a united Catholic populace. Indeed, they remind their audience of religion's central role in creating their version of ideal social relations.

While we now often associate the political use of "Merry England" with conservative movements, like Disraeli's early-Victorian "Young England" group, that idealized feudal relationships, Charles Dellheim notes that there were multiple possible political connotations to referencing images of a medieval, rural England: "medievalism was not the unchallenged cultural property of English conservatives" (16).<sup>183</sup> Late-

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<sup>182</sup> The only extended discussion of *Merry England* comes from an unpublished PhD dissertation on Wilfrid Meynell's career by Sr. Louise Marguerite. She points to the religious significance of the journal's name: "In crowning his periodical with so impressive a title, the editor had bridged several centuries in his dreams to rediscover the spiritual vitality of a period when Catholicism characterized English society" (71). The immediate inspiration for this name was the Wordsworth sonnet "Merry England," which was printed after the title page (Marguerite 71).

They call thee "Merry England" in old time,  
A happy people won for thee that name,  
With envy heard in many a distant clime;  
And spite of change, for me thou keep'st the same  
Endearing title, a responsive chime  
To the heart's fond belief, though some there are  
Whose sterner judgment deem that word a snare  
For inattentive Fancy, like the lime  
Which foolish birds are caught with. Can I ask,  
This face of rural beauty be a mask  
For discontent, and poverty and crime?  
These spreading towns a cloak for lawless will?  
Forbid it, Heaven!—that Merry England still  
May be thy rightful name in prose or rhyme! (1-14)

Like the magazine, the sonnet seeks to retain the spirit of "Merry England" within a modern age in spite of urbanization.

<sup>183</sup> Dellheim also suggests that medievalism was not strictly an anti-modern discourse for the Victorians: "The architecture of the Gothic railway station suggests that if the concern with the Middle Ages was, on the one hand, a protest against industrial society, on the other hand it became an integral part of its culture, because it satisfied the longing for continuity without impeding the march of improvement" (1).

century socialists, for instance, also appropriated this term. Robert Blatchford's 1893 book *Merrie England: A Plain Exposition of Socialism, What It Is and What It Is Not* became a best-seller in England and America and popularized socialist views while authors such as William Morris used images associated with merry England to depict a utopian society. For both conservative and socialist groups, then, the term was used to contrast utopian possibilities with the suffering brought about by modern urban conditions. The Meynells' title, then, served to emphasize the journal's Catholic identity and establish a commitment to social improvement based on an earlier social model, but left its political affiliations ambiguous. The journal's opening article, for instance, retrospectively discusses the social contributions of the "Young England" movement, while Alice Meynell's work in the journal verges on socialist critique. According to her biographer June Badeni, Meynell's politics were socialist throughout her life (244). Her contributions to *Merry England* reveal that her Catholicism was integral to developing this political outlook.<sup>184</sup>

The Meynells' use of a title evoking an ideal agrarian and religious past at first seems to contradict the idea that *Merry England* primarily sought to reconcile modern ideas and aesthetics with Catholicism. A journalistic endeavor mired in a nostalgia for a

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<sup>184</sup> As evidence of Meynell's socialism, Badeni quotes a 12 August 1896 article by Meynell called "My Faith and My Work" from *Woman*: "I am politically rather inclined towards Socialism than towards Individualism. I do not love political liberty much. The State is welcome to order my affairs far more closely than it has ever done yet, for the good of the majority, and especially for the good of the unfortunate" (244). Meynell's socialism was not, however, of the Marxist variety. Badeni quotes a letter to her daughter Olivia in which Meynell expresses a distaste for "the international politics of Labour" (244). Vadillo also points out that socialism was a feature of Meynell's literary *salon*, though she does not believe it was as strong a thread as some of the *salon*'s other social causes ("New Woman" 30). Lynne Hapgood, whom Vadillo references, has demonstrated the popularity of socialism in Christian circles during the 1880s and 90s. These socialists often focused on reforming urban environments, "radicaliz[ing] the image of Jesus" and using the doctrine of incarnation to point to the "uniqueness of man" (190). Hapgood explains, "Committed Christians who were also social activists enthusiastically made more or less conscious partnerships with secular discourses in their attempts to secularize Christianity and, as they thought, influence social issues more effectively" (188). I would suggest, however, that for socialist Christians like Meynell the goal was to show that there should be no separation between the "secular" public world and the "private" religious world. Thus, their goal is not to secularize Christianity but to show its wider applicability.

simpler, more religious time might not seem like the best way to discuss modern issues, and the “merry England” motif seems to re-enforce prior critical perception of Meynell’s religious writing as a backward-looking force in her oeuvre. In fact, however, the Meynells offer their own, far different interpretation of the title *Merry England*. A statement titled “The Manifesto of *Merry England*” appeared in the first issue of volume two and at the beginning of every subsequent issue in that volume (Nov. 1883-Apr. 1884). It focuses not on idealizing the past, but rather, on what the journal has to offer the modern, urban reader by suggesting ways in which England can be simultaneously “modern” and “merry.” Although unsigned, this article was presumably penned by one of the Meynells, or possibly by the two together. Wilfrid was the main editor, but the manifesto also expresses almost word for word some of the views on modernity, motherhood, and social reform that appeared in Alice Meynell’s subsequent essays, suggesting that she at least strongly influenced the piece.

In “The Manifesto of *Merry England*,” the Meynells suggest that this journal will be a space to come to terms with modernity while also creating continuity between Christianity’s history and its place in modern England. From the beginning of the “Manifesto,” they distance themselves from a purely nostalgic longing for the “Merry England” of rural, medieval, Catholic days. Instead, they position the journal as a venue that will confront the issues of modernity while also recognizing its positive potential. To create this ethos, they begin by contrasting their approach with Ruskin’s famous anti-technology stance in “Letter V” of *Fors Clavigera, Volume I*. Ruskin asserts that, “No machines will increase the possibilities of life.<sup>185</sup> They only increase the possibilities of idleness” (65). Throughout the essay he represents the steam plough as a daemon corrupting rural life while using the recurring image of a ploughman and his wife who

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<sup>185</sup> Talia Schaffer notes that Meynell was influenced by both Pater and Ruskin: “This influence is hardly surprising, since she wrote a book about Ruskin, who was an old family friend and one of the first people to see her poetry” (*Forgotten Female* 171).

suddenly have time to read poetry as a representation of idleness.<sup>186</sup> The “Manifesto of *Merry England*” promotes a much more optimistic view of technology’s possibilities and implicitly criticizes Ruskin’s inability to acknowledge the possible physical and intellectual benefits of technology because of a nostalgic view of country life and labour:

Professor Ruskin does not love the steam plough, yet surely the steam plough in the midst of scenery the most idyllic is a better alternative—where such the alternative must be—than a starving people. The Professor indeed supposes that the modern ploughboy’s whistling, as well as his work, will be done by steam; but we have faith that the rustic will yet again whistle for himself, albeit no longer for ‘want of thought.’ Frankly accepting the conditions of Modern England, we would have it a Merry England too. (7)

While the Meynells are overly optimistic in suggesting that the steam plow would necessarily alleviate hunger and create time for intellectual development, their recognition that technology might bring benefits as well as new challenges is emblematic of their general approach to modernity. While recognizing the ways in which technology and changing social relations can create upheaval in traditional concepts of religion and aesthetics, the Meynells nevertheless position their journal as aesthetically and religiously “modern.” Moreover, they confront the perceived dichotomy between “Merry England” and “Modern England,” and instead suggest a continuity between these worlds. They juxtapose images of “Modern England” with “Merry England” not to suggest the return to an idyllic pre-modern Catholic past, but rather to suggest that the challenges of modernity need not prevent the “merry” spirit of England’s past from permeating its present. In essence, they eschew romantic nostalgia in the face of modern urban pressures while still acknowledging the value of long-held traditions.

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<sup>186</sup> In “Letter V” from Volume I of *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin satirizes the possible effects of the steam plow on the laborers and their families, revealing his distaste for the idea of workers having the leisure to read poetry: “But, instead of holding them, you sit, I presume, on a bank beside the field, under an eglantine;— watch the goblin at his work, and read poetry. Meantime, your wife in the house has also got a goblin to weave and wash for her. And she is lying on the sofa, reading poetry” (65).



While the Meynells thus signal their willingness to embrace modernity, they suggest that doing so also involves directly confronting the challenges it creates, both in terms of physical well-being and in terms of individuals' inner responses to shifting technologies and environments. Indeed, the second section of the manifesto addresses what they see as the major physical and mental challenges created by recent cultural shifts. In laying out these challenges, they set an ambitious mission for their magazine: to examine how the British people can live better in a modern urban environment, including the issues of environmental conditions, aesthetic discernment, human relations, and spiritual understanding. The Meynells consider:

How their toil may be lightened and dignified for them, their sky cleared, their air sweetened, and the care for that light and sweetness cultivated in themselves; how marriage may be, not more rash, yet more possible and more righteous, among them; how maternity, losing at least its mental anguish, may regain once more the ancient 'joy that a man is born into the world;' how the children who now perish in their infancy may be saved to society and to thrifty homes; how old age may be made a season of honourable peace and of a well-earned pension, rather than of workhouse misery, which—cruel as death—puts asunder husband and wife; how Religion may be made more dear—at once more divine and more human, and the reverences and tendernesses of life multiplied among them:--how all this may be, the writers in the new Magazine will, from time to time, invite their readers to consider. (7-8)

Like Ruskin, the Meynells depict the pollution and human suffering fostered in urban environments. But, whereas a decade earlier Ruskin dismisses all urban settings as “laboratories for the distillation into heaven of venomous smokes and smells” (68), the Meynells clearly believe that questioning the inevitability of these conditions might lead to improvement.

Significantly, this mission statement suggests that the magazine's social, aesthetic, and religious goals were inextricably intertwined. Using the adjectives “sweetness and light” immediately calls to mind Matthew Arnold's prescription for cultivating an artistic taste for beauty and intelligence. Yet the manifesto first uses these terms in reference to lightening toil and sweetening air, implying that improving labor

conditions and physical environments is a prerequisite for cultivating aesthetic appreciation and even religious devotion. Similarly, they suggest that alleviating the physical challenges at every stage of life (motherhood, infancy, old age), is an important first step in improving mental and spiritual well-being.

Furthermore, the Meynells wait until the very end of the manifesto to introduce their religious mission, only broaching it after painting a picture of all the physical, social, and aesthetic challenges that they link to modernity. Giving this preceding context implies that a religion must clearly acknowledge and understand these challenges in order to be effective. The religious mission they propose is one that they believe can meet modern hardship: “how Religion may be made more dear—at once more divine and more human.” Crucially, their statement on religion suggests that a double action is needed in order to persuade their audience to hold religion “dear.” On one hand it must be “more divine:” it must regain its authority and clearly convey something that cannot be found on Earth. On the other hand, it must be “more human,” both more present in everyday life and more responsive to human need. While these two goals seem opposed on a surface level, this exact paradox provides the crux for Meynell’s most innovative poetry: the idea that faith in something greater than ourselves must be cultivated through everyday processes and arise from within human experience and responses to human suffering.

While the manifesto emphasizes the ways in which religion can remain pertinent in modernity, it clearly asserts that modern knowledge and technology cannot replace religious belief, concluding with a strong statement against the idea that faith becomes less relevant in a more technologically advanced society:

this at least we may promise, that our Literature shall be literary  
Literature and our Art shall be artistic Art. And since we hold that  
the length of our railroads is no measure of the happiness of life;  
and the electric light is no substitute for a Star in the East; nor  
literature a glory, nor art anything else than a shame, if they  
disown fealty to the All-Father;--we shall seek to revive in our own  
hearts, and in the hearts of others, the enthusiasm of the Christian  
Faith. (8)

Although the Meynells explicitly set aside attitudes that they consider backward looking, among them, Ruskin's horror of technological development as well as suggestions that "high" art/literature and religion are not compatible, the final section of their manifesto marks out an anti-secularization stance. This third section of the manifesto clearly places technology and art in the service of "the All-Father." It thus tempers the idea that religion must respond better to modern challenges and ethical dilemmas with the idea that it contributes a unique and necessary element to modern life.<sup>187</sup>

In their conclusion to the manifesto, the Meynells reiterate that religion, like aesthetics, must offer both more than adherence to tradition and more than a simple capitulation to modern trends. Borrowing Samuel Johnson's caution against "cant," his concept of insincere language, they suggest that religious aims can be blurred by the language of competing discourses:

Moreover, in religion, as in literature in art and in sociology, we shall seek to fulfil Dr. Johnson's precept, and 'clear our minds of cant'—the cant of commerce and the cant of capital, the cant even of chivalry and of labour, the cant of mediaevalism no less than the cant of modern days. (8)

The Meynells want to distinguish religion from popular social and economic discourses not to suggest that it is irrelevant to economic and social relations but to suggest that if religion is conflated with commerce, capital, or "chivalry" it loses the ability to critique these systems. Most importantly, they suggest that both "medievalism" and an inflated faith in the "modern" are a form of cant. This means that religion cannot rely solely on past tradition, which mires it in nostalgic remembrance, nor lose its independent voice in modern life. They seem particularly anxious to show that they do not advocate a backward-looking medievalism. Contemporary sociologist Hervieu-Léger has pointed out that religion requires some kind of continuity, but defining it solely as a tradition leaves

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<sup>187</sup> Sr. Louise Marguerite points out that "[t]he *Merry England* ideology advocates Catholicism as the integrating woof to the warp of the secular activities of the era in the fields of sociology, arts, and letters" (94).

no place for it in modern society: “To say that religion has to do with tradition, namely with continuity and conformity, in a world dominated by pressure for change effectively denies it any active social or cultural role in modern society. It is thereby effectively consigned to a function of nostalgic or exotic remembrance” (86). Hervieu-L  ger helps us to consider why viewing religion solely as a tradition automatically consigns its relevance to the past. In seeking to detach religion from medievalism and nostalgia, the Meynells were proclaiming its vitality in the modern world. At the same time, by distinguishing it from the cant of “modern days,” they were declaring that religion must have a unique perspective to contribute to modern life and an independence that allowed for critique.

### Medievalism and Modernity

The Meynells’ desire to eschew an inflated faith in both medievalism and modernity reconciles what seem to be two competing impulses in Alice Meynell’s essays for *Merry England*: on one hand, she champions the historical contributions of religious institutions, on the other hand, she frequently encourages a sober assessment of how modern life has altered religious needs. In “The Pope’s City” (July 1887 in *Merry England*), she takes the former stance, comparing Rome’s administration under Pontifical rule with its new civil government to critique the way that secular institutions try to efface their indebtedness to a religious past.<sup>188</sup> Meynell, who spent much of her childhood in Italy, took an interest in Italian art and politics. For her, the Italian state’s governance of Rome was a relatively recent event, with the capture of Rome in 1870

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<sup>188</sup> In his preface to what is still considered a classic, in-depth account of the time leading up to Rome’s annexation, R. De Cesare notes the remarkable shift that occurred in Rome after 1870: “Notwithstanding the transformation caused by pulling down and rebuilding that has been so great as to cause the old city to be unrecognisable, this is as nothing compared with the moral revolution accomplished. The pyramid has been inverted. The laity, tolerated by the clemency of the ecclesiastics, has become their master; a laity, not Roman, but national. And with this new power, new systems have been imposed and needs have arisen which it seems incredible should have not been felt even before the day when Rome became the Italian capital” (vi-vii).

completing the long process of Italian unification under a national government and the Catholic Church's loss of the Papal states.<sup>189</sup> While the new government brought many modern updates to the city, Meynell regretted the change, albeit from a removed theoretical position. She uses the circumstance of Rome's recent transition from theocracy to civil governance to symbolically suggest that secular institutions should not ignore religion's contributions to public life (in this case the religious foundations they literally stand upon):

Doubtless the fact that Pontifical Rome is so living and so obvious is one reason why the small importance of civil modern Rome has never been made thoroughly apparent. It has never been left naked; it has never been exposed alone. The provincial town without local character, at odds with its own antiquities, and given over to the vanity of ignoring its Middle Ages, has never been clearly seen to be the trivial thing it is; for the Rome of the Popes, mingled with it, stands august and tall and takes the eye of the world. (168)

Meynell's comments are emblematic of the way she saw the sacred and the secular as inextricably intermingled, both historically and in the way that religious ethics should inform governance. Meynell's defense of Pontifical Rome could be interpreted as the very "cant of medievalism" that the journal's manifesto promises to avoid. Yet her comments also function as a polemic against the attempt of secular institutions to ignore religious history. She objects to "the vanity of ignoring its Middle Ages" rather than advocating a return to them.

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<sup>189</sup> While Italy was largely unified by the 1860s, Rome remained under the political control of the papacy until 1870. Judith Riall explains how Rome was annexed and the hostility between church and state that resulted: "Rome only became part of Italy in 1870, when defeat in the Franco-Prussian war forced Napoleon III to withdraw the French garrison from Rome. The price was a lasting breach between Church and state. Pope Pio IX withdrew as a self-proclaimed 'prisoner' into the Vatican, and a papal encyclical threatened Catholics with excommunication if they participated in Italian politics" (Riall 74). R. De Cesare offers a detailed account of the September 20, 1870 annexation. The Italian ministry had hoped to enter the city without violence to demonstrate that "it was called there by the will of the people" (449). By contrast, "the Pope wished to demonstrate unmistakably that he was the victim of violence" (451). When no uprising of Rome's citizens occurred, a short siege followed. For a more recent discussion of these events see *Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli: And Papal Politics in European Affairs* by Frank J. Coppa and Denis Mack Smith's *Victor Emanuel, Cavour, and the Risorgimento*. Smith points out that, although there had been no uprising, "[s]ome initial lack of enthusiasm was, however, amply compensated when a plebiscite gave the customary 99 per cent majority against Pius" (Smith 366).

As Meynell extols the contributions of Pontifical Rome, she adamantly insists that acknowledging what she claims were Papal Rome's innovations in social programs will help her audience to understand the contributions that religion can make to public life:

Where else, for instance, has a dispossessed government left so noble a sign and seal of the times of its rule as in the hospital system which the Popes have given as a model to the world? In Papal Rome was first organized the special hospital—the hospital for women, for the aged, for fever patients, for children; the industrial hospital for the education of little criminals. The first maternity charity was Pontifical; and the first Foundling Hospital was due to the chance that a Pope—Innocent III.—was struck with sorrow at seeing three little bodies of drowned children caught up by a fisherman's net from the Tiber. When a river is under Theocratic government, such incidents are 'stuff o' the conscience.' Thus, in 1198, three nameless little martyrs became the seed of the great charities of Europe to its forlorn infancy. (168-169)

This passage suggests that the role of religion in public life should be to establish systems that provide social care. This discussion of Rome seems to suggest that Meynell preferred theocracy over secular government. Yet because her own religion was not the state religion of England, her argument for religion in public life was necessarily qualified. In her own English milieu, Meynell seems uninterested in advocating theocratic government, instead encouraging Catholics to see their religious views as an impetus to support government social programs. Her clearly biased description of Papal rule, nevertheless, urges her audience not to underestimate the contribution of religious views to civic life.

Rather than opposing Rome's new civil government, Meynell's essay merely objects to what she sees as its dismissive rhetoric about religious institutions. Her main critique of Rome's new secular government is the way it positions its achievements as "modern" to distance itself from Papal administration of the city. Similar to Talal Asad's critique of current secularization theories, Meynell identifies a rhetoric implying that religion and modernity are incompatible. Her insistence on defending Pontifical Rome from the charge of failing to govern in a modern way by dramatically idealizing its

achievements reflects her own agenda to show that Catholicism was relevant to England's modern challenges:

Those are surely hardly candid comments on the old and new orders in Rome which would represent the difference as one referring entirely to matters connected with the modern Divinity of Drainage. That the Popes administered to their city the very most modern developments, that the Tiber was as complete a sewer as our own happier stream—we will not assert. But it is a very ingenuity of disparagement that will cast this old and in truth very disputed reproach at Pontifical rule, and will ignore the enormous institutions of the Papal Charities, the public decorum of the streets, and the assured fact that the Italian 'deliverance' found a Rome in which there was absolutely no starving man, woman, or child, and hardly a touch of such poverty as implies grave privations. (168-169)

Here Meynell clearly espouses an overly idealized vision of Rome under theocratic rule while failing to acknowledge that a sewer system does not simply improve technology, but also the health of citizens surrounding it. Yet Meynell is making the point that modern technology is no substitute for human compassion. Pope Innocent III's intervention, as she depicts it, focused on the human consequences of institutions and technologies rather than on the "modern" quality of these innovations. By contrast, Meynell suggests that the civil government's emphasis on the "modernity" of its technology ignores the ethical purpose of such systems. Modern systems to enhance technology, she suggests, cannot take the place of systems that respond directly to human suffering.

Whereas Meynell's defense of Pontifical Rome casts aspersions on those who would deny the past contributions of religious institutions, she is equally critical of those who fail to recognize the legitimacy of "modern" challenges to an easy religious faith. In "For Faith and Science," a September 1885 article in *Merry England*, Meynell discusses the career of George Mivart, who tried to reconcile evolution with the Catholic faith. In her introduction, Meynell cautions readers of *Merry England* against rhetoric that dismisses as easily resolved scientific and philosophical views contrary to their own:

for assuredly he who thinks that the religious difficulties suggested by astronomy, or geology, or physiology, or those which arise from the acute sensitiveness of the modern mind before the mysteries of evil and of eternal loss, are to be disposed of by a sneer at 'so-called science' or a smile at 'so-called philosophy,' have realized little indeed of the conditions of the physical or of the mental world in the midst of which they live. (285)

Meynell reserves her criticism for those who do not understand modern challenges rather than those who “succumb” to them. Notably, these challenges to religion arise not only from changing knowledge about the “physical” world, but also from a shift in how the “modern mind” processes information and emotions. While her narrative of Victorian scientific doubt seems quite familiar, this passage also reveals Meynell’s belief that the mind itself has been altered by modern life and that the mind’s heightened sensitivity poses a threat to traditional forms of belief. Yet she also implies that, if taken seriously, this sensitivity could lead to new religious understanding as well, for the mind is more aware of, if more sensitive to, “mysteries” and “the eternal.” Therefore, rather than proposing that her Catholic readers should rail against what seem to be inevitable responses to the current “conditions of the physical or of the mental world,” she suggests that they must learn to understand this new state of mind in order to discern the religious needs of the modern world.

If Meynell’s comments about medieval papal rule run the risk of being misread as regressive, her admission that modern challenges to religion are tenable could be read as a concession to secularization. Indeed, some of the most recent theories of secularization suggest that an acceptance of pluralism is a key indicator (perhaps driver) of secularization.<sup>190</sup> Philosopher Charles Taylor, whose book *A Secular Age* is at the forefront of updating secularization theory, explains two of the most common ways of defining secularism while offering a third alternative. The first definition focuses on

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<sup>190</sup> Just as sociologists such as Hervieu-Léger have developed more complex definitions of religion in response to the secularization debate, scholars such as Taylor have also developed more complex and convincing definitions of secularization and its mechanisms.



“common institutions and practices,” often related to the state, while the second focuses on individual “belief and practice.” Taylor suggests that both of these definitions tell us little about the underlying process of secularization. His alternative measure of secularism, which must be addressed when viewing Meynell’s work, is that, in a “secular age,” belief in God is no longer the “default” option but is seen as “one human possibility among others” (3). In her writing about modernity, Meynell clearly believes that she lives in a society in which Christianity, and belief in any kind of transcendence, is no longer a default position. Yet, she does not see her acknowledgment of this fact as furthering the process of secularization. Rather, for her, Christians’ recognition of this fact is the first step toward bringing Christianity back into dialogue with modernity.

Despite Meynell’s opposition to the positions of the “Evolutionist and the Positivist and the Pessimist” who would deny God, she argues that their intelligence and integrity must be respected as representative modern points of view (286). She therefore acknowledges that religious positions must present themselves differently in a “modern” society where it is possible for many intelligent people to take differing positions on belief. In essence, she suggests that Christians must take a different approach to expressing religious ideas and focus on creating a more respectful tone in their debates with non-believers:

The pity which is akin to respect rather than scorn is due from those who are happy enough to believe, towards those who have been mysteriously misled by a wrong reading of the records written by the Creator Himself in the stones of His world and the bones of His creatures. And still more tenderness should be felt for those who have gone astray in the complicated mazes of modern thought, or who by taking the sorrow and pain of life intimately to heart have unhappily begun to doubt the omnipotence of good.  
(286)

As we see here, Meynell was walking a fine line between representing views that differed from hers as legitimate and asserting the superiority of her own views. Framing respect with pity is a rather condescending way to talk about opposing viewpoints. But she is also using pity as an intermediary between the scornful view she wishes her readers to

abandon and the posture of respect she wishes them to embrace, and her attempt to communicate the value of this respect toward modern doubt becomes more skillful as she incorporates it into her poetry.

Although Meynell explored the potential of dialog between religion and doubt, Taylor has suggested that when a society no longer sees religion as the only reasonable possibility other goals take the place of connecting with a transcendent power. Once religion is no longer the default position, Taylor argues that it becomes possible to imagine a society in which there are no goals beyond “human flourishing” and an individual system of meaning in which “the power to reach fullness is within” (8). Both of these outcomes are predicated on the idea that society and individuals can detach their systems of value and fulfillment from the idea of a transcendent other. From this definition of secular society, one could easily make the leap to assume that elements within Christianity that shift focus away from God’s transcendence to emphasize a social gospel or God’s immanence within the person might ultimately promote the kind of secularization that Taylor describes. Meynell, however, argues exactly the opposite: that the church is losing relevance because it only showcases God’s transcendence at a time when people are looking for answers within the world. This modern preoccupation, suggests Meynell, could prompt the church to creatively revitalize the other half of the transcendence/immanence binary.

While Taylor describes the philosophical concept of immanence as a secularizing force that precludes the need for an outside transcendence (God), Meynell relies on a theological idea of immanence, in which an immanent understanding of the world complements rather than contradicts a transcendent one. Thus, she attempts to validate what comes from within the person, but in terms of its relationship to divinity. In “Manifesto of *Merry England*,” for instance, the Meynells had suggested a double commitment to transcendence and immanence: “how Religion may be made more dear—at once more divine and more human, and the reverences and tendernesses of life

multiplied among them” (8). They assert the need for both transcendence (religion as “more divine”) and immanence (religion as “more human”), suggesting that showing religion as more human need not diminish the idea that it is also supernatural.

Later in her career, Meynell built on the attitudes toward pluralism and immanence expressed in her journalism to produce poetry that creatively navigated a religious course between modernity and secularization. Her poem “In Sleep” (1915),<sup>191</sup> for instance, draws on her respect for those “who by taking the sorrow and pain of life intimately to heart have unhappily begun to doubt the omnipotence of good” (“For Faith” 286), while also demonstrating her approach to some of the mechanisms of secularization that Taylor would later suggest: acceptance of pluralism, the primacy of human flourishing as a goal, and finding fulfillment within rather than searching for transcendence. In the poem, she depicts a man whose denial of God arises from a deep compassion for the poor and outcast. Her description of the man affirms the value of his emotions, yet she also insists that this man cannot see the whole picture. Although the man’s attitude toward suffering precludes faith, the reader witnesses Christ’s presence within the man’s compassion despite the man’s inability to do so. The divinity Meynell depicts, however, is not a transcendent power but an immanent Christ who is present as a force within the man and within the community about which he cares:

I dreamt (no ‘dream’ awake—a dream indeed)  
A wrathful man was talking in the park:  
“Where are the Higher Powers, who know our need  
And leave us in the dark?”

“There are no Higher Powers; there is no heart  
In God, no love”—his oratory here,  
Taking the paupers’ and the cripples’ part,  
Was broken by a tear.

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<sup>191</sup> This poem was first published in 1915 in *Ten Poems*, a volume that seems to have been meant for private circulation as only twenty copies were printed. It was published again in 1917 in *A Father of Women and Other Poems* (1917). In that volume, it appeared alongside some of Meynell’s poems about World War One, and thus may have resonated with a loss of faith due to the suffering of the war as well.

And then it seemed that One who did create  
 Compassion, who alone invented pity,  
 Walked, as though called, in at that north-east gate,  
 Out from the muttering city;

Threaded the little crowd, trod the brown grass,  
 Bent o'er the speaker close, saw the tear rise,  
 And saw Himself, as one looks in a glass,  
 In those impassioned eyes. (1-16)

The narrator's status as an outside observer of this incident, a status highlighted through the distance of a dream, gives the audience a view of the "wrathful man" that is sympathetic but which also suggests that his perspective is limited. (The narrator shows what he cannot see). The poem's meter generally follows the pattern of three lines of iambic pentameter followed by a short line of iambic trimeter, which unbalances the stanzas with a sense of incompleteness. In the first two stanzas, these short final lines emphasize the man's anger and sorrow: in the first stanza, the unanswered questions that lead him to deny a compassionate God; in the second, his seemingly unanswered compassion for the poor, which cuts short his speech with a tear. The man seems to vacillate between skepticism and the idea that any existing God would have no compassion, but in either case, his doubt is predicated on the idea that Higher Powers are not responding to current human needs and are not present to intervene in the world.

Yet in the third and fourth stanzas, the narrator's perspective reveals what the "wrathful man" cannot see. Meynell's description of Christ in these stanzas implicitly contradicts the man's denial of a present deity; she emphasizes Christ's physical presence in the scene as he walks in at the gate and literally grounds him on the "brown grass" that he "trod." Furthermore, the poem's meter stutters with an extra syllable over the rhyming words "pity" and "city," tripping up the reader long enough to notice how these words contradict both the idea that God is not compassionate and that he is not present. When Meynell depicts Christ walking "Out from the muttering city," she not only reinforces the idea of Christ's physical presence but also suggests that he is at work in the midst of busy

urban life, precisely where the doubtful man speaking in the park does not expect to find him.

The poem's setting illustrates Meynell's desire to bring together the aims of reformists thinking about the urban poor and those espousing Christian compassion. The "park" she depicts is likely Hyde Park; Christ walks in at the park's "north-east gate," and this corner of Hyde park is the location of "speaker's corner," where one might expect to hear this kind of speech. While the soapbox of speaker's corner hosted speakers of every ilk, this speaker is particularly concerned about the physically and economically marginalized. Christ walking in from "the north-east gate" may also indicate what part of the city he is coming from. While the neighborhood surrounding Hyde Park was a relatively affluent, middle-class part of the city, with Oxford Street and its upscale shops immediately to the northeast, someone entering at the north-east gate might be travelling from the more impoverished sections of east London, which suggests that Christ is emerging from interactions with the very people about whom the wrathful man is concerned.<sup>192</sup>

Yet Meynell does not simply bring Christ in at the gate to prove the man wrong, but also to show the man's affinity with Christ. Although the dreaming narrator asserts a more complete view of the situation than the man caught up in "wrathful" emotion, it is the man's tear, the physical representation of his emotion, that calls Christ. Ironically, his expression of the compassionate emotions that cause him to deny God in fact summon the God he denies. This poem then, simultaneously asserts that the man is wrong in his

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<sup>192</sup> Charles Booth's *Maps Descriptive of London Poverty, 1898-9* from his survey of life and labour in London can be accessed through the *Charles Booth Online Archive*. The map provided a color-coded key to the levels of poverty in different neighborhoods. The area surrounding Hyde Park was designated "Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy." Moving east down Oxford Street, which is at the Northeast corner of the park (it becomes Holborn, Viaduct, Newgate, Cheapside) the neighborhoods become progressively less wealthy, designated as "Poor" or "Very Poor." When Christ comes in at this gate, then, he may have simultaneously traversed the poorest parts of the city and the heart of the materialist shopping culture on Oxford street that Meynell disparaged, thus calling attention to the contrast between these areas.

estimation of God while implying that his emotions strongly correlate with those of Christ. Paradoxically, the man's tear blinds him (as he never seems to see or acknowledge the Christ figure seen by the narrator) while simultaneously allowing Christ to be reflected (both literally and figuratively) "In those impassioned eyes." Thus, while Meynell contradicts the man's view of God, she suggests the legitimacy of his anger and compassion within Christian tradition. This poem, then, recognizes what is valuable about the wrathful man's perspective while also co-opting it as essentially religious. According to Meynell, even though the man is denying God, his internal emotions are connecting with Christ, whether or not he chooses this.

Meynell's description of a situation in which Christ-like emotion actually obscures religious belief points to one of the challenges she believed confronted the church in modernity. The wrathful man seems to think that religion is about asserting the transcendent abilities of a "Higher Power," yet he really longs for an immanent Christ who is involved in the everyday lives of the poor and disabled. That the man believes he must choose between compassion and religion indicates that the church has not adequately portrayed God's immanence or focused on its own social mission; for, as Meynell sees it, this particular man's religious conflict might be negated through belief in an immanent God who is intimately caught up in improving human life. Christ is immanent in several respects in the poem. First, he is physically present, at work in the busy city. Second, he is immanent within the man's tear, something that comes from deep within the man and symbolizes his emotion, which seems to suggest that Christ is also present within the man before being physically revealed through his expression of compassion. Meynell's poem ultimately critiques the modern church's message rather than the "wrathful man." Indeed, the surprising moment of recognition at the end of the poem is not when the wrathful man recognizes Christ (he doesn't), but when Christ acknowledges his own reflection in the man's eyes, implying that his followers must also acknowledge their kinship with this man's social ideals.

Meynell's poem attempts to speak to doubters and believers alike, asking those discouraged by religion to look beyond their immediate emotional reactions and challenging believers to ask why they aren't the ones reflecting Christ. Out of the whole city, it is here where Christ sees himself reflected not because of belief, but because of compassion. Within the poem, there is an answer to the man's question ("Where are the Higher Powers") that God sees, but which the man does not, and Meynell thus suggests that the church has neglected its responsibility to show God to the world.

"In Sleep," then, suggests a kind of respect for the wrathful man's perspective even while affirming Meynell's own. While contemporary scholars like Taylor suggest that seeing "human flourishing" as an end goal is a byproduct of secularization, Meynell suggests that "human flourishing" and the "promotion of belief" are not so easily separated, for the impulse to promote human flourishing is the most Christ-like action humans perform. The wrathful man clearly values the goal of human flourishing over belief in a higher power, but Christ's intervention at this moment in the poem contradicts the idea that privileging human flourishing pushes religion out of the picture. Meynell suggests that perhaps a religion that appealed more strongly to this compassionate impulse would be more meaningful in the modern world. The man bears the image of God within himself; it is only the constraints of his individual vision that keep him from recognizing this. Far from denying that fulfillment might come from within the individual, Meynell uses the man's tear to simultaneously express his need for Christ and concretize the idea that every individual bears the image (in this case the reflection) of God within him or herself.

### Religious Womanhood

In addition to suggesting that Christians should moderate their antipathetic rhetoric toward those who questioned religious belief, "In Sleep" reflects Meynell's desire for a more socially-engaged modern religion. Yet she also suggests that this

progressive and active vision of the Christian mission was hampered by passive constructions of religious womanhood. For her, critiquing Catholicism's failure to live up to its public social mission was integrally connected to critiquing representations of women's religious roles that emphasized privacy and femininity.

In fact, Meynell's depiction of the socially-engaged religious woman in *Merry England* and her subsequent discussions of women's creativity and bodily processes in her poetry suggest that she framed the relationship between religion and modern womanhood much less antagonistically than many scholars have implied.<sup>193</sup> Instead, as in her discussions of technology and religious pluralism, much of her discussion of gender focuses on how Catholicism can accommodate modernity. While scholarship on Meynell has largely moved beyond asserting a dichotomy between the religious and feminist impulses in her work expressed by critics such as Sharon Smulders in the 1990s, this dichotomy has been replaced by the idea that Meynell appropriated the image of female sainthood (cultivated by her male admirers) for her own ends. This new construction still places Meynell's religious commitments and her interest in modernity in opposition to one another largely based on assumptions about how Catholicism would have shaped Meynell's views of femininity without reference to her own comments on the subject.

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<sup>193</sup> Meynell's religious views have particularly been associated with restraint. Jackson suggests that "Indeed, she had joined the Catholic Church in large part because she saw it as the sole administrator of a moral legislation that to her was even more important than its guiding her to faith" (456). Sharon Smulders sees a split between Meynell's political and religious commitments: "Her radicalism compasses her feminism and, until the Great War, her pacifism. On the other hand, her toryism manifests itself in a relatively traditional approach to matters of religious faith and poetic form" ("Feminism, Pacifism" 159). By contrast, F. Elizabeth Gray reminds us of the ways that Meynell integrated her political ideas (both feminist and socialist) with her faith. Gray reads her poetry about the Eucharist as "inclusive, egalitarian, and feminist" ("Making Christ" 176). Similarly, Meynell's writings about the Virgin Mary reveal the integration of her religious ideas and her feminism. Ashley Faulkner notes that, in her extended essay *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, Meynell suggests that "women's rights is essentially a Catholic project, stemming from Marian devotion" (80).



Meynell was recovered by feminist critics preoccupied with the question of how progressive she was on the issue of gender roles, and early critics characterized her work as either “Victorian” or “modern” according to how progressive they believed she was. In 2000, Talia Schaffer opened a new door in Meynell criticism by reassessing her relationship to the figure of the “angel in the house,” an association inspired by Coventry Patmore, Francis Thompson, and George Meredith’s adoration of Meynell. Schaffer suggests that for these admirers, “[t]he term [was] an economical way to convey Meynell’s Catholic piety, her semi-divine status as poetic ‘muse,’ her apparent dissociation from mundane concerns, and her role as the presiding genius of the home” (“Tethered Angel” 50). Schaffer examines both how Meynell’s life did not conform to this image—she was a bad housekeeper, physically robust, and politically involved—and how she appropriated “the angel in the house” image to advance her career and increase her critical acclaim, a move which eventually led to critical backlash from Modernist women writers such as Virginia Woolf who were nevertheless indebted to her. Despite the ways in which Meynell’s own life differed from “The Angel in the House” ideal, Schaffer points out that Meynell cherished the manuscript copy of Patmore’s poem *The Angel in the House*, which he gave her for her birthday in 1893 and “stoutly defended its poetic merit throughout her life” (50).<sup>194</sup>

Yet, Meynell’s comments on Patmore’s poem in *Merry England* also contained a few critical barbs. While Schaffer convincingly shows Meynell’s willingness to embrace Patmore’s idealization of women, of her in particular, Meynell also clearly critiques Patmore’s understanding of what it means to be a religious woman. Significantly, her

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<sup>194</sup> Patmore’s poetics had an important influence on Meynell’s career. F. Elizabeth Gray catalogues a long list of reviews Meynell wrote in favor of Patmore’s work, pointing out that “Meynell’s highest and most distinctive praise—again in the face of prevailing opinion—was reserved for the poetry of Coventry Patmore, which she viewed as supreme genius (“Literary Reviewing” 81). In “Patmore’s Law, Meynell’s Rhythm,” Yopie Prins examines how Patmore’s poetic theories on pauses and silences influenced Meynell. Meynell, she suggests, took the idea of the “metrical value of pauses” and adapted it to her own art (264).

only feminist criticism of the poem arises from her disapproval of how Patmore uses religion to paint a picture of perfect femininity.

In a December, 1885 review of Patmore's career for *Merry England*, "'Twixt Anacreon and Plato," Meynell scolds Patmore for his lack of political progressiveness and his depiction of materialistic rather than spiritual values in "The Angel in the House." While generally approving of the way Patmore links femininity with piety, Meynell demonstrates her own opposing understanding of this relationship by criticizing his shallow portrayal of religion's private role in "the angel's" life. Although religiosity is supposedly a defining feature of "the angel," Meynell suggests that it is merely nominal in Patmore's depiction, functioning simply as a marker of ideal womanhood, not as a constitutive part of her character:

And yet this poet, who praised so well does not directly attribute the sweet virtues which he implies. The woman of whom he sings writes trivial little notes, is fond of expense in dress, and, all in the way of dignity and gaiety, is somewhat vain. She is won by her lover's admiration of her beauty. The poet studies her in the smaller mysteries, not in the depths, of character; studies her for feminine, not for human, nature. We are allowed to know that she prays in secret, but she rises from her knees to jest about the new ball dress with which she had planned to delight her husband's eyes. (77)

Even as she praises Patmore's idealization of female virtues, Meynell asserts that, in execution, the virtues of the woman he depicts are bound by her femininity rather than enhanced by it. Patmore imperfectly realizes his ideal, she contends, because he suggests that feminine virtue is best discerned through materialistic interests rather than spiritual practices.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, in focusing on the outward markers of femininity rather than

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<sup>195</sup> Vadillo documents Meynell's dismay at the culture of London shopping in *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*: "Kensington was representative in London of consumer society, and this particular space enabled Meynell to represent and criticize this new social and economic transformation" (*Women Poets and Urban* 80-81). She disliked shop-windows because they were representative of consumer culture (95) and "transformed the metropolis into a spectacle" (112). Meynell's criticisms of the burgeoning materiality of Oxford Street also reflected her antipathy toward the equation of materialism with femininity.

on character and spirituality, he has failed to acknowledge the full depth of her humanity, which Meynell implies is more important than markers of gender difference.

By pointing to the moral flaws in Patmore's attempt to portray perfect womanhood, Meynell implies some of the ways in which her own vision of religious womanhood differed from her admirer's. In particular, the angel's solely private spirituality seems to fall short of Meynell's vision of the Christian mission. Although Patmore suggests the angel's piety because she "prays in secret," Meynell uses this privacy to suggest a hypocritical gap between her personal and public engagement with religion, suggesting that Patmore's idealization of women in the private sphere comes into conflict with the type of Catholicism she wishes to promote.

Meynell's review of Patmore in *Merry England* reflects not only her more socially engaged version of femininity, but also the larger concerns of *Merry England*. While she criticizes Patmore's depiction of women as materialistic and frivolous, she also objects to what she views as his excessive political conservatism and his depiction of religion as merely an adornment. She accuses Patmore of using the angel's religiosity merely as a trick to illustrate her femininity, thus implying that he fails to take religion seriously enough to see it a force that can meet social challenges such as poverty. Meynell directly criticizes Patmore's politics, asserting that:

if we have any quarrel with him it is probably a political one. As far as we can gather from the odes which deal with the Conservative Reform Bill, and other topics of like nature, the English language has no word, no superlative of Tory, which would define his party of one. This political character affects, we think, his social ethics; the prosperities of 'The Angel in the House' are almost oppressive; we should have been better pleased if the hero had not been quite such a good *parti*; the poor are introduced for the purpose of giving an exquisite heroine the opportunity of being detected in the virtuousness of reading the Scriptures in their cottages. These are hardly the relations on which the ethics of our time can rest. (76-77)

While contemporary scholars often use Patmore's *The Angel in the House* as an example of a particularly oppressive idealization of women's domesticity,<sup>196</sup> Meynell expresses this oppressiveness as a failure to engage the ethical challenges of the "modern" world. It is not Patmore's version of femininity that she finds "oppressive" as much as the poem's "prosperities," a failure to recognize social concerns that might certainly take the "angel" out of her house for reasons other than demonstrating her feminine piety. Tellingly, she accuses him of having inadequate "social ethics" to meet "our time," implying that his version of the private female philanthropist falls short of her own vision of women's engagement in larger political efforts to ameliorate poverty. Meynell's own poetry, by contrast, attempts to depict an engagement with religion that responds to the ethical challenges of modernity.<sup>197</sup>

Meynell further reveals her distaste for the idealization of women's religious lives as a merely private matter that does not take into account the needs of a larger community in her comments on religious femininity in "A Daughter of St. Clare," a November 1887 article for *Merry England* that discusses the biography of Clare Vaughan, a pious young Englishwoman of delicate health who joined the Poor Clares and subsequently died while embracing the austerities of convent life. Although the biography of Vaughan that

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<sup>196</sup> Bina Freiwald's 1988 "Of Selfsame Desire: Patmore's *The Angel in the House*" exemplifies feminist critiques of the poem. She notes that "*Angel in the House* clearly subscribes" to the idea that woman inhabited a 'separate sphere,' a sheltered private sphere (sheltered by men against other men) that was kept at a distance from men's public domain (forever inaccessible to women)" (545). Furthermore, the idea of women's religious nature permeates the poem leaving no room for female subjectivity: "For Patmore, 'woman' is indeed instrumental, functional, for in her man can find a mirror wherein he might see reflected the divine in the human" (549).

<sup>197</sup> Meynell's biographer June Badeni recounts an anecdote revealing Meynell's antipathy toward the idea of respectable femininity when it prevented ethical action on behalf of other women: "But with the kind of nineteenth-century convention that found it immodest for a lady to concern herself with any but the respectable Mrs. Meynell had no sympathy. Having woken one night to hear screams in the street outside her house, she asked the policeman whose beat it was what had caused the disturbance; she repeated, with anger, the reply he had given her: 'Oh, you don't want to trouble about that—it was only women. Ladies didn't ought to have nothing to do with women.' To her womankind was as much injured by the rough treatment of a prostitute as that of a duchess. She had that truest kind of charity that made her unable to feel herself a member of a race apart from the outcast, the transgressor, the failure" (211).

Meynell discusses, written by Lady Lovat and published by the Catholic press Burnes & Oates, hails her as a Catholic heroine, Meynell presents her saintliness with a grain of salt by pointing out the limits of her understanding of poverty. At first, Clare Vaughan's experience seems to express a sincerely religious womanhood that eschews all of the materialistic trappings Meynell objected to in her critique of the "angel." Yet, Meynell's objection to her is quite similar to the one she levied at Patmore, a failure to comprehend and confront the challenge of poverty. Vaughan's private drive toward deprivation and contemplation does not embody the socially aware Catholicism that Meynell championed:

She must have seen, indeed, but she never understood, that outside her convent and outside the cloister of her heart there were innumerable poor Clares—poor Clares against their will, obliged to see their little ones fast and go barefoot, with a pang compared with which the penances of the Amiens Convent were trivial. She must have known, but she can never have realized, that the affections which helped to make life hopeful and heaven dear to her are to countless women the source of the intolerable fear of eternal separation. (401)

In this passage, both the literal convent and the metaphorical cloister around Clare Vaughan's heart become a way to segregate the religious woman from encountering the needs of women from a less privileged background. Meynell contrasts Vaughan's idealized image of poverty with what it means for the women outside of the cloister—mothers forced to witness poverty through their children's hunger. For these women, poverty is a barrier rather than an inducement to faith, and the kinds of sacrifices Vaughan embraces do little to help those who cannot find religious significance in a lifestyle that they have been forced to endure. Vaughan's version of poverty is incomprehensible to these women, yet Meynell dignifies them with the title of "Poor Clares," implying that their experience of poverty is as legitimate as Clare Vaughan's. While Meynell does not question Clare Vaughan's religious devotion, she invites her reader to acknowledge the insufficiency of Vaughan's understanding of poverty to meet the needs of her community before unequivocally canonizing her.

### A Poetics of Process

Just as Meynell critiques both Patmore and Clare Vaughan's understanding of female piety because they ignored the importance of social engagement, she suggests that modern artists can easily ignore their ethical responsibility to active public engagement. In her essay "Solitude" (1898), for instance, she points out the value of solitude, but chastises the poets who use the privacy of art to avoid moral and social obligations; this type of "vain artist" behaved as "master of his own purpose, such as it was; it was his secret, and the public was not privy to his artistic conscience. He does violence to the obligations of which he is aware, and which the world does not know very explicitly. Nothing is easier." (20). She compares the socially irresponsible artist unfavorably with those who have given up solitude for lives of service in schools, cloisters, and hospital wards, thus suggesting the need for the ideal artist to find a balance between social commitment and artistic development. Meynell suggests that because the artist's calling is individually defined by conscience, the artist is not always held to ethical standards by the public. However, she also suggests that the artist always has a public obligation even if only s/he is aware of what that obligation is.

Meynell's own religious poetry depicts a God who is directly accessible to everyone and places him in the midst of human experience and suffering. While Meynell's essays in *Merry England* directly address Christianity's relationship to the challenges of pessimistic philosophy, urban poverty, and women's changing roles, the poetry that emerged during her work for *Merry England* translates these challenges into a poetic voice that expresses the individual consciousness informed by these issues.<sup>198</sup> This subject encounters religious doctrines with a desire to creatively interact with Christianity rather than passively absorb and affirm religious doctrine.

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<sup>198</sup> For further discussion of Meynell's interest in psychology, see Maria Frawley's "'Tides of the Mind': Alice Meynell's Poetry of Perception" and Linda M. Austin's discussion of Meynell's interest in emerging theories of materialist psychology and the pre-Freudian unconscious in "Self Against Childhood: The Contributions of Alice Meynell to A Psycho-Physiology of Memory."

Meynell published her poem “I Am the Way” as she reached the end of her most prolific years as a journalist and prose writer and re-embarked on a more active poetic career. Emerging from the journalistic milieu of *Merry England*, this poem addresses her belief that Christianity need not antagonize modernity. It also anticipates her subsequent preoccupation with defining an incarnated Christ in process in her religious poetry. “I Am the Way,” published in *Merry England* in March 1895 and subsequently included in her 1896 volume *Other Poems*, expresses her emerging understanding of how traditional religion can relate not only to the concrete challenges of modernity but to a new artistic sense of self that was emerging in the fin-de-siècle. The first-person narrator of “I Am the Way” articulates the limitations of her subject position in terms of both knowledge and perspective. In doing so, she suggests that Christianity can relate to someone with a “modern” sense of self not through its teleological certainties but through its inclusion in everyday processes and even uncertainties.

At first, the poem seems to participate in the very type of easy doctrinal acceptance that Meynell ultimately complicates. The title of the poem references Jesus’s well-known assertion from the gospel of John that “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (*KJV*, John 14.6). In the opening, the poem’s narrator tersely affirms this traditional doctrinal statement saying “Thou art the Way,” but the poem goes on to playfully unpack and reinterpret the metaphor used in this statement. By engaging with the implications of Jesus’ metaphor beyond the traditional interpretation of this passage, Meynell reveals its hidden pertinence for a modern audience:

Thou art the Way.  
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal  
I cannot say  
If Thou hadst ever met my soul.

I cannot see—  
I, child of process—if their [sic] lies  
An end for me,  
Full of repose, full of replies.

I'll not reproach  
 The way that goes, my feet that stir.<sup>199</sup>  
 Access, approach,  
 Art Thou, time, way, and wayfarer. (1-12)

In the poem's first stanza, Meynell affirms Jesus' statement but ignores the traditional interpretation of this verse that focuses on the exclusionary nature of "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Instead of focusing on the words "but by" that imply there is no way to approach God except through Jesus, Meynell instead contrasts the idea of Christ as a "way" with the idea of Christ as a "goal." This distinction allows her to shift focus away from the teleological, goal-oriented aspect of Christianity, a focus that might seem difficult to accept for the modern audience that she believed placed a premium on process. The second line, for instance, clearly diminishes the importance of goals with the words "nothing but." By contrast, Meynell's description of Christ as "the way," indicates that she believes he meets humans in their present state of imperfect comprehension. At the end of the stanza, the narrator indicates that she was by no means certain of religion or her ability to find Christ. Thus, Christ's embroilment in the process of life is the only quality that allows him to "meet" her and others who are uncertain about religious belief. Thus, the first stanza uses the narrator's unsettled artistic perspective to express the uncertainty of modern religious understanding while simultaneously asserting Christianity's relevance amidst this uncertainty.

Meynell creates a feeling of uncertainty in the rhythms of the poem itself. Although the meter remains regular, alternating a line of iambic dimeter in the first and third lines of each stanza with a line of iambic tetrameter in the second and fourth lines, the very short first and third lines of the poem create a number of enjambments as well as moments where a thought seems to have ended but continues to become more

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<sup>199</sup> While this line remained unchanged in Meynell's 1896 and 1902 volumes, for her 1913 *Collected Poems*, Meynell revised this line to "the road that winds, my feet that err." While the original line emphasizes Meynell's movement and impressionistic perception, the changed line calls more attention to the idea of religious transgression.



complicated. The first short opening affirmation, “Thou art the Way” is the only line that contains a complete thought, with the rest of the poem giving the sense that Meynell is feeling her way toward a more complete answer that she is still discovering. As the narrator states in the poem, she too is a “child of process.”<sup>200</sup>

The short first and third lines also underline statements of doubt and limitation such as “I cannot say” and “I cannot see,” culminating in her short line “I’ll not reproach,” indicating that she has embraced this limited perspective as a Christian and as an artist. As if to illustrate the narrator’s assertion of an incomplete visual perspective in the second stanza, the third stanza is narrated from a visually unsettled perspective. The narrator asserts: “I’ll not reproach / The way that goes, my feet that stir” (9-10). This perspective depicts the vision of a person in motion, a walker who cannot distinguish whether the way is “receding” or whether her feet are “stirring.” Thus, the shifting perspective seems to purposefully mimic the hurried movements and uncertainty of modern life. As Ana Parejo Vadillo has demonstrated, Meynell’s own experiences of new forms of transportation in the city contributed to her style of narration. Vadillo argues that “Meynell’s aesthetic response to the ephemerality of modern life is impressionism” (97).<sup>201</sup> Building on this observation, I suggest that Meynell used these impressionistic techniques not only to express new experiences of the physical world but also to mimic how the modern mind processes religion.

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<sup>200</sup> Both Kathleen Anderson and Beth Newman note the importance of process and continuum in Meynell’s poetry. Anderson follows Meynell’s use of the mother/child relationship to figure the process of creation, and Newman contrasts Meynell’s understanding of temporality with the emerging modernist emphasis on epiphany.

<sup>201</sup> Vadillo points out the importance of movement and the road in Meynell’s understanding of impressionism: She “argued that movement was a quality of modern life, and that roads were the material expression of that quality” (*Women Poets and Urban* 104). In her discussion of Meynell’s art criticism, Meghan Clarke also establishes that Meynell was an early defender of impressionism, “credited with introducing the *plein aire* Newlyn School to the mainstream art world” in the *Art Journal* (1889) and defending the merits of French impressionists in comparison to contemporary British art as early as 1882 (34).

In this poem, Meynell's modern, impressionistic experience serves to uncover a new interpretation of "I am the way." The poem's ending brings us full-circle, expressing the same assertion made in the first line. Therefore, it at first seems to offer a reaffirmation of the opening doctrinal statement. But by this point in the poem, the simple affirmation "Thou art the Way" has fractured into a more nuanced and syntactically complex restatement: "Access, approach / Art Thou, time, way, and wayfarer" (11-12). The third line of the final stanza, "Access, approach," serves to illustrate two different ways in which "the way" can be understood. First, it is an access, a means of getting to God. Approach at first seems to be a restatement of this idea, but the slight change in words once again adds a sense of movement, introducing the possibility that Christ could be present in the motion of approach itself rather than just serving as a pathway. In the final line, Meynell also explores several different ways to think about Christ as "the way," offering images that progressively become more and more embodied. First, Christ is within time, then Christ becomes physical as the "way," and finally, Christ is embodied in human form as the "wayfarer," so that by the end he is fully immanent and mirrors the narrator's status as a traveler. Instead of a disembodied "way," the narrator has gained a traveling companion. Thus, Meynell suggests that Christ was not incarnated once in human history, but rather that he is continually reincarnated to accompany different types of travelers.

In addition to using "the way" as a springboard for a new image of Christ, Meynell revises the opening statement's syntax to express a more modern approach to finding Christ. We see this change in the final two lines: "Access, approach, / Art Thou, time, way, and wayfarer" (11-12). The break between these two lines has the effect of giving the final line the syntax of a question, whereas the poem's first line was a definite statement. Its new phrasing as a question leaves the line open to a future process of creative revision. This modern narrator is one who cannot parrot back the lines of

scripture with simple certainty, but she is nevertheless accompanied by Christ in her process of exploration.

Going beyond the idea of Christ accompanying the modern “child of process” on her journey, Meynell suggests that Christ himself was a child of process, linked to the natural world in the same way that every child is. In “Advent Meditation,” which appeared in *Merry England* in 1888, Meynell asserts that: “No sudden thing of glory and fear / Was the Lord’s coming” (1-2). Instead of depicting a single moment of incarnation, she invites us to think of Christ’s coming to earth as an everyday natural process of formation inside of Mary’s womb: “but the dear / Slow Nature’s days followed each other / To form the Saviour from his Mother / --One of the children of the year” (2-5). By emphasizing that the incarnation was a slow natural process similar to many other human gestations, Meynell simultaneously elevates women’s bodily capabilities and suggests that contemplating everyday experience is a legitimate way to comprehend divinity.<sup>202</sup> Tracy Seeley sees Meynell’s turn to focus on incarnational subjects as a turning point that placed her work on the cutting edge of fin-de-siècle thought. She claims that “Meynell’s emphasis on the human side of the divine incarnation is more than an inflection of orthodoxy. It also places her amidst a *fin-de-siècle* insistence on body and spirit as necessarily entwined” (“Fair Light” 671). I would suggest that, theologically, Meynell does more than focus on Christ’s incarnation. She offers an immanent understanding of God that places him not only at one point in history but within the ongoing natural processes of everyday life. In embracing an immanent theology, Meynell was not only expressing the desire of her time to reconcile body and spirit, but also offering a way for the modern person to conceive of a God relevant to their lives.

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<sup>202</sup> Beth Newman sees this as an example of Meynell’s “anti-momentous temporality” because it “constructs Advent as a slow, continuous, even rhythmical process that takes place over a long time, the opposite of an intense moment” (500). Beverly Schlack also calls attention to the feminist potential of this poem: “Meynell’s feminism is reflected in her insistence that religion in general and its Lord in particular are derived from *the mother* (human mother and Mother Nature)” (117).

As Meynell develops this idea in her later poetry, she not only suggests that God is present within a creation in process but also that modern society can participate in the process of creating Christ, thus aligning religious understanding with artistic process. In her poem “To the Mother of Christ the Son of Man,” she suggests that her contemporaries were uncertain and confused about their relationship to religion but that they could still engage God by participating in a process of creative reconception. This poem metaphorically makes believers into the pregnant Mary, comparing their experience of Christ to a continually re-enacted pregnancy.<sup>203</sup> The plural narrators address Mary directly, insisting that they must create Christ through a mental process that mirrors Mary’s physical pregnancy. This way of understanding divinity as an idea in process within the believer gave Meynell’s contemporaries the power to encounter divinity in the same intimate and direct way Mary did:

We too (one cried), we too,  
We the unready, the perplexed, the cold,  
Must shape the Eternal in our thoughts anew,  
Cherish, possess, enfold.

Thou sweetly, we in strife.  
It is our passion to conceive Him thus  
In mind, in sense, within our house of life;  
That seed is locked in us.

We must affirm our Son,  
From the ambiguous Nature’s difficult speech,  
Gather in darkness that resplendent One,  
Close as our grasp can reach.

Nor shall we ever rest  
From this our task. An hour sufficed for thee,  
Thou innocent! He lingers in the breast  
Of our humanity. (1-16)

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<sup>203</sup> F. Elizabeth Gray’s brief discussion of “To the Mother of Christ the Son of Man” in “Catholicism and Ideal Womanhood in *Fin-de-Siècle* Women’s Poetry” also points to the egalitarian nature of this poem while Kathleen Anderson focuses on this poem as a metaphorical discussion of poetic creativity: “Divine-like, the poet generates God’s Son in the clay of her own thoughts, a kind of self-fertilization which reflects Meynell’s belief that both the seeds of God and of poetry innately exist in every human being” (271).

In Meynell's poem, Mary is not, as she often appears in Catholic discourse, the intermediary between humans and God, but rather provides a model of the experience of God that modern believers crave. The words "conceive Him" imply both that the speakers must try to understand Christ and that this process of understanding is similar to the physical process of conception. Importantly, this experience is not limited to those who are privileged or certain or exemplary people. The speakers of the poem demand insistently that "we too, / We the unready, the perplexed, the cold," a particularly needy group of humans, must also approach Christ by following Mary's example (1-2). By using a plural narrator that explicitly includes all of these groups, Meynell is inviting her audience to participate in the process she describes.

Furthermore, Meynell depicts Mary's pregnancy as a creative act, implying the need for the speakers to creatively engage with God in their own metaphorical pregnancies. The narrators use active verbs such as "shape" and "gather" to describe their encounters with Christ, indicating that this metaphoric pregnancy is not a passive process. Furthermore, Meynell implies that, given the modern challenges her speakers face and the difference between them and Mary, witnessing Mary's process is not enough. Rather, they "Must shape the Eternal in our thoughts anew" (3). This line aptly describes Meynell's idea of how modern subjects can relate to religious tradition. In reenacting Mary's pregnancy, the speakers both affirm the value of the religious past and reinterpret it for their present needs.

Ultimately, the poem suggests not only that the speakers must engage in a participatory process to encounter Christ, but also that Christ is most fully present within process itself. While Meynell describes Mary's creative process in producing Christ as idyllic and limited in duration, she contrasts this sharply with the narrators' processes. Although "an hour sufficed for" Mary to bring Christ into the world, the speakers claim that "He lingers in the breast of our humanity," implying that the human process of trying to shape Christ will never give birth to a fully formed, fully understood savior (14-16).

Yet, this idea of Christ lingering within the body has a more positive connotation as well. It is only through this process of shaping Christ inside of themselves that the speakers experience Christ at all, and if Christ lingers within them, he remains continually immanent, as close as possible to the speakers.

### Religious Instinct

By placing an immanent version of Christ amidst the difficulties of modern life and depicting him within embodied experience, Meynell was offering a response to what she believed were the most pertinent challenges to religious engagement. Meynell's descriptions of modern life in *Merry England* clearly demonstrate that she perceived a very specific set of challenges emerging for Christianity at the fin-de-siècle. In "Human Instincts: Their Lapse and their Survival," a December 1884 article in *Merry England*, we get a glimpse of Meynell's theory on the major threats to modern religious belief when she attempts to diagnose a shift in the ideas that appeal to the "modern" agnostic:

Contemporary speculations are tending far less towards what are supposed to be the joyousness of paganism and the serenities of science than towards the despair of pessimism. Neither Mr. Herbert Spencer nor Mr. Swinburne will probably have the last word; it is the dark utterance of Schopenhauer which is likely to be pronounced by modern Agnosticism to be "the one sad Gospel which is true." (112) <sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> At the end of this section, Meynell refers to "the one sad Gospel which is true," a quotation from Arthur Hugh Clough's poem "Easter Day." Clough's poem meditates on the difficulty of believing in Christ's resurrection for someone influenced by reason and textual criticism. The refrain of Clough's poem is "Christ is not risen," though the poem ends on a question "Christ is not risen?" leaving an opening for the poem to be one of temporary doubt:

Let us go hence, and think upon these things  
 In silence, which is best.  
 Is He not risen? No—  
 But lies and moulders low?  
 Christ is not risen? (44-48)

For Clough, the use of "gospel" is an irony meant to call attention to his difficulties with the Christian gospel. For Meynell, quoting this line both calls attention to an earlier narrative of Victorian doubt and suggests that the beliefs presented as an alternative to traditional religion may become their own dogmatic gospel.

Identifying which forms of agnosticism Meynell found most viable helps us to understand why she turned to a discourse of immanence as a way to revitalize religion. In dismissing Spencer's natural selection and social Darwinism as major threats to religious belief, Meynell suggests that she thinks new forms of scientific understanding can be incorporated within a Christian framework. In dismissing paganism as represented by Swinburne, Meynell suggests that she is not overly concerned about a turn to hedonism or a celebration of nature. Her dismissal of both science and joyous paganism suggests that Meynell did not believe that a focus on the natural world was fueling a turn away from religion.

Meynell puts forward two very different forces that she perceived as a threat to religious engagement: the loss of an instinctual appreciation for life, which fits with her idea that religion is a natural instinct, and Schopenhauer's pessimism, the fear of a future in which humanity, having lost faith in God, also loses faith in an ability to improve itself. In calling Schopenhauer's work "the one sad Gospel which is true," Meynell hints that the Christian gospel is being replaced with another somewhat dogmatic "gospel" of pessimism, one which is explicitly "modern" and ascendant but which may also lose its appeal in time. Loss of faith for Meynell also goes hand in hand with losing a zest for physical life:

Life may be infinitely precious to us for the sake of what it contains; in itself it has become cheap. Added to this, that languor of the physical functions which accompanies such habitual security has caused large classes of modern society to be conscious of existence as a slightly and insipidly disagreeable sensation; and superadded again is the shade of pessimism which is closely and surely advancing over the field of modern thought. (112)

This hypothesis about the loss of faith clearly calls for an immanent emphasis in theology. On one hand, the impetus toward social change that comes from locating Christ within human suffering responds directly to Schopenhauer's pessimism. On the other hand, placing divinity within the physical world might combat the lack of instinctual joy

that Meynell laments. For Meynell, immanence brought the nearness and comfort of Christ into a world that was plagued by pessimistic thought and physical disengagement.

Through her later career, Meynell's concern remains neither the elevation of the natural world over the spiritual world nor the scientific questioning of a transcendent deity, but a loss of connection with the physical world and the loss of conviction in religion's relevance to the challenges of modernity. In an effort to contradict what she sees as a modern malaise, Meynell's religious poetry became both more participatory and more visceral. The participatory quality of the plural narrator she relies on in her later religious poetry, such as the one in "'To Mary the Mother of Christ the Son of Man,'" allows her to encompass her audience's doubts and challenges into the search for a modern religion. Her use of pregnancy and childbirth in these poems provides her a perfect example of an episode of embodiment, both using Mary's pregnancy and Christ's birth to respond to the modern woman's disconnection from physical experience, elevating this uniquely female experience as a public event.

Meynell's poem "Christmas Night," published in her 1923 posthumous book of poetry, continues this search for an immanent God, bringing together a number of the concerns about modern life that Meynell had articulated in her writing for *Merry England*. This poem also reveals the balance she continued to seek between religious tradition and creative modernization. Much of the poem depicts the difficulty people face as they attempt to discern God in the modern world, a difficulty which she dramatizes as a search for God in various places. The poem begins despondently as the narrators unsuccessfully try to locate Christ in a number of different ways, but it ends triumphantly as the narrator eventually discovers Christ by meditating on Mary's childbirth experience. Meynell's poem explores unsuccessful solutions to a feeling of distance from God and isolation from community, but she eventually seeks to counteract this problem by promoting communal Christian experience, once again narrated in third-person plural and based on the model of Mary's experience.



The first three stanzas of the poem depict the difficulty of locating God on earth and at first seem to contradict the immanental thrust of Meynell's earlier depictions of Christ within everyday processes:

We do not find Him on the difficult earth,  
In surging human-kind,  
In wayside death or accidental birth,  
Or in the "march of mind." (1-4)

Although the opening line suggests that humans can no longer find God, a close look at the verbs of the poem's first three stanzas reveals that God is not necessarily absent, but rather, inaccessible to modern-day human perception. The verb "find" suggests that the problem is with a human inability to perceive God rather than with God's absence, while the description of the earth as "difficult" suggests a negative attitude toward nature already established in the speakers' mind which might color their perception. Similarly, stanzas two and three suggest that God is "hiding" or "lurking" on the earth, again pointing to a divine presence but one that is obscured. Emphasizing the particular challenges that modern, urban society ("surging human-kind") poses to religious seekers, Meynell revisits the concerns that she and her husband laid out in the "Manifesto of *Merry England*." While they assert that the products of the modern city and modern technology are not incompatible with a spiritual life, they do suggest that this environment raises unique barriers to understanding God which are counteracted only by a deeply seated human "instinct" for joy:

Though the maypole be a thing of the past, the same instinct for joy which moved men and maidens on the village greens of long ago is ready to assert itself still—Heaven sees in what distorted fashion—in our manufacturing towns, in our dense seaports, and our fields of coal. In London alone there are 'two millions [sic] who never smile'—the members, alas! of a great family scattered, or rather huddled, in every city and village, through the land. (7)

With "scattered, or rather huddled," the Meynells call attention to the emotional distance ironically created by overcrowding and physical proximity. Yet, they also assert their

journal's characteristic claim that changing conditions cannot compromise our capacity to connect with God.

In "Christmas Night," Meynell's description of "wayside death or accidental birth" likewise draws attention to the lack of interpersonal connections in modern urban society. These events, the most significant physical disruptions possible, go unacknowledged by the proper emotional responses of grief and joy. In "Human Instincts: Their Lapse and their Survival," Meynell expresses a similar lament about the lack of instinctual and emotional responses to momentous occasions. Discussing her disappointment at how people respond to both birth and death, she locates the problem in a failure to fully embrace life, the earth, and the body:

In effect, it is only natural that, since the world has ceased to rejoice at birth, it should feel mixed and modified pain at death. It is not too much to say that the reluctance of modern man to pay the debt of nature consists almost entirely in his pessimistic fear of what may be beyond the grave, and that love of life for life's sake—love of his home, the earth, love of his own living flesh and blood—have hardly any part in it. (113)

This lack of connection to and love for the earth is something that Meynell sees as dampening people's interest in the religious life of the spirit as well.

It is no surprise, then, that Meynell turns her attention to nature, long the refuge of poets disillusioned with city life, in the second stanza of "Christmas Night." God, however, proves equally elusive in this setting, which to the narrators' eyes seems less imbued with heavenly order or poetic Romanticism than with Darwinian thought:

Nature, her nests, her prey, the fed, the caught,  
Hide Him so well, so well,  
His steadfast secret there seems to our thought  
Life's saddest miracle. (5-8)

While God seems to be present in nature, he remains a "steadfast secret" because the speaker's view of nature is tinged with a pessimism: "Nature, her nests, her prey, the fed, the caught, / Hide Him so well, so well." Unlike Meynell's depiction of nature in "Advent Meditation" as nurturing the Christ child, these lines point to the brutal quality

of natural life and deny that an acceptance of biological process alone can bring the modern subject enhanced knowledge of God. The positive image of “nests” is followed immediately by “prey” and the word “fed” by the word “caught,” so that just as we envision the wonder of a new life we are asked to consider that the life was created at the cost of another life. Thus, nature holds “Life’s saddest miracle” (8). In calling natural life a “miracle,” Meynell seems to acknowledge a divinity at work in nature while at the same time eschewing the natural world as a place of positive revelation.<sup>205</sup>

Since neither human society nor nature offers Meynell a glimpse of God, in the third stanza she turns as a final resort to the idea that human emotions themselves contain a kind of divinity. In her 1915 poem “In Sleep,” Meynell had depicted the reflection of Christ within the compassionate tears of an atheist, thus honoring human compassion as a force for good whether or not it originates in religious conviction by finding Christ embedded in the signifiers of the man’s emotion. Yet, while Meynell acknowledges the uncompromised value of the man’s compassion in “In Sleep,” in “Christmas Night,” she asserts that:

He’s but conjectured in man’s happiness,  
Suspected in man’s tears,  
Or lurks beyond the long, discouraged guess,  
Grown fainter through the years. (9-12)

In these passages, she approaches God more closely than she had in the previous stanzas, yet human emotions are unable to offer the experience of religious joy she seeks. Again, Christ seems to be in these things, but He cannot be located or pinned down. He “lurks beyond the long, discouraged guess, / Grown fainter through the years” (11-12). Here, Meynell calls attention to the particular difficulty her modern audience faces when trying to find Christ, because he seems to become more remote as time goes on.

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<sup>205</sup> For the Victorians, the idea of nature’s cruelty would have been a familiar part of the discussion of faith and doubt. Meynell’s comments are reminiscent of Tennyson’s famous lines in *In Memoriam*: “Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek’d against his creed” (176).

Yet this final assertion that God is “Grown fainter through the years,” an assertion that suggests the inevitable decline of religious faith through history (the secularization thesis) as well as an inevitable personal trajectory away from belief over one’s lifetime (a narrative of doubt), triggers an abrupt break in the poem. Separating the final stanza from the first three with a line of asterisks, Meynell stops to interrogate the idea that the desire for an immanent God can no longer be fulfilled:

But absent, absent now? Ah, what is this,  
Near as in child-birth bed,  
Laid on our sorrowful hearts, close to a kiss?  
A homeless childish head. (13-16)

With the words “Ah what is this,” the speaker finally discovers Christ using the metaphor of the childbirth bed, a metaphor which refers to Mary’s delivery of Christ, but in a way so intimate that the speakers appear to be re-enacting this moment as Mary. The line “laid on our sorrowful hearts” implies that the speaker encounters Christ in the same way Mary did when she was handed her newborn child for the first time. The result is that, while Christ was growing fainter in stanza three, here, in the Christmas story, the speaker discovers him “near.”<sup>206</sup> Religious experience, Meynell suggests, must become like a physical instinct, so pressing in its demands, that it overwhelms our process of thought and results in an instinctual moment of joy.

The visceral immediacy of the epiphany Meynell depicts in the final stanza does not alter the narrators’ limited perspective, but rather highlights human ineptitude when it comes to perceiving the divine. In Meynell’s imagery, Christ has to come out of us, be pushed up against us hungry, crying, and needy, before we notice him. Even in the final stanza, as the poem describes the intensely personal experience of the child-birth bed, the narrator remains plural, suggesting that this intimate experience has a public

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<sup>206</sup> Tracy Seeley uses the final stanza of this poem as an example of Meynell’s focus on “the human side of divine incarnation,” which she connects to *fin-de-siècle* discussions of the inextricable link between body and spirit (“Fair Light” 671).

resonance.<sup>207</sup> While Meynell's earlier poem "I am the way" suggests the limitations of her speaker's individual perspective and the consequent need for an immanent deity, her choice of a communal narrator for this poem suggests a societal rather than individual need while also inviting a larger community to join in her process of discovery.

Furthermore, the poem's final metaphor suggests that this discovery is not only the discovery of Christ but a rediscovery of a sense of social responsibility. This poem is an invitation to encounter Christ as a joyful mother would, but also to take on an emotional burden. Christ is "Laid on our hearts," like a twinge of conscience. He is also utterly dependent, not only a newborn, but a homeless one. Will the mother respond with a kiss? This dependence suggests the responsibility that comes with religious epiphany, both the need to offer physical care and the need to engage intellectually. The believer does not take on a fully-formed Christ, but one which requires care, engaged tending, shaping, a living Christ who will morph and change over time.

While Meynell suggests the importance of Mary's act of childbirth in bringing Christ to the world at Christmas time, she does not merely commemorate Mary's experience, nor does she suggest that the childbirth metaphor is simply a good way for individual women (like herself) to understand and draw closer to God. Instead, she views this discovery of the Christ child as a recurring event in which a whole community participates on Christmas Night. The cyclical structure of the church calendar both mirrors Mary's female biological cycle of pregnancy and makes her experience accessible to the modern Christian community. In this way, Meynell suggests that

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<sup>207</sup> Throughout the poem, Meynell uses the first person plural to indicate the communal nature of both the search for Christ and the rediscovery of the Christ child. She uses this mode of address most often in her religious poetry. In "Victorian Women Writers and Communal Identities," Julie Melnyk argues that religious women poets like Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning imported the collective "we" from the hymn tradition into lyric poetry in order to create a voice that simultaneously reflects individual and communal experience and that helps them navigate the difficulties of romantic subjectivity for the female lyric poet.

traditional church structures can be adapted to facilitate new experiences of divinity by calling attention to an immanent Christ in process.

### Conclusion

Just as Meynell suggested in the opening of this chapter that the modern museum should help its public understand the masters by revealing tradition as a process rather than a product, she also attempts to revivify religion by exposing the rawness of its process in her work. Her writings for *Merry England* argue that religious tradition was not stagnant but evolutionary, that it could adapt to both the physical and mental challenges of modernity by responding more directly to poverty and by acknowledging the need for an immanent version of God. Taking up these ideas from her essays, her poetry places Christ in the midst of modern challenges to facilitate a more direct engagement with God. She creates a socially engaged religious poetry that invited her audience to encounter an immanent deity directly through the act of creation.

Returning for a moment to Meynell's art criticism gives us a sense of her own mission as an artist who sought to blend religious tradition with modern challenges. In "Out of Munich," an April 1890 essay in *Merry England* praising the work of painter Fritz von Uhde, Meynell expresses her admiration for artists who combine religious subject matter with the latest artistic techniques: "Where von Uhde is salient and singular is in his treatment of subjects so remote by means so modern; for the penultimate or the antepenultimate learning, the belated fashion, has generally been considered good enough for religious painting. He has given to the motives of his choice the flower of the science of his time" (394). Here, Von Uhde exemplifies Meynell's appreciation of art that adapts religious tradition to engage a modern audience. Von Uhde was known for paintings such as *Lasset die Kindlein zu mir kommen* (Let the children come to me) and *Das Tischgebet* (The Mealtime Prayer), which depicted well-known scriptural moments or ideas in the midst of modern life. Meynell was clearly attracted to Von Uhde's work because it

reinterprets Christian traditions in light of modern conditions. Furthermore, she admired his use of cutting-edge artistic techniques to bring life to these subjects. She described him as “an impressionist, a man thoroughly of his time, master of all the resources of contemporary art as it is practiced in the very centre of the movement” (392).<sup>208</sup> Von Uhde’s paintings brought religious subjects into the modern world both literally in what they depicted (Christ entering everyday modern scenes), and by using an artistic technique that reflected a new way of perceiving the physical world.

Meynell’s praise for von Uhde could equally describe her own work. Just as Von Uhde depicted Christ within modern scenes, the subject matter of Meynell’s poetry places Christ directly into modern contexts, assuring her audience of God’s immanence within the world. Like Von Uhde, Meynell brought Christ into the modern world not merely by asserting Christianity’s relevance but by using poetic impressionism to show how Christ’s immanence within a world of process corresponded to the fin-de-siècle subject’s modes of perception. An immanent understanding of divinity, therefore, not only affected the content of her poems but also spurred her artistic innovation. Rather than simply painting a picture of Christ in the modern world, however, Meynell’s poetry routinely depicts a Christ who is not fully formed, inviting her audience to creatively

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<sup>208</sup> Von Uhde’s artistic techniques are now categorized somewhere between realism and impressionism. He pioneered new techniques in Germany as a “trailblazer of the idea of plein-air-painting in Munich” and introduced “masterful solutions for technical composition problems in paintings” (Charles and Carl 38). His religious paintings featured depictions of Jesus, his apostles, and his early followers, all with the faces and clothes of German peasants and situated in the plain settings of German countryside and village. In this case, the mainstream art critics proved far more ready to embrace this naturalistic image of a German Jesus than were the Protestant or Catholic church establishments. The latter remained suspicious of the socialist sympathies implicit in all forms of Naturalism” (Retallack 123). He also stirred up religious controversy with depictions of the Holy Family as impoverished rather than idealized (West 21). As her admiration of von Uhde demonstrates, Meynell remained on the cutting edge of art criticism. According to Meghan Clarke, Meynell was also an early defender of Degas and Monet, whom she labeled as both “realist” (in representing social reality) and “impressionist.” Clarke argues that in doing so “she offered through the comparison with naturalistic literature a reading of [Degas’] work to an audience incredibly uneasy with the unpleasant and unsightly element of impressionist work” (35).

participate in re-imagining God and thus allowing the process of reinvention she depicts in her art to be continually reenacted.



CHAPTER FOUR  
 MYSTICISM IN THE MUNDANE: EVELYN UNDERHILL AND EVA  
 GORE-BOOTH'S THEORIZATION OF IMMANENCE IN EARLY-  
 TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOMEN'S POETRY

While Alice Meynell was comfortable incorporating a new sense of process and impressionism into her religious writing, she was less quick to embrace another “ism” that became the popular parlance of both religious and artistic circles at the turn of the century—Mysticism, or as Meynell deemed it: “that ‘unitive life’ which seems about to become the slang of studios” (“Mystical Lyric” xiii). Nevertheless, in 1910, she took on the task of introducing an anthology with the title *Mount of Vision: A Book of English Mystic Verse*. This provided her an opportunity to defend the place of religious verse in the English canon, but she proved reluctant to use the anthology’s title term “mysticism,” because “It is ominous to hear the name of mysticism so easily used, given and taken, without a thought of its cost” (x). Meynell’s concern about the new prominence of this term centered on the idea that great privation and suffering were necessary to achieve mystical vision, and she summed up her complaint about the popular artistic use of this term in a literary critique:

It is not long since an interesting novel appeared of which the motive and the whole subject was Mysticism. Visions were easy to come by; and revelations, and such extreme things as ‘the unitive life’—things for which the Saints thought fifty years of self-conquest and self-abandonment a paltry price—were discussed as incidents of well-read aspiration. There was no mention of the first step, there was much chatter of the last. (x)

In 1910, the novel to which Meynell referred was likely Evelyn Underhill’s 1909 *The Column of Dust*, which was being reviewed in the late months of 1909 and the early months of 1910. Yet the dangerous (as Meynell saw it) vagueness of early-twentieth-century definitions of mysticism would partly be remedied by Underhill’s own non-fiction work a year later: *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, a text that is still known as one of the most popularly accessible tomes on the subject.

Despite Meynell's distaste for Underhill's early fictional effusions, Meynell and Underhill shared a similar understanding of the poet's place within mystical thought. Even as she disparaged Underhill's fictional depiction of easily-acquired visions, Meynell claimed this same privilege for the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets she admired, asserting that, unlike the saints who reach mysticism through self-denial, these poets "become mystics by their genius and the divinity of their imagination" (xi). In particular, Meynell admired the unique confluence of everyday experience and visionary acumen within their poetry. They "have beheld and fingered with spiritual senses those symbols and similitudes which are the matters of daily life" (ix). And she marvels that, rather than abandoning the visible world, these poets seem to look at it with a heightened set of spiritual senses.

Similarly, for Underhill, the mystical poet's work was not to abandon the world of sense, but to infuse it with spiritual significance for the less spiritually aware reader. Underhill, however, turns to her contemporary Eva Gore-Booth for her poetic ideal, offering a scholarly discussion of poetic mysticism in an introduction to Gore-Booth's final book of poems *The House of Three Windows* (1926). Underhill argues that "It is the supreme function of the poet to reveal to us unchanging realities by means of symbols drawn from the world of sense; thus making the spiritual world more homely to us, and the homely world in which we live, more spiritual. The poet, thus seen, is more than an artist. He is also a mediator" (v). Here Underhill identifies a double action that she believes good poetry must perform. While her use of the word "symbols" at first suggests that the physical world functions merely as a symbolic place holder for abstract spiritual concepts, the second part of her formula suggests, rather, that the interaction between the spiritual and physical components of poetry not only educates us about the spiritual world, but transforms our understanding of the physical world, making it innately more spiritual. She articulates an understanding of poetry that links it to a theology of immanence and uses this theology simultaneously to proclaim God's accessibility

through poetry and to enlarge the possibilities of ordinary life. Furthermore, in calling the poet a “mediator,” she asserts an almost priestly power for the poet. Seeing lyrical poetry’s facility in linking physical image and spiritual experience as a definitional feature of the genre, she suggests that it has a religious value that does not rest solely on the overt message of each individual poem.

In expressing their views on religious poetry, Meynell and Underhill encounter the same paradox. On one hand, they expect poetry to take the reader beyond “daily” life, to bring us from the “homely” into the “spiritual.” On the other hand, these transcendental moments are created by infusing everyday life with spiritual significance. Poetry, for both of them, is a discipline that expresses spiritual vision in terms of everyday life and the material world, and the effect is not simply to think of the material world as a metaphor for the spiritual, but to heighten our sense of the spiritual world within the material world. Despite Meynell’s wariness of using the term mysticism and Underhill’s embrace of it, their shared understanding of poetry as an immanent discourse suggests how firmly poetry and immanence had been linked in early twentieth-century religious poetics.

In order to fully understand the confluence between women’s poetry and immanence, this chapter considers the poetry and theological writings of Evelyn Underhill and Eva Gore-Booth, both prominent mystical writers in the early twentieth century who used immanence to explain what they saw as an affinity between aesthetics and mysticism. Primarily discussing the years from 1911, when Underhill wrote *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, to 1926, when Gore-Booth’s final book of religious verse was published posthumously, I argue that incorporating a theology of immanence into mystical thought had both poetic and political ramifications for Underhill and Gore-Booth. They emphasized the immanent element within mysticism in order to create a poetics that integrated the artist’s close contemplation of the physical world with the mystic’s quest for the “infinite life.” Thus,

these mystical artists deployed poetic images that uncovered divinity within physical life, which they believed would enable their audiences to recognize an essential unity between the material and the spiritual worlds. This same emphasis on immanent theology, I argue, led them to question discourses in early-twentieth-century politics that dichotomized the sacred and the secular to suggest instead that the spiritual insights of mystics, often labeled as women's private experiences, uniquely qualified them for a life of active social reform.

Although Christian mysticism at first seems to be a discourse in constant pursuit of the otherworldly, Underhill and Gore-Booth, inspired by the study of medieval mystics and by mysticism across Eastern and Western religious traditions, suggested that immanent theology was imbedded within mystic thought. They were also inspired by, but wanted to set themselves apart from, the popular interest in "vital immanence" among intellectuals in the early twentieth century. This primarily pantheistic understanding of divinity, represented by philosophers such as Henri Bergson, identified a spiritual force entwined in the process of evolution. Thus it celebrated a spiritual force within life itself beyond scientific rationality, but bound this force within the material world and did not recognize it as belonging to a deity that was separate from nature.<sup>209</sup> By contrast, Underhill and Gore-Booth insisted on a theological form of immanence that saw it and, by extension, poetry as a link between the material and spiritual. Thus, they questioned an understanding of immanence that set it at odds with transcendence even as they emphasized the daily, embodied experience of divinity.

To establish a working definition of immanence within Underhill's and Gore-Booth's work, this chapter begins by examining Underhill's discussion of immanence's role within mystical thought in her 1911 study *Mysticism*. Underhill's exploration of

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<sup>209</sup> This is most clearly expressed in Henri Bergson's 1907 book *Creative Evolution*, which rejects a mechanistic understanding of causality.

immanence equates this theology with artistic experience and with the mystic's active engagement in the world. Thus, *Mysticism* provides a starting point to understand Underhill and Gore-Booth's deployment of immanent theology in their poetry and activism.

Building on Underhill's definitions, the second section of this chapter establishes the association between theological immanence and poetry in Underhill and Gore-Booth's work, focusing on Underhill's volume *Immanence* and Gore-Booth's two volumes of religious poetry. In their poetry, both Underhill and Gore-Booth enact a process of seeking divinity that mimics Underhill's description of an immanent approach to divinity, suggesting that the medium of poetry was particularly suited to uncover and articulate a spiritual presence within the physical world and everyday occurrences. Thus, their poetry infuses the physical world and common occurrences with spiritual vitality as they find God present in a tulip bulb, an acorn, or in an encounter on a city street.

In explaining the relationship of poetry and mysticism, Underhill and Gore-Booth were also offering an alternative to two countervailing trends in early-twentieth-century poetics: on one hand, the imagist attempt to empty poetry of spiritual overtones by focusing strictly on its material subject matter, and on the other hand the elevation of poetry as its own purified form of religion. Examining Gore-Booth and Underhill suggests a third alternative to these more well-acknowledged trends. Although Underhill and Gore-Booth connected poetry with both an acute awareness of the sensory world and a revelation of the spiritual world, neither a materialist nor a quasi-religious explanation of poetry's purpose satisfied them. For both writers, theological immanence was a discourse that blurred the boundaries between the material and spiritual worlds in order to demonstrate the relevance of religion to modern poetics. They presented poetry as a form of mediation between mystical experience and everyday life.

The third part of this chapter suggests that the version of immanent theology that Underhill and Gore-Booth honed in their poetry also directly influenced their call for a

socially active mysticism. Thus, their theology created a kind of cross-pollination between their poetry and their activism. Mysticism has often been depicted as a rarified personal experience, and some scholars have even viewed early-twentieth-century mysticism as complicit in narratives of secularization. Theologian Mark A. McIntosh, for instance, argues that “coincident with the apparent divine withdrawal from the cosmos, mysticism in modernity also withdraws into this inner castle the world of the inner self—a world whose claims to wisdom, authority and truth could easily be marginalized” (69). The work of Underhill and Gore-Booth, however, questions an easy equation of the mystical and the private. In *Mysticismn*, Underhill establishes her commitment to the idea of the “active mystic” who sees re-engagement in society, rather than a stereotypical hermetic retreat, as the final step in the mystic’s journey, a step that she associates with an appreciation for the immanent aspect of God.

Thus, I examine Underhill’s argument for integrating the contemplative life with a socially-engaged, active form of mysticism alongside Gore-Booth’s legacy as a social reformer in the suffragist, labor, and pacifist movements. Underhill’s definition of immanence in *Mysticism* suggests that mystics who focus on immanent theology view the world in a particular way because they see that “The Divine nests within it [the world]: no part is more removed from the Godhead than any other part” (121). For Gore-Booth, this immanent understanding of divinity offers a theological basis for social reforms that unsettle human hierarchies of gender and class. Furthermore, the image of divinity within the person and within the natural world led her to recognize the sacred quality of all life through pacifism and vegetarianism. Underhill and Gore-Booth, then, believed social reform was tied to a greater acknowledgement of spiritual experience, particularly women’s spiritual experiences, within public life, and thus saw their mysticism as a key enabler of activism.

Finally, an analysis of Gore-Booth’s theological work *A Psychological and Poetic Approach to Christ in the Fourth Gospel* (1923) anchors the chapter, providing an

example of these writers' desire to synthesize theology, poetics, and social activism as part of a unified mystical system. In particular, this work reveals Gore-Booth's attempt to leverage her immanent poetics in the secularization debate. Poetry serves as a metaphor for both Underhill and Gore-Booth to explain the need for a vision of morality that goes beyond material utopias to embrace a larger spiritual life. In linking poetry and religion, Underhill and Gore-Booth seek on one hand to highlight an essential similarity between religious experience and the impulse to create poetry, thus defining religion in poetic rather than merely moral terms. On the other hand, both seek to combat the secular trend that would offer poetry as a substitute form of religion, suggesting instead that poetry gestures beyond itself to the spiritual world.

Evelyn Underhill is now best known as the author of *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911), a foundational text on the history and varieties of mysticism that is still one of the most highly regarded studies on the subject today. In his entry for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, James Whitlark notes the historical importance of Underhill's text claiming that, "Popularized by her, the status of mysticism rose from an obsolete relic of monasticism to a respectable element of modern culture" (240). Underhill not only popularized mysticism, but single-handedly added the voices of many medieval mystics such to the scholarly canon,<sup>210</sup> and her use of aesthetics to understand mystical experience was particularly appealing in the literary world where it inspired interest in mysticism among modernists such as T.S. Eliot.<sup>211</sup> Drawn to the Catholic church as a young woman, Underhill eventually chose not to convert because of what she saw as its anti-intellectual stance against religious

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<sup>210</sup> Michelle M. Sauer describes Underhill's contributions to medievalist scholarship in "Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941): The Practical Mystic."

<sup>211</sup> Underhill's biographer Dana Greene notes that "Her friend T.S. Eliot hailed her as a writer attuned to the great spiritual hunger of her times. 'Her studies,' he wrote, 'have the inspiration not primarily of the scholar or the champion of forgotten genius, but of the consciousness of the grievous need of the contemplative element in the modern world.'" (*Artist of the Infinite* 2).

modernists in the early twentieth century. During what she saw as a period of exile from the established church, she turned to studying mysticism<sup>212</sup> and eventually joined the Anglican Church in 1917, becoming particularly well-known for conducting spiritual retreats and acting as a spiritual mentor.<sup>213</sup>

In addition to theorizing the relationship between poetry and mysticism, Underhill contributed numerous poems to journals such as *The Nation* and published two collections of religious poetry.<sup>214</sup> The first, immediately following her publication of *Mysticism*, was called *Immanence*, indicating the particular importance of this theology for her development as a poet. While Underhill is now mainly recognized as a theological writer, her forays into poetry shaped her understanding of mysticism on a definitional level as she often used aesthetic experience as a metaphor for the mystical experience.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, because she believed that poetry was an immanent discourse, she used her poetry to model an immanent version of mystical contemplation. Although Underhill did not continue to publish her poetry after the early part of her career, she continued to see

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<sup>212</sup> Whitlark states that she had joined the Anglican church by 1917 (290). Greene explains that, "Because Underhill considered herself a Modernist, this condemnation precluded her joining the Roman Catholic Church. Her response to this set-back, and she clearly saw it as such, was to move forward in her work of gathering materials on mysticism" (Introduction 5).

<sup>213</sup> Greene argues for the importance of Underhill's career as a whole. In her own time, "She was acknowledged as a writer and scholar and was the recipient of many honors: she was the first woman to be chosen as an outside lecturer at Oxford and the first laywoman to give retreats within the Anglican church; she was both a Fellow at King's College, London, and a holder of an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of Aberdeen. Her thirty-nine books and more than three hundred fifty articles won her the respect of both ordinary people and great ones" (*Artist of the Infinite* 2).

<sup>214</sup> In total, she published three books of poetry: *A Bar Lamb's Ballad Book* (1902), *Immanence: A Book of Verses* (1912), and *Theophanies: A Book of Verses* (1916). *A Bar Lamb's Ballad Book*, her earliest published work, which Whitlark describes as "amateurish," was an imitation of Sir William Gilbert's *The "Bab" Ballads* (Whitlark 285). The other two were books of religious verse. She also published additional poems in periodical venues such as *The Nation*, *The Outlook*, and *The Spectator*" (Greene, *Artist of the Infinite* 58).

<sup>215</sup> In his entry on Underhill in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, James Whitlark posits that, although she did not continue to publish poetry throughout her career, "Poetry, nonetheless, was her primary avenue to the aesthetic, and coupled with the social work she did in the slums, it formed, she believed, a foundation for the highest level of human activity: the mystical, or the perception of ultimate reality" (285).



poetry and the poetic imagination as important stimuli for the mystical life, and her beliefs about the confluence between the mystic and the artist were influential for her poetry-writing peers.<sup>216</sup>

During her lifetime, Eva Gore-Booth was a respected Irish poet who, after eschewing a life of privilege as one of Ireland's Anglo-Irish landed elites, spent much of her life as a social reformer in Manchester. Gore-Booth's biographer Gifford Lewis notes that Underhill and Gore-Booth became friends after Gore-Booth moved to London late in her career (Lewis 153), and Gore-Booth likely would have encountered Underhill's work on mysticism prior to this given its status as the most famous early-twentieth-century conceptualization of that topic. For her part, Underhill clearly admired Gore-Booth's mystical work as she favorably reviewed Gore-Booth's extended prose explication of the gospel of John (*A Psychological and Poetic Approach to Christ in the Fourth Gospel*), wrote the introduction to Gore-Booth's final book of devotional verse, and composed an obituary of her for *The Times* in which she holds Gore-Booth up as an exemplar of the practical mystic and the mystical artist.<sup>217</sup>

Gore-Booth, whose legacies as a respected poet in Ireland and as a key contributor to the suffrage and pacifist movements in England seemed to assure her a place in literary and political history, has all-too-often been mentioned by scholars only in two capacities: as the subject of a Yeats poem and as the sister of Constance Markievicz, who, like Gore-Booth, abandoned a life of privilege for a life of activism,

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<sup>216</sup> Donald J. Childs argues in "T.S. Eliot and Evelyn Underhill: An Early Mystical Influence" that Underhill's book had a crucial influence on both Eliot's personal and poetic development: "Eliot's reading of *Mysticism* during his final years at Harvard proved the beginning of an intellectual, personal, and spiritual acquaintance that was to endure, in one or more of these aspects, throughout the years of his most intense poetic and religious development" (83).

<sup>217</sup> Gifford Lewis states that the two writers became friends when Gore-Booth moved to London (153) and notes Underhill's admiration for Gore-Booth's ability to "express the spiritual simply and directly" (155). Sonja Tiernan documents Underhill's admiration for Gore-Booth's *A Psychological and Poetic Approach to the Study of Christ in the Fourth Gospel* (*Image of Such Politics* 241).

capturing the attention of historians with her involvement in the Easter Rising.<sup>218</sup> While Gore-Booth's legacy has been somewhat eclipsed by her sister's, the last several decades have seen a greater interest in both her biography and her literary legacy. Several scholars have reread Gore-Booth's literature in light of her life-long partnership with Esther Roper, who drew Gore-Booth into her work for the suffrage and labor causes. Emma Donoghue, for instance, has recovered her as a lesbian writer,<sup>219</sup> a connection which is reinforced by her late-career involvement with the radical feminist journal *Urania* that sought to undermine gender differences.<sup>220</sup> Gore-Booth's dramas have also recently

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<sup>218</sup> Karen Steele gives an overview of Markievicz's legacy and suggests that many historians have also underestimated her: "as a founder of Fianna Éireann (the Irish nationalist boy scouts), as a female warrior in 1916, as the only woman sentenced to death for her leadership in the Rising (a sentence later commuted to life imprisonment), as the first woman elected to the British Parliament in 1918, and as the only female cabinet member in the first Dáil Éireann" (62). In his introduction to Gore-Booth's plays, Frederick Lapsard argues for the importance of Gore-Booth's legacy: "It is neither fitting nor just that Eva Gore-Booth should be remembered simply as a support player to Constance's starring role. Certainly Constance was the more flamboyant, and her active part in the 1916 Easter Rebellion, her militant political stand, her repeated imprisonments at the hands of the British all made her a more appealing figure to write about than the apparently more delicate, less worldly, bookish sister. But Eva Gore-Booth was so much more than that. She was an active pacifist in a militant age, she was a dedicated feminist before it was fashionable, she was a sincere Christian mystic, and she was the author of at least nineteen published volumes of poetry, prose, and drama" (iii). For a reading of Yeats' poem and an account of his relationship with Gore-Booth and Markievicz, see Anthony L. Johnson's "W.B. Yeats 'In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Constance Markievicz'" as well as Elizabeth Cullingford's "Yeats and Women: Michael Robartes and the Dancer."

<sup>219</sup> Gifford Lewis' biography of Roper and Gore-Booth insisted that their relationship was not sexual (8), prompting a backlash among scholars, such as Emma Donoghue, who in addition to noting a lack of proof either way, point to Gore-Booth's involvement in *Urania*, a radical feminist magazine, and suggest that the exact nature of her sexual relationship was not primarily relevant to reclaiming her as a lesbian writer.

<sup>220</sup> Both Alison Oram and Sonja Tiernan point out that Gore-Booth was referred to as a founder, leader, and inspiration for the journal (Oram 61, Tiernan, "Engagements Dissolved" 139). Oram offers a comprehensive overview of *Urania*. She details that the journal was published privately three times a year with a circulation of 200-250 (57). It included what she calls more "conventional" articles on women's education and legal equality while also collecting accounts of "daring rescues by teenage girls, newspaper reports of women dressed as men, scientific findings on sex changes in frogs, pigs and pigeons, and esoteric digressions on the spiritual state of society" (57). Its purpose, Oram states, was "the abolition of sex and gender difference" (57). Sonja Tiernan expands on this reading of the journal in "'Engagements Dissolved': Eva Gore-Booth, *Urania* and the radical challenge to Marriage." She questions previous readings of the journal that depicted it as advocating spiritual love over physical encounters, suggesting that these readings arose mainly in an effort to depict Gore-Booth and Roper's relationship as platonic. Instead, she posits, "the editors of *Urania* were not frightened to embrace the idea of female partnerships; rather they presented lesbian relationships as the ideal. The journal launched a campaign to face the fear

received scholarly attention as feminist rewritings of Celtic myth.<sup>221</sup> Most recently, Sonja Tiernan's political biography of Gore-Booth has restored her to her proper place at the center of the labor, suffrage, and pacifist movements, noting not just the impressive list of organizations in which Gore-Booth was involved, but her central role as a political organizer as well as her role at the crux of key divisions within these organizations.

Gore-Booth's refusal to compromise her pacifist views led to a key divide in the suffrage movement. Famously, after Gore-Booth originally mentored Christabel Pankhurst, the two split over the issue of militant suffrage (Gore-Booth was staunchly against any kind of physical force), a split which immediately led to the formation of two separate organizations to promote the vote in Manchester and eventually split the entire suffrage movement in half (Tiernan, *Image of Such Politics* 79-80). Gore-Booth and Roper were also some of the first within the suffrage movement to call attention to the needs of working-class women,<sup>222</sup> and over the course of her career, Gore-Booth became a staunch advocate for various groups of women workers, such as florists' assistants and pit brow workers, whose interests were compromised by labor reforms because they, unlike their male counterparts, could not vote. (Hawley 74). During World War One,

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expressed by the feminist movement and took a radical approach by advocating for the dissolution of heterosexual marriage altogether" (130). Thus, while Oram raises the question for other scholars to explore of whether the journal can be read as a lesbian, gay, or queer text, Tiernan explicitly argues that it should be.

<sup>221</sup> See, for instance, Cathy Leeney's "The Space Outside: Images of Women in Plays by Eva Gore-Booth and Dorothy Macardle." Leeney focuses on Gore-Booth's reimaginings of the female figures in Celtic myth: "Her dramaturgy liberates representations of the female into realms of new possibility, challenging the limitations of conventional tropes such as Mother Ireland" (56). Margaret Llewellyn-Jones also reads Gore-Booth's plays in light of her pacifist commitments in "Pacifism, Pugilism and Proxemics: Irishwomen and World War I—plays by Sean O'Casey and Eva Gore-Booth."

<sup>222</sup> For instance, Gore-Booth and Roper were some of the first suffragists to argue that working-class women as well as women of property should have the vote (Hawley 72). In addition, Gore-Booth was integrally involved in getting labor candidates elected and in advocating for women's causes within the labor movement. She even successfully campaigned against Churchill because he supported restrictions on the barmaids and threatened to make it illegal for women to work after 8 p.m. He lost the 1908 election in Manchester North-West, which was supposed to return him to parliament for a seat on the cabinet, largely due to Gore-Booth's mobilization of her supporters (Tiernan, *Image of Such Politics* 123-126).

Gore-Booth observed the trials of conscientious objectors brought before military tribunals on behalf of the No-Conscription Fellowship and set up services to aid their families (Tiernan 159-162). In addition to arguing against the war, she also specifically advocated against Irish conscription (Tiernan 213). This is an impressive resume, made all the more intriguing by Gore-Booth's insistence on connecting her various forms of activism in a unified philosophy, using her immanent approach to mysticism as an underlying thread.

While Gore-Booth found inspiration in religious ideas from a number of traditions, including Buddhism, Gnosticism, and theosophy, Joy Dixon suggests that the most accurate way to describe her religious outlook was that of a Christian esoteric.<sup>223</sup> Over the course of her lifetime, Gore-Booth moved from a pantheistic view of nature to a Christian articulation of mysticism while continuing to engage with the theosophical society and a few specific concepts, such as karma and reincarnation, from other religious traditions. Gore-Booth's religious writings have received little attention, but they are remarkable for their attempt to integrate her aesthetic, reformist, and mystical views in a single system.<sup>224</sup> Perhaps one of the most holistic assessments of her life came from Underhill, who recognized within her life's work the synthesis of immanent theology, poetics, and social reform, complementarily classifying her as "belong[ing] to that rare class, the practical and intellectual mystics" for whom spiritual understanding overflows into action" ("Miss Eva Gore-Booth" 11).

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<sup>223</sup> Although biographers such as Gifford Lewis emphasize Gore-Booth's study of Eastern mysticism and reincarnation prior to her return to the figure of Christ late in life (150), Dixon argues that "While Gore-Booth's vision was far from orthodox Christianity, it was still based on the Christian tradition and represented Christianity as normative" (194).

<sup>224</sup> Joy Dixon's brief assessment of them in *The Devine Feminine* is an exception, and Gore-Booth's biographer Sonja Tiernan also devotes part of a chapter in her biography of Gore-Booth to her interest in Theosophy and her study of the Gospel of John.

### Immanence as an Element of Mysticism

By the early twentieth century, “immanence” had become a problematic term in conservative Christian circles because of its association with pantheism, in which there is no distinction between God and the natural world. One of the most public and controversial responses to the popularity of radically immanent theology was Pope Pius X’s 1907 “*Pascendi Dominici Gregis: On the Doctrine of the Modernists*” (often referred to as the “Encyclical against Modernism”), which condemned agnosticism, scientific rationalism, and “vital immanence.” Linking these ideas together, he labeled them as a coordinated “Modernist” attack on religious orthodoxy from within the church. Although this document and subsequent attempts to purge modernists from positions of authority in the Catholic Church had greater reverberations in predominately Catholic countries, in England it ended some of the attraction of Catholicism for intellectuals. Underhill, who had seriously contemplated becoming Catholic, abandoned this idea after the Encyclical, preferring to maintain a greater spiritual and intellectual freedom outside of the church until she joined the Anglican church a decade later.<sup>225</sup>

Many scholars see the encyclical as a definitional document for modernist religion, which had not clearly self-identified as a movement before being negatively defined by the Pope.<sup>226</sup> According to the Encyclical, “religious immanence” had become

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<sup>225</sup> Underhill identified as a Modernist, and “[t]he purpose of Modernism, as Underhill saw it, was to revitalize religion, and the prerequisite for such revitalization was freedom of research and discussion in the pursuit of truth” (Greene, *Artist of the Infinite* 29). Dana Greene sees Underhill’s exile from Catholicism as a defining moment in her decision to pursue a project on mysticism. She had already begun to collect materials for it in 1904, but “she started to work on her book in earnest in 1907” (*Artist of the Infinite* 34). Greene suggests that Underhill was attracted to Catholicism because she believed “she needed its sacramental life in order to balance what she already appreciated as her tendency toward the transcendent” (28). Cut off from the direct sacraments of the Catholic Church, she seems to have turned to a more general discourse of immanence within mysticism. Although never embracing Catholicism institutionally, it had an important influence on her theological development. Baron Fredrich von Hügel, a highly regarded Catholic theologian sympathetic to Modernism, served as her spiritual advisor beginning in 1921 despite her Anglican affiliation (Whitlark 239).

<sup>226</sup> Taking his cue from the Catholic Church’s 1907 condemnation of Modernism as a heresy and the subsequent modernist formation of the Heretics Society, Damon Franke astutely notes in his book *Modernist Heresies: British Literary History, 1883-1924* that modernists created an artistic discourse

prominent among scholars who rejected the factual certainty of the church's historical teachings. Instead, they posited that the impulse toward religion must come from within man himself. Modernists, contended Pius X, believe "that faith, which is the basis and the foundation of all religion, consists in a sentiment which originates from a need of the divine" rather than from an intellectual acceptance of religious dogma. This version of immanence interprets man's impulse toward the divine as divinity itself, eliminating all distinction between man and God: "this sentiment possesses, implied within itself both as its own object and as its intrinsic cause, the *reality* of the divine, and in a way unites man with God." Although Underhill did not embrace a version of immanence that was pantheistic and Gore-Booth moved away from a more pantheistic understanding of immanence over the course of her career, both authors embraced the idea that man's subconscious impulse toward God was a clearer marker of the spiritual world than intellectual agreement on specific dogmas.

They also incorporated ideas from the "vital immanence" that Pius X singled out for censure. French philosopher Henri Bergson was the most influential thinker to discuss the idea of "vital immanence." In his most famous work *Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson identified a "force immanent in life" that did not depend on matter and must therefore be spiritual (149). He calls this force the *élan vital* (vital impulse) that began all life, a force that we seek to rejoin but can only sense through instinct rather than rationality. While Bergson equates this *élan vital* with God, there is no transcendent aspect to this force, and it is inextricably tied up with the material world.<sup>227</sup> Bergson's

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surrounding the idea of heresy rather than simply following a clear trajectory of secularization. Heresy, as defined by Franke, did not necessarily reject religion, but rather was the impulse to synthesize Christianity with discourses traditionally seen as competing with it. Thus, "heresy" is not the opposite of religion, but the opposite of religious orthodoxy.

<sup>227</sup> Bergson reminds his audience in *Creative Evolution* that he understands "God" as a limited rather than transcendent force: "It must not be forgotten that the force which is evolving throughout the organized world is a limited force, which is always seeking to transcend itself and always remains inadequate to the work it would fain produce" (126). Paul-Antoine Miquel helpfully explicates this passage in "Bergson and Darwin: From an Immanentist to an Emergentist Approach to Evolution": "What is more,

“vital immanence” was an important influence on Underhill’s first edition of *Mysticism*, though she was less enamored of it when she revised her 1930 edition (Whitlark 288).<sup>228</sup> In 1911, she suggests that vitalism is useful in the study of mysticism “for it clearly illustrates certain aspects of perceived reality which other systems ignore” (33). She goes on to explain that vitalism has highlighted the concept of immanence, which has become more central in understanding the mystical life. Mystics, she suggests “are, by their very constitution, acutely conscious of the Divine Immanence and its unrelenting travail...as they put it in their blunt theological way, ‘the spirit of God is within you’” (42). At the same time, she questioned the vitalists’ refusal to hold immanence in tension with the transcendent aspect of deity calling their ideas “but half a truth” (42).

While solely promoting immanent thought was not, then, Underhill’s goal in *Mysticism*, her text provides multiple definitions of immanence that help to reveal how it was understood in the early twentieth century and why it was so important for Underhill and Gore-Booth’s poetics. While immanent thought was only one subsection of mysticism, Underhill directly equates this way of expressing and experiencing the divine with the aesthetic experience. Although Underhill viewed mysticism as a primarily experiential rather than theological truth, she particularly addresses mysticism’s

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if the ‘élan vital’ is a psychological force, if this force is God as ‘unceasing life, action, freedom,’ as an immanent cause present in nature, *then this means that God is material!*...God, then, as an ‘élan vital,’ as a temporary ‘tendency,’ is a *dimension* of reality, *depending essentially on another dimension (matter)*” (original emphasis 52).

<sup>228</sup> Underhill’s interest in Bergson is confirmed by her 1912 article published in the *English Review*, “Bergson and the Mystics.” Underhill states that Bergson “offers to us, not the sharp conventional diagram of some older philosophies, but a fluid and living ‘scheme of things’—a teeming world of life, a complex realm of consciousness which, if we choose to employ it, opens to us new possibilities of attainment” (49-50). In her preface to the twelfth edition of *Mysticism* (1930), Underhill signals her shift away from using vitalism as one of her organizing principles (though it is important to note that she never fully embraced Bergsonian vitalism as a complete system by itself): “Again, it now seems to me that a critical realism, which found room for the duality of our full human experience—the Eternal and the Successive, supernatural and natural reality—would provide a better philosophic background to the experience of the mystics than the vitalism which appeared, twenty years ago, to offer so promising a way of escape from scientific determinism” (viii).

relationship to a transcendence-focused and immanence-focused theology, suggesting that this issue has been so important to mystics because, “Since the aim of every mystic is union with God, it is obvious that the vital question in his philosophy must be the place which this God, the Absolute of his quest, occupies in the scheme” (116). Underhill explains theologies of transcendence and immanence as two contrasting “diagrams” that mystics often use to describe their spiritual journey and argues that true mysticism should find a way to encompass and reconcile both. For Underhill, these diagrams of transcendence and immanence should not be confused with the experience itself, for these theological maps are really an attempt to translate a personal experience or intuition to the outside world, an experience “whose dominant characteristic is its ineffability” (121).

Nevertheless, the models created to express this ineffable experience have real implications for how mystics conduct themselves in the world. The first model she discusses is “emanation-theory,” which depicts God’s “utter transcendence” (116). Thus, it emphasizes distance from God, creating a hierarchy of creation and envisioning the spiritual journey as a quest to move closer to God. This view she sees as primarily pessimistic about the material world, and when transcendence is taken to its extreme, it “wholly ignor[es] the divine aspect of the World of Becoming” (118). On the other hand, transcendence provides a clear goal beyond the self for the mystic to seek.

The second is the theory of Immanence. Underhill’s discussion of immanence offers several useful definitions of the term. For those who emphasize immanence, “the quest of the Absolute is no long journey, but a realization of something which is implicit in the self and in the universe: an opening of the eyes of the soul upon the Reality in which it is bathed” (118). Here we see that immanence was being defined as both God within the self and God within the natural world. She also highlights the different ways that immanence-focused theology describes the process of finding God, as a process of realization rather than of development. In another definition of immanence, Underhill



states that “The Absolute Whom all seek does not hold Himself aloof from an imperfect material universe, but dwells within the flux of things” (118). This second description of immanence emphasizes not only its appreciation for the material world, but an acceptance of process (rather than perfection) as a dwelling place for God, as we saw heavily featured in Meynell’s poetry.

The immanence model, suggests Underhill, is ultimately a much more optimistic view of the world and its potential. Still, she does not privilege this bent over the emanations-theory. Underhill acknowledges that there has been a turn toward immanence, which is “so fashionable amongst liberal theologians at this time” (118), but she also points to problems with an “extreme” or “pure” form of immanence, distinguishing versions of immanence that wholly deny a transcendent component of divinity from versions that acknowledge immanence as one among several divine attributes. Without a “limiting” dogma there are two possible “dangers” for the immanence theory: a tendency toward pantheism, the deification of nature or the idea that there is no God distinct from it, and self-deification, the perception that because God is within the self, the self alone is God (119).

### Evelyn Underhill’s Poetics of Immanence

Given Underhill’s contentions that neither a primarily immanence-focused or transcendence-focused theology is definitional to the mystical life and that an ideal version of mysticism would incorporate both, it seems surprising that she chose to publish a volume of poetry under the title *Immanence* (1912) the year after she published *Mysticism*. Yet careful attention to Underhill’s discussion of aesthetics within *Mysticism* reveals that she equated aesthetics with an affinity for the immanent: “The artist, the poet, every one who looks with awe and rapture on created things, acknowledges in this act the Immanent God” (103). Because she believes poets are uniquely equipped to see divinity

in “created things” and to recreate this experience in words, they become the exemplars of immanence for Underhill.

Despite seeing poetry as an important medium to express divine immanence, both Underhill and Gore-Booth, I argue, pushed against a growing tendency among poets to conflate poetry with religion, suggesting instead that aesthetic experience revealed divinity without encompassing it. By the early twentieth century, many writers were describing poetry’s purpose as either a celebration of the material world that negated the need for a supernatural component or as a form of religion itself, a distilled essence of spirituality that required no reference to specific theological understanding. On one hand, Gore-Booth noted that many of her contemporaries, influenced by Whitman’s celebration of the physical world, rightly identified a “unity” within all natural life but substituted this physical unity for a greater unity between the physical world and a spiritual beyond. The result was a celebration that “our souls go back to the great soul of all material things” (*Psychological and Poetic Approach* 52). For Gore-Booth this reincorporation of poetry into the materialist dream stunted its potential to show the connection between humans and the infinite.

On the other hand, numerous scholars have suggested that by the end of the Victorian period poetry was taking on the cultural work that had once belonged to religion. In one articulation of this argument, Hilary Fraser suggests that, as Christianity declined, poetry took on its “moral” and “mystical” qualities and began to serve as its substitute (5). This attitude can be seen in the work of several well-known early-twentieth-century poets. Yeats, for instance, admired the idea of “a tradition where poetry and religion are the same thing.”<sup>229</sup> While this understanding of poetry was anti-

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<sup>229</sup> This statement comes from Yeats’ introduction to *Gitanjali* by Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore and suggests some of the ways in which Western perceptions of the East and a growing awareness of Indian religions influenced depictions of immanence in England and Ireland. While Eva Gore-Booth’s interest in the ideas of reincarnation and karma are one example, Underhill was also influenced by mystical ideas across the religious spectrum. Like Yeats, she was very impressed by Tagore: “she hailed Rabindranath Tagore as a ‘seer,’ a ‘great seeker,’ ‘my beloved Indian prophet’” (*Artist of the Infinite*,

materialist, it was often pantheistic. In a reading of Yeats' essay "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900), Mark Knight and Emma Mason point out that his understanding of symbolism "allowed Yeats to explicate his belief in the unity of all things, a unity that eschewed any distinction between God and the world and sought instead to discover the god within" (*Nineteenth-Century Religion* 211). Yeats' pantheistic understanding of poetry has similarities to Underhill and Gore-Booth's association of poetry with immanence, but Underhill and Gore-Booth offered a version of immanent poetry that was connected to a mystical system that continued to hold immanence in tension with transcendence.

Before turning to Underhill and Gore-Booth's poetry, it is necessary to understand the relationship they posited between mysticism and aesthetics, including both the religious work they expected poetry to perform and the ways in which they believed mystical experience exceeded aesthetic experience. Both Gore-Booth and Underhill use aesthetic experience as an analogy for religious experience, positing numerous parallels between the artist's journey and the mystic's journey. In addition to following similar developmental trajectories, they suggest that the artist's path and the mystic's path intersect at key moments. For instance, in *Mysticism*, Underhill states that the artist becomes a mystic during moments of inspiration. Although not a permanent state, this allows the artist to become the "mediator between his brethren and the divine, for art is the link between appearance and reality" (89). This suggests that the artist can translate engagement with the everyday physical world (the world of "appearance") into something of spiritual significance (which Underhill labels "reality") for her audience.

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Greene 57). In 1913, Underhill worked with Tagore to translate *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1914), which they believed, mistakenly, were by the medieval Bengali mystical poet Kabir. Tagore had become very popular, winning the Nobel Prize in 1913, and Whitlark argues that his interest in collaborating with Underhill suggests that her first volume of poetry was highly regarded (290).

Conversely, if the mystic wishes to communicate a seemingly ineffable experience to others, she must, according to Underhill, become an artist: “the mystic, upon one side of his nature, is an artist of a special and exalted kind, who tries to express something of the revelation he has received, mediates between Reality and the race” (27). Although Underhill reserves certain areas of experience for the mystic alone (the mystic is an artist only “upon one side of his nature”), she assigns both artist and mystic the role of “mediators” who can uncover the connection between divinity and the physical world.

While Underhill and Gore-Booth were broadly interested in the relationship between aesthetic experience and mysticism, their own poetic careers led them to focus on poetry as a particularly fitting vehicle to express the immanent element within mysticism. Notably, their poetics centers on defining the function of the poetic image. The poetic image, as they understood it, does not simply engage the senses or use the material world as a symbol for spiritual reality, but rather, demonstrates an organic connection between the spiritual world and the sense world. Frank Kermode posits that many modernist poets, influenced by Romanticism, came to see “the image” as a way to reconcile soul and body, attributing a near-religious significance to it (56). Matthew Mutter identifies this “poetics of the image” in Yeats, Eliot, and Lawrence’s poetry, which he believes reveal “hopes that the aesthetic could accomplish religious and magical reconciliations” (187). This elevation of “the image” is, to an extent, also true of Underhill and Gore-Booth’s poetics. For them, however, poetry need not perform the work of reconciling body and spirit, but rather simply reveal a mystical unity that already exists between the two. Its goal is to teach others how to discern an immanent divinity.

Unlike the imagists, who focused on the directness, exactness, and near-scientific clarity of the image, Gore-Booth and Underhill’s poetics of immanence posits that an image’s success depends on its ability to help readers envision the connection between physical and spiritual reality. The imagists were anxious to distance themselves from those that Richard Aldington referred to as “the ‘cosmic’ crowd,” and Gore-Booth and

Underhill's use of the image as a mode of spiritual connection would likely have placed them in this category for the imagists (202).<sup>230</sup> Bruce Clarke notes that, among imagists, "distinctions between science and mysticism were often deployed to mark a division between 'hard' and 'soft,' or avant-garde vs passé modernisms" even as these distinctions were less pronounced than they claimed (120). Underhill, like the imagists, suggests the importance of closely contemplating the physical world, but the purpose of the image is not to render exact physical particulars but to posit a larger unity between the material and the spiritual.

When Underhill asserts that the mystic must become an artist, her definition of the artist rests on how artists deploy images to speak to an audience: "they ever seek, like the artists they are, some new and vital image which is not yet part of the debased currency of formal religion, and conserves its original power of stinging the imagination to more vivid life" (82). For her, formal religion is a "debased currency," which no longer functions as a medium of exchange between author and audience. In its place, the "vital image" becomes a new method of exchange that can explain the connection between the physical and the spiritual. Poetic language, in other words, can accomplish what ritual language does not: help an audience to perceive the physical world in a new way and thereby uncover the divine presence within it. For Underhill, A vital image would not only communicate the mystic's experience, but "sting" its audience's imagination, allowing them to set aside easy labels for the material world in order to experience the spiritual reality behind it. In *Practical Mysticism* (1915),<sup>231</sup> Underhill equates the

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<sup>230</sup> The preface to the first imagist anthology *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), which lays out the tenets of imagism, explains the imagist antipathy to the "cosmic poet": "we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shrink the real difficulties of his art" (vii). Yet, Bruce Clarke has pointed out that "cosmic consciousness" was an important aspect of imagism itself, which brought together the scientific and the mystic. The later distinction between the scientific and the mystic often obscured their connection in the early phases of the movement (120).

<sup>231</sup> In *Practical Mysticism*, Underhill provides a justification for aesthetics and religion within the everyday practical world. Géza von Molnár, who explains the Romanticism behind Underhill's aesthetics,

perceptions that arise from the mystic's contemplative life to the poet's way of processing the sense world. Seeing the world this way means that we "should receive from every flower, not merely a beautiful image to which the label 'flower' has been affixed, but the full impact of its unimaginable beauty and wonder, the direct sensation of life having communion with life" (23-24). Thus, Underhill suggests that the mystical poet does not ignore careful contemplation of the sense world, but is able to see further into it, past the scientific labeling of objects to the spiritual world hidden inside.

Although both Underhill's poetry and Gore-Booth's poetry have been dismissed as backward-looking because they did not engage heavily with the formal experimentation that we now associate with the early twentieth century,<sup>232</sup> their work was engaged in a conversation about the poetic image, and their immanent thought offers an unexplored alternative to both "cosmic" and "imagist" configurations of poetics. Gore-Booth's poetry has received more attention than Underhill's as part of the Celtic revival and because of its engagement with World War One and Irish Nationalism, but, as Emma Donoghue notes, her critical star faded after her lifetime. Her poetry is seldom examined beyond the level of thematic content. In one of the only treatments of Evelyn Underhill's poetry, James Whitlark suggests that we should value her poetry because of the light it sheds on her development as a mystic (290). Yet, her poetry is not only interesting because she used aesthetic experience to shape her idea of mysticism, but also because she tries to enact the definition of immanence she shapes in her theology through her

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offers a reading of Underhill's method to help the "normal" person encounter the mystical in *Practical Mysticism* "by discarding, first of all, the labels we hold ready for every object so that it may speak to us on its own terms as an expression of the great reality of all being" (Molnár 68).

<sup>232</sup> Whitlark, for instance, notes that Underhill's poetics are primarily Victorian and did not shift to keep up with formal innovations (240). Frederick Lapisardi inquires why Gore-Booth has been neglected as a poet and dramatist: "An obvious answer would be that Yeats was right. She lacked technical skill. The works weren't good enough to survive. She missed the Modernist boat, and drifted off into some Tennysonian fog" (v). Lapisardi, however, encourages us to look beyond archaic diction to note the importance of her ideas to the twentieth century.

poetry. Both Underhill and Gore-Booth tease out the multiple implications of immanent theology through their poetry, modeling a mode of engaging the concrete world that they believed was integral to mystical experience. Furthermore, the social implications of their mystical thought were revealed as they used their poetry to place God within different elements of life.

Underhill's volume *Immanence* provides a good starting point to consider the influence of immanent theology within these women's poetics. While some of the poems in this volume take the immanence of God as their direct subject matter, others suggest that the process of composing poetry inherently calls attention to this theology. Although Underhill begins this volume with a poem called "Immanence," and ends it with a poem called "Transcendence," even this poem, as Whitlark notes, seems to contain an understanding of God's immanence within it (289).

The first poem in this series takes immanence as its subject and makes no attempt to balance the immanent and transcendent aspects of God, instead boldly beginning by declaring: "I come in the little things, / Saith the Lord" (1-2). This declaration, which begins each stanza, is rhythmically set apart from the iambic meter of the subsequent lines using emphatic spondaic and dactylic feet. The rhythm thus calls attention to the strength of this statement as well as to Underhill's boldness in taking on the voice of God as her own poetic voice. Each stanza goes on to discuss God's presence within a different aspect of life, first in nature and agriculture, second in animals, and finally within people. After the opening declaration, the first stanza emphasizes both the daily nature of God's presence and its nearness:

Not borne on morning wings  
Of majesty, but I have set My Feet  
Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat  
That springs triumphant in the furrowed sod.  
There do I dwell, in weakness and in power;  
Not broken or divided, saith our God!  
In your strait garden plot I come to flower:  
About your porch My Vine

Meek, fruitful, doth entwine;  
 Waits, at the threshold, Love's appointed hour. (3-12)

In this stanza's depiction of immanence, God plants himself among the wheat that is being cultivated. Underhill uses this action to draw a distinction between finding God through church-administered sacraments and embracing a wider view of God's immanence in the world. The references to wheat and vine in this stanza along with the word "broken" bring to mind the "blood shed" and the "body broken" in the communion service's bread and wine, but here, God dwells in unharvested wheat, within nature itself, rather than being symbolically invoked within a church ceremony. Thus, God becomes immediately accessible in an everyday garden or on one's porch. By asserting that God is not "broken" or "divided," Underhill further emphasizes the central mystical contention of a spiritual unity underlying all things.

The subsequent stanza follows God into the animal world, and the final stanza ends with God's presence within human kind, first within a beggar, and finally within the listener's (or every human's) heart:

Meekly I fit my stature to your need.  
 In beggar's part  
 About your gates I shall not cease to plead—  
 As man, to speak with man—  
 Till by such art  
 I shall achieve My Immemorial Plan,  
 Pass the low lintel of the human heart. (30-36)

Unlike Gore-Booth who wholeheartedly embraced immanence as her primary mode of discussion, Underhill's version of immanence in this poem is one that carefully avoids placing it in a controversial light by making it clear that God remains a separate and decisive entity apart from human desire. In her poem, God is making a choice to present himself in an immanent manner rather than as a removed transcendent being in order to appeal directly to the human heart. Underhill assents to the traditional Christian idea that God is both transcendent and immanent, yet she nevertheless highlights the important social implications of God choosing to manifest himself immanently.



One implication of God's choice to appear "in the little things" is that Underhill's version of God is intimately concerned with the human heart. The imagery of the "threshold" in the first stanza, along with the "lintel" of the second stanza and the "gate" of the third stanza emphasizes the clear barrier that exists between God and the person, but one which is overcome by recognizing God's immanent manifestation. In both the first and last stanza, God waits on the threshold for humans to welcome him in, thus suggesting the importance of remaining alert to God's presence in everyday moments.<sup>233</sup> Part of the reason that God manifests in the little things is because his goal is so intimate and relatively small. We get the sense of a giant allowing himself to be shrunk down to get through a short door as he "fits his stature" to human need. Thus, even though God makes the choice to appear immanently, it is still human desires and human needs that dictate the form he takes.

The other important implication of God's immanence is that it implies not only how one should interact with God, but also how one should interact with the rest of the world given God's presence within it. In the first stanza, taking the time to contemplate the everyday natural world is essential to encountering God. In the third stanza, the beggar at the gate is also a bearer of God. Thus, anyone who refuses to speak with him "as man speaks with man" misses the opportunity to speak to God. Taken together, these moments suggest that an immanent understanding of God requires a different way of interacting with the world. It requires attention to natural and domestic details, respect for other forms of life, and a recognition of the essential equality between humans.

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<sup>233</sup> In a discussion of the relationship between Platonism, Christianity, and Deleuze and their approach to immanence, *Encountering the Secular: Philosophical Endeavors in Religion and Culture*, J. Heath Atchley describes the way that Christianity traditionally understands immanence: "its god is first and foremost a creator who by necessity stands outside of his creation. When god is immanent to history, it is by his choice; he walks into the world as through a door, but his place of residence is always on the outside, and it is the task of faithful humans to achieve passage to that outer domain" (16). This bears a remarkable resemblance to the way that Underhill discusses it here.

As a collection, *Immanence* not only seeks to remind readers of God's presence in the world, but to remind the mystically-minded of their own place in it, suggesting that a search for the infinite must be balanced by an appreciation of life in the concrete world.<sup>234</sup> Underhill straightforwardly states this purpose in "Memento, Homo," which urges readers, albeit in somewhat trite stanzas, not to forget their own connection to the world. It begins with a reminder to humans that "dust thou art" and the suggestion to "recollect thyself a part / Of the eternal strife" (1, 3-4). Doing so involves a greater attentiveness to the earth itself, figured as a mother's womb, and to the other creatures on it. In the fifth stanza, Underhill directs her readers to remember their kinship with the "furred, the scaled, the feathered things / Wouldst thou the angels' freedom win? / Thy brother birds have wings" (18-20). Here she suggests that, in reaching for transcendence, mystics might forget their kinship with, and thus responsibility toward, the physical world. The final stanza takes a tone of self-chastisement for allowing the "other-worldly" focus on transcendence to overtake an appreciation of the world:

Remember, then, with healing pain  
Thy graceless other-worldly mood;  
Turn to the living earth again,  
And thou shalt find her good. (25-28)

This declaratory poem serves as a sort of manifesto for the collection as many of the other poems model the close contemplation of seemingly insignificant elements of the physical world that it suggests. For Underhill, however, this "turn to the living earth" is not necessarily a turn away from the supernatural. Rather, she suggests that a deep contemplation of the everyday parts of the world allows us to recognize the immanent aspect of God.

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<sup>234</sup> Dana Greene identifies this as a trend in Underhill's work: "It was the ordinary, the daily, which was the theater in which the infinite broke through. Her writing was her attempt to articulate those breakthroughs as she encountered them in her own life and that of others" (*Artist of the Infinite* 5).

The poem “Planting Time,” illustrates this process of contemplation while also connecting it to the artistic process. In this poem, the speaker begins by contemplating a tulip bulb, then imagines herself entering into the earth with the bulb, where she finds beauty metaphorically at work with divinity, and finally resurfaces with the sprouting tulip to see it transformed. This seems quite similar to the Romantic progression of flight away from the earth, and a return to an altered earth, but unlike Romantic poetry that takes flight away from the object of examination, for Underhill the sensory image is more than a point of departure to a more transcendent reality. Instead, her process is to dig deep under the surface of the object, finding divinity inside of it.

To paint the earth with tulips is a joy,  
It is the satisfaction of desire;  
’Tis to employ  
God’s own creative touch  
And from the smouldering world to strike a coloured  
fire.

Behold how much  
Within my hand I hold!  
A bulb, brown and tight,  
Leaf lapped, fold on fold,  
As if from prying sight  
And winter’s cold  
To keep the sacred spark of the Eternal Light. (1-13)

In this second stanza, Underhill uses the image of the bulb as a way to understand God’s presence within the natural world, thus highlighting the paradox of the eternal and infinite existing within a small and delicate space. She emphasizes the bulb’s smallness with the rhythmic compactness of iambic dimeter and iambic trimeter lines in the second stanza. The third and fourth lines in this stanza, which each consist of one iamb followed by an anapest, trip up the regularly iambic rhythm, mimicking the bulb’s overlapping yet tightly furled layers. Finally, the stanza ends with a long line of hexameter, “To keep the sacred spark of the Eternal Light,” which fittingly calls our attention to the Eternal hidden in the bulb (13).

Using the bulb as a representation of both God's creativity and her own creative potential, Underhill moves from holding and observing the tulip to imagining what it would be like to enter the ground with it. Here, she encounters an immanent God who is planted down into the dirt with the bulb where he is hidden but not distant from the speaker. Because this world of the buried tulip bulb is hidden from human senses, Underhill describes it by personifying the abstract forces at work under the ground.

God dreams in plants, they say.  
 Ah, would that I might creep  
 Within the magic circle of his winter sleep:  
 Go, as the bulbs, with him  
     Into the dim,  
     There well content  
     to pitch my tent  
     And mark  
 Rapt from all other thing  
 The flowery fancies that elamp his dark.

There Life, who cast away  
 Her crumpled summer dress,  
     Sets on the loom  
 The warp-threads of another loveliness  
 And weaves a mesh of beauty for the Spring.  
     She is apprentice of Reality,  
 And the divine imagination broods  
     Above her busy shuttles as they fly.  
     Within that narrow room  
 Dwell these disparate partners side by side,  
 In undivided act of artistry.  
     Yea, in the sod  
     Life hath laid hold on God:  
 And Joy above the wintry flower plot sings  
 Because Eternal Truth into poor Time she brings. (14-38)

As she imagines the underground activities of a personified Life who collaborates with “divine imagination,” Underhill witnesses the mysterious unification of the material world and the spiritual world. In the most significant revelation of the poem these “disparate partners” unite “In undivided act of artistry.” In this moment, we witness the unification of the physical and spiritual worlds within a natural object. Underhill reiterates the fact that God has become immanent several times: “Life hath laid hold on God” and “Eternal Truth” is brought into “Time.” Here, as in the poem “Immanence,”

Underhill describes an immanent God as “undivided,” suggesting that she is refusing the dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical world.

By describing God’s incorporation into the natural world as an act of artistry, Underhill creates a meta-narrative about poetry’s role in bringing God into everyday life. Like the underground artistic process described here, religious poetry “lays hold” of divinity and describes it within the confines of a physical image. In doing so, poetry encourages its audience to contemplate the physical world more closely in order to find God within it. When the bulb sprouts, we witness the speaker responding to the tulip (which the final line explicitly tells us is also a poem) by engaging in a careful contemplation of it:

First the sharp leaves thrust through;  
                     Sea-blue,  
                     Tight-furled,  
 As if about some private treasure curled.  
                     Then, hard to see  
                     But dear to guess,  
 The timid promise of maturity—  
                     So proudly meek!—  
 Comes whispering at the casement of the heart:  
                     Calls us to part  
                     Those curtained leaves, and seek  
 The harbinger of coming fruitfulness.  
 And lo! within each strong and sheltering blade  
                     A baby poem, new-made. (47-60)

Here, as the tulip returns to the surface, Underhill returns to a more concrete physical description of it. Just as the rhythm mimicked the compactness of the bulb earlier in the poem, the rhythm here mimics the unfurling of the tulip, with several lines consisting of a single iamb describing the bud at its tightest point (“Sea-blue, / Tight-furled”) giving way to longer descriptions. This time, however, the speaker actively seeks to see within “those curtained leaves,” and what she finds there is a poem. By referencing the creation of a newborn poem at the end of “Planting-Time,” Underhill makes a clear parallel between the act of planting and the creative act of the poet. From the beginning, she compares planting to the visual art of painting and compares her own act of creativity to God’s

creation. This suggests that the process she goes through as she examines the bulb, plants it, and envisions its relationship to divinity runs parallel to the poetic process of creation. Underhill calls our attention to the way in which this poem aids the speaker in looking for God within the physical world. The bulb at the beginning of the poem is inscrutable, but the poem's imaginative foray into the bulb allows it to unfurl, revealing the world inside the bulb, and thus the God immanent within it, to the speaker.

By 1917 when Underhill published her next book of poetry, *Theophanies*,<sup>235</sup> she had begun to think about how to explain the need for contemplation in a modern world engaged in war.<sup>236</sup> Thus, her poetry expresses a new sense of difficulty in engaging in moments of immanent contemplation. In her poem "In the Train" she uses the contrast between her desire to engage deeply with the natural world and the types of perception allowed by the train to express this difficulty.

O train full of blind eyes, rushing through the world,  
Fields lie on each side of you,  
Full of life, starting with life; patient, fruitful, creative.

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<sup>235</sup> This volume was collected from poems she wrote for *The Nation* and other magazines. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a theophany is "A manifestation or appearance of God or a god to man."

<sup>236</sup> Whitlark suggests that her work during the war demonstrated a greater concern with showing the pragmatic value of mysticism (290). Underhill's preface to *Practical Mysticism* (1915) revealed that the war caused her to question the value of both mysticism and an immanent worldview, though she ultimately affirms them. She notes the difficulty of engaging in contemplation when the world's attention is turned "towards the most concrete forms of action—struggle and endurance, practical sacrifices, difficult and long-continued effort—rather than towards the passive attitude of self-surrender which is all that the practice of mysticism seems, at first sight, to demand. Moreover, that deep conviction of the dependence of all human worth upon eternal values, the immanence of the Divine Spirit within the human soul, which lies at the root of a mystical concept of life, is hard indeed to reconcile with much of the human history now being poured red-hot from the cauldron of war" (vii-viii). Perhaps catalyzed by her focus on the practical value of mysticism during the war, throughout the 1920s, Underhill's work would become increasingly focused on "an exploration of the spiritual life as it was lived out in the world. She believed that the spiritual life 'must penetrate every level of existence and every relationship—politics, industry, science, art and our attitude for one another, our attitude to living nature, spiritualizing and unselfing all this;' and it was to this end she dedicated the last years of her life. Her principal work was that of a spiritual guide who gave individual direction, retreats, and inspiration in her writing. Although her particular vocation was to point to the spiritual, she believed that the spiritual was found enmeshed in life itself" (Greene, Introduction 11).

Don't you see the divine light lying in the furrows?  
 Don't you feel the soft hair of the nascent corn? (1-5)

Underhill chastises the train's passengers for their inability to use their senses, partly hampered by their mode of transportation, but also, metonymically, their "blind eyes," a clear indication that they do not value the act of contemplating the physical world. Those on the train fail to engage a whole range of senses, including not only the ability to see small details in nature clearly, but also to touch them. In *Practical Mysticism* (1915), a book that sought to explain the value of contemplation and mystical practices to a broad audience, Underhill advocates that everyone should learn to engage in a deep contemplation of the physical world akin to the poet's gaze. For her, this is the best way to combat the constraints of the modern mind, which she suggests often stops at categorizing and labeling objects rather than fully perceiving them:

the impassioned contemplation of pure form, freed from all the meanings with which the mind had draped and disguised it; the recapturing of the lost mysteries of touch and fragrance, most wonderful amongst the avenues of sense. It would mean the exchanging of the neat conceptual world our thoughts build up, fenced in by the solid ramparts of the possible, for the inconceivable richness of the unwall'd world from which we have subtracted it. (23)

Contemplation, she suggests, retrains the mind to discern more in the physical world than we have been taught to expect. Viewing the world from the perspective of the train only leaves time to understand the physical world based on pre-arranged labels and categories rather than truly looking within it.

The poem, then, encourages those on the train to look deep into the physical world beyond easy categorizations. Underhill generally did not write in free verse, but her choice to do so in this poem suggests not only that she was aware of changing poetic styles but that she wanted to contrast the experience of poetic contemplation with the constricting rhythmic regularity of the train. The poem's title "In the Train" indicates that the speaker is herself riding the train but refuses to be bound by its rhythms. In an act of rebellion against this way of viewing the world, she detaches from her body to spiritually

engage with the landscape in a moment of mystical unity. Despite appearing to exit her own body, seems to maintain her ability to physically engage the landscape, suggesting the importance of the material world to her spiritual experience: “I explore with tentative touch the maternal soil, / I know the recurring beat of the life within” (19-20). Here she finds a different rhythm deep within nature through the sense of touch that was denied by the train.

After exploring this mystical connection with the world, Underhill pauses to contemplate a single image, a small sprout, where she is finally able to locate divinity within the world. Her close attention to the sprout represents what the people on the train are missing in their failure to engage the everyday sensory world.

One little sharp, upstarting leaf I find;  
And deep within the hearted curl of it,  
Secret and strong as the wistful dream of a virgin,  
The bud that shall bear the immortal germ on its way—  
Small, humble, uncounted,  
Pricking the path the future shall tread to the light. (27-32)

Underhill’s experience in this moment is directly antithetical to her experience on the train as she slows down to peer into a tiny sprout. Her argument for contemplation in an increasingly active world partly rests on her ability to find God within the seemingly small and insignificant. While the train is moving quickly toward its goal, she claims that this small bud also contains the path of the future. At the end of the poem, the train does not simply represent technology, but the modern tendency to privilege business and movement over stillness and contemplation: “Haste! haste! says the train, for life is movement itself. / Why should we haste? God is here. / He is within and without” (33-35). Underhill questions the need for the train’s business, which can bring people no closer to an immanent divinity that already surrounds them. Rather, she stresses the need for mystical thought and art to call attention to an already present God.



Eva Gore-Booth's Poetry and "The Kingdom of heaven  
that is within"

Although Underhill continued to publish a few poems in magazines into the early 1920s, she largely abandoned her poetic career after *Theophanies*. At the same time, she continued to engage in discussions of poetics as a key way of understanding the mystical life. Underhill expressed her ideal for the mystical poet in her introduction to Eva Gore-Booth's *The House of Three Windows*, claiming that Gore-Booth represented the perfect balance of seeking for the spiritual while embracing the concrete world. Underhill claims that, while some poetry was associated with mysticism because of its fuzzy, abstract quality, this was not a true marker of mystical poetry. Gore-Booth, she argues, was a true mystic "always seeking with ardour the unseen realities, expressing and re-expressing the soul's craving for Eternity" (vi). Yet she was also a true artist, providing a necessary grounding for mystical experience in the sense world: "she retained and developed the artist's loving understanding of the sense-world...which the mystic needs so greatly if he is to escape the dangerous aloofness from the simplicities of human life" (vi). Underhill identifies mysticism not as a departure from the sensory world but as a quest for something beyond the merely material. Those who combine mystical and artistic tendencies can unite them in an immanent approach to God.

Underhill also considers the trajectory of Gore-Booth's career. Noting that mystics often follow one of two paths, either growing more abstract or more concrete in their approach to divinity, she acknowledges that Gore-Booth's progression as a poet and mystic followed the latter path, which she also sees as more conducive to poetry:

On one hand, they may begin with a vividly personal, often anthropomorphic conception of the Divine, and thence move to an evermore abstract and formless experience of God: 'stripping themselves,' as they often say, 'of all bodily images' and therewith of the very means whereby men and women still in the body may actualize spiritual reality best. On the other hand, they may begin with the diffuse and impersonal—with some sort of 'cosmic consciousness,' or 'nature-mysticism,' or other type of philosophic abstraction—and thence move to a more and more concentrated,

concrete and personal, and thus more rich and fruitful relationship.  
This was the path taken by Miss Gore-Booth's genius. (ix-x)

While Underhill seems to be suggesting that an abstract and concrete understanding of divinity are equally valid ways to understand mystical truth, she offers a subtle critique of those who take a path that moves toward abstraction, eschewing "all bodily images" because those who follow it lose "the very means whereby men and women still in the body may actualize spiritual reality best." Moving too far into an abstract understanding of God, suggests Underhill, undermines the mystic's ability to express her experiences of divinity in a way that others can comprehend, the very job of the mystical poet. In her praise of Gore-Booth's poetry, Underhill indicates that "bodily images" and an understanding of the divine within concrete experience are essential to mystical poetry.

Indeed, Gore-Booth herself corroborates Underhill's assessment of this trajectory from a more abstract, cosmic, understanding of divinity to a more concrete and embodied one. Gore-Booth recognizes the beginning of this shift fairly early in her career in her poem "The Quest" from the 1904 volume *The One and the Many*. "The Quest" is a poetic declaration about her new approach to encountering the spiritual world. The first stanza expresses her original process, a top-down approach to understanding the natural world, filtered through a transcendent abstraction. By contrast, the second stanza introduces an immanent approach that looks first to the concrete world and finds divinity through it.

For years I sought the Many in the One,  
I thought to find lost waves and broken rays,  
The rainbow's faded colours in the sun---  
The dawns and twilights of forgotten days.

But now I seek the One in every form,  
Scorning no vision that a dewdrop holds,  
The gentle Light that shines behind the storm,  
The Dream that many a twilight hour enfolds. (1-8)

This poem declares both a change in religious focus and a change in artistic approach.

The problem Gore-Booth implies with her initial approach is that seeking to understand the concrete world through a transcendent perspective does not allow one to fully

appreciate the physical world. If one looks directly at the sun expecting to find a rainbow, it will be impossible to enjoy (or even see) the rainbow, which will be “faded.”

The shift she describes from searching for “the Many in the One” to seeking “The One in every form” also seems to declare a new approach to poetics, one which focuses intently on seemingly insignificant aspects of the physical world such as the dewdrop in order to discern a larger truth rather than directly imposing abstract ideas onto the physical world. In this way, her theological declaration also becomes a statement of her method for composing poetry. While Gore-Booth’s poetry still contains some of the cosmic vagueness of which the imagists complained, she does begin to single out small elements of nature and everyday moments for more attention while continuing to express her immanent theology directly in her poetry.

This turn toward immanence is most prominent in Gore-Booth’s final two books of poetry, *The Shepherd of Eternity* (1925) and *The House of Three Windows* (1926). In these she turns from a largely pantheistic depiction of immanence to using more Christian imagery, so that, while continuing to depict God within nature, she also uses images of incarnation as well. Gore-Booth peppers her book of poems *The Shepherd of Eternity* with the refrain that the infinite is found within, comparing expectations that humans have for a transcendent God with the idea that God can fit himself into human life. In “Nazareth,” she expresses this in an image that recurs throughout the collection:

For size is man’s demand,  
And smallness the earth’s doom,  
But the Infinite can stand  
In a narrow room. (13-16)

This image suggests that it is “man” rather than “the Infinite” that erroneously insists on a completely transcendent deity. Divinity, contrary to our expectations, can fit within a small space, whether it be a narrow room or a slender poem. Gore-Booth finds this idea of immanence best-figured in the incarnation as she compares the political power of Rome with the seeming insignificance of Nazareth.

While Gore-Booth became more interested in the incarnation as a manifestation of immanence in her later career, she maintained a broad understanding of immanence throughout the natural world as well. In a poem called “The Acorn” from *The Shepherd of Eternity*, she meditates on a single natural object, the acorn, envisioning its significance in a way that is strikingly similar to Underhill’s treatment of the tulip bulb in “Planting Time.” This poem, I would suggest is emblematic of Gore-Booth’s immanent poetics, what Underhill might call the part of her philosophy that is “world penetrating.” It begins with the speaker’s contemplation of a seemingly insignificant natural object, the acorn. Rather than treating the acorn metaphorically, she focuses on the nature of the acorn itself, penetrating its surface to imaginatively envision the invisible spiritual forces at work inside of it. Then, having re-imagined the acorn as the host for a spiritually significant process, Gore-Booth re-assesses its significance and affirms its place as a link between the physical and spiritual world. The first stanza begins by debunking our typical attitude toward the acorn:

The Acorn is a common thing and small,  
Child of the sun and plaything of the wind,  
You think it is of no account at all,  
Yet at its heart great forces crash and grind. (1-4)

Gore-Booth specifically chooses an element of nature that appears “common” and “small,” then later uses the potential hidden within it as an image for the spiritual potential hidden within the whole material world. The final two lines of this stanza set up an antithesis between our assumption that common, small, or weak things like the acorn are insignificant and the idea that it is a vessel for powerful abstract forces. Yet these abstractions are intimately linked to the physical life of the acorn and can only be uncovered by closely attending to this concrete object.

The second stanza opens up the internal space of the acorn for us to contemplate these forces hidden behind its shell:

The Acorn's jade-wrought chalice holds concealed  
The Eternal Host, with dreams and death at strife,

Great are the issues, small the battle-field,  
Where infinite will drags beauty into life. (5-8)

Gore-Booth's assertion "Great are the issues, small the battle-field" points to the essential paradox of the poem that places infinity into the small sphere of the acorn. Just as Underhill recognizes a natural version of communion in "Immanence," Gore-Booth here evokes a kind of communion within the acorn's "chalice," locating the mystery of the "host" within this organic object, and affirming that God "dwells within the flux of things" (Underhill 118). Communion with "the infinite" thus becomes accessible through the deep contemplation of everyday life rather than through a ceremonial event. "Eternal Host" also clearly has a second meaning in the context of the stanza's battle imagery, which aligns an eternal army against death to accomplish the strenuous process of bringing "beauty into life." Like Underhill, Gore-Booth discovers a world within the acorn in which a spiritual entity participates directly in creating life. This divine force did not simply create the earth once, but is intimately involved in the creation of each individual life.

While the acorn functions symbolically in this poem, it also functions literally. Gore-Booth suggests that a great eternal force literally lies within the world of this tiny, seemingly insignificant thing. At the same time, the acorn functions synecdochically to represent all of the material world and its relationship to divinity. Gore-Booth and Underhill do not celebrate the acorn in and of itself, they celebrate it for the infinite potential that lurks inside. Yet, the poem also has the effect of changing one's perception of the acorn, of fostering an appreciation for this seemingly insignificant natural object.

The final stanza suggests that attentiveness to these small things is still in line with a quest to find "the infinite" life.

The Acorn is a holy thing and dear,  
The green leaves shudder out to meet the Light,  
The great Tree rushes upward, tier on tier,  
Stretching wild boughs towards the Infinite. (9-12)

In this final stanza, we find a clear image of immanence's place within Gore-Booth and Underhill's thinking. Attention to the small details of nature reveals the important and holy truth hidden inside, but the infinite does not necessarily stay locked inside. Rather, the immanent understanding of divinity propels a great movement to reach beyond the world, to reach toward "the Infinite." The final image of the acorn stretching out as a tree reflects what Underhill found so attractive about Gore-Booth's poetry, an attempt to reach for the spiritual world without abandoning the sense world. The poet's imagination sees further into the sense world than those around her. This reaching into the world, however, ultimately leads her imagination toward infinite life rather than simply celebrating the material quality of the acorn.

This poem also provides a map for Gore-Booth's understanding of the poetic experience. For the audience, the space of the poem is akin to the acorn. The genre of poetry becomes an especially apt means of conveying immanent thought because the compression of mystical insight into poetry mirrors the compression of divinity into the small space of an acorn. Yet a carefully attentive reader will witness the poem unfurl in the act of poetic interpretation. In this way, the act of interpreting the poem mirrors the act of interpreting the physical world.

Finally, Gore-Booth's poetry explores not only a divine immanence within nature, but also a divine immanence within the self. The poem "Within" from *The House of Three Windows* (1926), her final posthumous volume of poetry, reveals her turn toward an exploration of human consciousness, which is also evident in her prose work *A Psychological and Poetic Approach to Christ in the Fourth Gospel* (1923). In the first eleven lines of "Within," the speaker searches throughout the world and in the heavens but fails to find God. In the second half of the poem, which is quoted below, the speaker asserts that God's presence is hidden within the natural world, but ultimately concludes that the best place to seek him is within the human mind:

Strange Father of that inner life that flows  
 Deep down beneath the colour of the rose,  
 And lifts the hills to heaven and lurks unseen  
 Within the trees' bright aureole of green,  
 And hides behind the sunset's blue and gold,  
 And sings in shining rivers manifold,  
 And waves of the wild air, give us to see  
 And know ourselves, that thus we may know thee,  
 To dig deep down beneath our thoughts and find,  
 Haply each son of man in his own mind,  
 Thy hidden light, far from the cosmic din,  
 Where Love walks free of wrath, and death, and change,---  
 O country starry fair and silver strange,  
 The Kingdom of that heaven that is within. (12-25)

Here, Gore-Booth has fully embraced the process of looking within the world to find divinity. Yet even as she addresses the divine presence within the natural world, she also suggests that it is not readily accessible to the human observer. The life she discusses is “beneath,” and “behind” nature where it “lurks unseen,” and “hides.” Thus, the natural world no longer seems the most direct avenue to understand it. This part of the poem is structured as a prayer that, after acknowledging a “Strange” God in nature, asks God to improve humans’ ability to look within the self. If one can locate God through internal examination, divinity suddenly becomes accessible to “each son of man,” and one need only understand oneself to understand God. Like the immanent mystics that Underhill discusses in *Mysticism*, Gore-Booth outlines a quest that does not depend on improvement but on self-discernment. While Underhill might be uncomfortable with the idea of primarily looking into the self to find God, citing the possibility of self-deification, Gore-Booth is more comfortable with this form of immanence. God remains a separate entity within the self, a “strange” country still in need of exploration, but one which the speaker feels much more confident she can learn to understand.

While Gore-Booth’s view of God’s light within each individual clearly democratizes access to divinity, it also begs another question: if she embraces a version of divinity that focuses on internal experience and exploration, a God of “that inner life,” is this form of mysticism primarily a private form of faith that sees no need to engage the world beyond the self? Does this version of mysticism unwittingly participate in the

privatization of religion? I would suggest that Gore-Booth and Underhill saw several counterbalancing implications of immanent theology that allowed them to simultaneously equate it with internal experience and reformist endeavors.<sup>237</sup> They use it to uncover an underlying kinship between individuals, even all living things. Similarly, by placing God in all aspects of the world, they suggest the necessity of engaging this world despite its imperfection in order to comprehend divinity more fully.

One of the implications of Gore-Booth's poem "Within" is that, while immanence may prompt one to look inward for God, it can also prompt a realization of God's equal presence within all things, creating a mystical unity between the world's parts. In the poem, she subtly calls our attention to this unity by recreating it structurally. While there is nothing remarkable about the poem's meter and rhyme scheme, the use of a single sentence to bind this whole section points to the one current of divinity Gore-Booth depicts as binding humans to the earth and to one another while also connecting them to God. This understanding of mysticism as a unifying force immanent within all things permeates Gore-Booth's poems and also underlies much of her reform work.

### The Active Mystic

One common perception of twentieth-century mysticism that I suggest is not true of Underhill and Gore-Booth's oeuvres is the idea that it represented the quintessential example of privatized religion, a religion that can also be customized for every individual partly because it has little public relevance. Mark McIntosh suggests in *Mystical Theology* that this perception of mysticism crystallized in the early twentieth century. In particular, he cites Underhill's *Mysticism* as an expression of this shift because her work focuses on the lives of exceptional individuals and because she was part of the shift away

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<sup>237</sup> Joy Dixon has similarly argued that Gore-Booth's focus on the inner life did not detract from her public activism: "Gore-Booth blurred the boundaries between public and private and between the secular and sacred." (191).



from thinking about mysticism as theological and toward thinking about it as experiential:

Underhill is articulating the impression of several centuries in her description of 'the mystic' as the experiential artist who lives at a different level from us ordinary people. "Mysticism" is now understood as an inner drama enacted by the mystic's exquisitely refined feelings on the stage of the interior self. (69)

McIntosh is certainly correct that Underhill often suggested that mysticism was primarily experiential rather than dogmatic. Yet he also suggests that Underhill depicted the mystical experience as available only to a select elite and that it prompted a withdrawal into the self that left it inapplicable to the wider world. Underhill contradicts both of these ideas explicitly in her work. First, she suggests that, while certain people may be great mystics, mystical experience is open and useful to everyone. Her book *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (1915), for instance, was written with the express purpose of showing how mystical concepts could be applied to ordinary life. This book, claims Géza von Molnár, "direct[s] the reader's attention away from spiritual transcendence for its own sake, which is far too easily associated with contemplative withdrawal of little value in dealing with the concrete reality of existence" (67). Instead, Underhill encouraged her audience to think about mysticism as part of their everyday lives.

Underhill's book *Mysticism* also argues that the best-developed mystic is the active mystic who holds contemplation in tension with social service. Thus, she seeks to show how the mystic's "inner drama" relates directly to social obligation. Contrary to the stereotypical conception of mystics as too reclusive and wrapped up in the spiritual life to pay attention to the world, both Underhill and Gore-Booth attempt to establish a view of mystics as active contributors to society. They do so by highlighting the immanent element within mysticism, which became the uniting thread between their activism and their artistic endeavors. Underhill's vision of the active mystic suggests that the mystic's ultimate path does not lead to solitude but to a re-engagement with the world, and Gore-

Booth's impressive career as an activist highlights the social implications of mystical thought.<sup>238</sup>

Just as Underhill and Gore-Booth saw their poetics as an effort to blur the line between the material and the spiritual, they also placed their political and social endeavors in this light. In her examination of female reformers associated with the Theosophical Society,<sup>239</sup> Joy Dixon notes that, because we tend to think of politics as secular, we often miss the extent to which "the political realm was reconstituted as a sacred space" by early-twentieth-century feminists (205). Rather than simply appropriating religious language to gain political traction, argues Dixon, many women reformers saw the privatization of spiritual experience as the larger problem that encompassed women's relegation to the private sphere. I suggest that Gore-Booth and Underhill's understanding of immanence as a discourse that yoked the material and the spiritual together was particularly helpful in overcoming this perception as well as questioning our own contemporary assumptions about mysticism as a private discourse. Rather than trying to uncouple the association between women and the spiritual, Gore-Booth and Underhill present a claim for spirituality's public voice. Gore-Booth saw recovering a place for the spiritual world within public life as a key part of her feminist

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<sup>238</sup> Géza von Molnár argues that, during the war, Underhill turned toward a more practical imperative for mysticism: "she is going to emphasize the way the mystic travels and relate it to the world of practical pursuits in which we are all engaged, thus directing the reader's attention away from spiritual transcendence for its own sake, which is far too easily associated with contemplative withdrawal of little value in dealing with the concrete reality of existence" (67).

<sup>239</sup> Both Gore-Booth and Underhill were associated with the alternative religious movements that became popular in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. During her early career, Underhill was associated with Arthur Waite's non-magical branch of the secret society called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Waite's branch focused on gaining supernatural knowledge through Christian rituals and mysticism. Greene speculates, "Although she was only minimally involved in the Society for a short period of time, the influence on her was probably substantial" (*Artist of the Infinite* 17). Similarly, Eva Gore-Booth was peripherally involved in the Theosophical Society. Joy Dixon points out that, while Gore-Booth rejected many theosophical teachings, the theosophical society provided a "sympathetic audience" for her often unorthodox religious work (190).

and pacifist activism, while Underhill reminded her readers that a successful contemplative life inevitably overflowed into public life.

Underhill was one of the first early-twentieth-century writers to add a focus on the active life into her study of mysticism. The second half of Underhill's *Mysticism* famously explicates five stages of the mystic life, culminating in the final stage, "The Unitive Life."<sup>240</sup> Rather than perpetuating the idea of the entirely reclusive mystic, one of Underhill's key contributions to the discussion on mysticism was her insistence that the developed mystic in "The Unitive Life" stage was a particularly active contributor to the world having mastered the art of holding the commitments of active intervention in balance with the solitude and rest needed to feed an inner spiritual life. Just as she suggests that the mystic poet must hold a sense of other-worldly encounters in check with an appreciation of the sense world, she suggests that the well-developed mystic holds contemplation in balance with a sense of God's immanence within human need:

It is the peculiarity of the Unitive Life that it is often lived, in its highest and most perfect forms, in the world; and exhibits its works before the eyes of men....Hence, the enemies of mysticism, who have easily drawn a congenial moral from the 'morbid and solitary' lives of contemplatives in the earlier and educative stages of the Mystic Way, are here confronted very often by the disagreeable spectacle of the mystic as a pioneer of humanity, a sharply intuitive and painfully practical person: an artist, a discoverer, a religious or social reformer, a national hero, a 'great active' amongst the saints. (495)

Here, she confronts her readers with their own preconceived notions about the "morbid and solitary" contemplative life, directly contradicting the idea that these traits characterize the full mystical experience.

Underhill equates this active portion of the mystic life with theological immanence and artistic creativity. Holding contemplation and activity in tension, she suggests, is the same as holding immanence and transcendence in tension:

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<sup>240</sup> The five stages are: Awakening of the Soul, Purgation of the Self, Illumination, Dark Night of the Soul, The Unitive Life.

In discussing the contributions of the mystical experience to the theories of Absolutism and Vitalism, we saw that the complete mystic consciousness, and therefore, of course, the complete mystic world, had a twofold character. It embraced, we perceived, a Reality which seems from the human standpoint at once static and dynamic, transcendent and immanent, eternal and temporal: accepted both the absolute World of Pure Being and the unresting World of Becoming as integral parts of its vision of Truth, demanding on its side a dual response...not merely (a) a fruition of the Divine Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, his place within the Sempiternal Rose, nor (b) the creative activity of an agent of the Eternal Wisdom still immersed in the River of Life: but both together—the twofold destiny of the spiritual world. (518-519)

In Underhill's list of ideas held in tension, she equates the second half of each pairing with immanence: the dynamic, temporal, World of Becoming, and creative activity.

Although these are not the ideas typically associated with mysticism, she clearly embraces them as important components of the mystic life while suggesting that they can be successfully balanced with the transcendent. This balance proves the key to becoming the “mediator” between human and divine life that forms such an important refrain through all of Underhill's descriptions of both the mystic and the poet. Here, she associates both creative activity and social engagement with the immanent half of the mystic's life, suggesting an essential link between the two in her system of thought.

Underhill illustrates the mystic's active life through biographical discussions of the mystical figures in her study. In addition to recovering the writings of medieval mystics, bringing attention to many women mystics who had not previously been well-known, Underhill pointed to their lives as practical administrators and social reformers.

<sup>241</sup> Specifically highlighting the work of St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Catherine of Genoa, and St Teresa, she notes that it “ranged from tending of the plague-stricken to the reforming of the Papacy” (522). In doing so, she attempts to break down the dichotomy

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<sup>241</sup> Her discussion of immanence also calls attention to a number of (at the time) less canonical female mystics, whose visions of God often were extremely physical and intimate. St. Teresa and Julian of Norwich feature heavily in this section. For her, the female figure who embodied the active and philanthropic qualities of mysticism was St. Catherine of Genoa, who had been the subject of her future spiritual mentor Baron Friedrich von Hügel's work *The Mystical Element of Religion* (1908), which Underhill cites as an inspiration.

that opposes active service with the inner religious life. These mystics were “observant of an infinitude of tiresome details, composing rules, setting up foundations, neglecting no aspect of their business which could conduce to its practical success, yet ‘altogether dwelling in God in restful fruition’” (523). These historical figures allow Underhill to oppose the perception that mysticism was a feature of women’s private lives that had little implications for the public sphere.

Underhill continues her meditation on the life of St. Catherine of Genoa in a poem of that title in *Immanence*. In it, she uses St. Catherine’s life to re-articulate her understanding of the immanent element within mysticism in terms of social action. From the beginning of the poem, she tries, as in *Mysticism*, to break down the dichotomy between the mystic and the social reformer. Just after the title, she includes the epigraph “Mystic and Philanthropist,” immediately making her point that the terms are complementary rather than opposed. Thus, while many of *Immanence*’s poems imagine God in nature, this poem focuses on the presence of God within human need. In the first stanza, she establishes the dichotomy she wishes to dismantle.

Say, did you go,  
Great soul and sweet,  
When first his message reached your weary heart,  
Far in the wilderness your Love to greet  
From all mean things apart?  
Not so:  
But down the alleys that his footsteps trod  
Between the blind, the ailing, and the lame,  
Steadfast in ministry you came—  
Yet swift to encounter of your God. (1-10)

Underhill’s opening rhetorical question sets up the expected path of a mystic, into solitude. Turning on the line of a single iamb, “Not so,” Underhill concludes that moving toward ministering to the ill also brings St. Catherine closer to God. In this way, she reverses the expected location of the mystic’s goal, steering the mystical life instead toward human need.

Later in the poem, Underhill focuses on St. Catherine of Genoa's work with plague victims, suggesting that she found God not only through the act of service, but within the individuals she tended:

Did you surprise  
 Within their fevered eyes the sudden gleam  
 Of Paradise?  
 Or watching through the night  
 The adept of a mighty agony,  
 Discern as in a dream  
 Behind his anguished sighs,  
 The murmurous olives of Gethsemane? (21-28)

Here it is not the Saint that teaches the poor and ill how to see God, but they become her teachers, revealing through their "fevered eyes" and "anguished sighs" the persistence of hope for paradise and the human pain of Christ. Finding God immanent within suffering suggests the necessity of moving beyond a solitary experience of mysticism. Underhill's desire to alter the perception that mysticism is an entirely private matter is summed up quite well in a 29 of August, 1908 letter to her friend Margaret Robinson, whom she advised on spiritual matters. Underhill urged her to become more involved in active service and social endeavors noting that, "The kingdom of heaven is not a solitude *a deux*. It is the vice of false mysticism that it often produces this impression" (qtd. in Greene, *Artist of the Infinite* 32).<sup>242</sup>

While Underhill focused mainly on the individual's need to engage in social service, Gore-Booth's activism encompassed a much wider understanding of the mystic's

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<sup>242</sup> In 1921, Underhill later received similar advice from her spiritual advisor, Baron Fredrich von Hügel, who urged her to constantly consider the importance of incarnation: "To counter her natural theocentric orientation and develop her incarnational sensitivity, he urged Christocentric devotion and sent her to work in the slums of North Kensington" (Greene, Introduction 9). Underhill would continue to focus on the importance of incarnation in urging religion's public social role after her career moved away from focusing on mystical thought. In a 1940 discussion of her anti-war convictions, Underhill notes: "Christianity is not a religion of escape but a religion of incarnation, not standing alongside human life, but working in and through it. So, she is bound to make a choice and declare herself on the great issues of that life, and carry through her choice into action however great the cost. War means men pressing their own claims and demands, or resisting another's claims and demands, to the point of destruction" ("The Church and War" 215).

social role, not using immanence solely to inspire philanthropic endeavors, but to question oppressive social structures. Gore-Booth's commitment to the idea of the active mystic can be seen most clearly in her full and varied life of activism on behalf of the women's suffrage, labor, and pacifist movements. Her advocacy was remarkable not only in its extent as previously laid out, but in the way that she insisted on the underlying unity of all her positions. Despite her commitment to the labor movement, Gore-Booth opposed restrictions on labor that put women at a disadvantage in seeking employment, arguing that these laws resulted from women's inability to influence labor advocates through the vote even as they financially supported these candidates.<sup>243</sup> Similarly, during World War One, she refused to use wartime efforts as a means to popularize her suffragist views, instead maintaining a staunch pacifism that she believed was compatible with her feminism.<sup>244</sup> Cathy Leeney notes that Gore-Booth was radical because "she put issues of women's values and experience before any national interests. In England she was a pacifist suffragist when women's vote had become a prize in exchange for women's support for the 1914-18 war effort" (25).<sup>245</sup> Finally, despite her support for the Irish rebels' cause and her own sister's participation in the Easter Rising, she did not endorse

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<sup>243</sup> Gore-Booth was not opposed to safety regulations but to setting limits specifically on women's work (Tiernan, *Image of Such Politics* 106). When the labor movement tried to limit women's work hours without placing similar restrictions on men, for instance, Gore-Booth campaigned against the parts of the Factory and Workshop Acts that would lead to an unfair disadvantage for women in the labor market (136-137). In arguing against restrictions placed on particular professions, she pointed out the double standard that was applied to men and women, arguing: "Unemployment is the worst industrial disaster that can befall anyone. In speaking of men, people seem to realise this, but as regards women they assume that an unpleasant trade is a more serious misfortune" ("Women's Right to Work" 8).

<sup>244</sup> Tiernan discusses how Gore-Booth connected pacifism with suffrage in a 12 December 1914 anti-war talk, *Whence Come Wars?*, at the National Industrial and Professional Women's Suffrage Society (149-150). Although militant suffragettes courted favor through their support of the war effort, the radical suffragists organized anti-war campaigns (Tiernan 214).

<sup>245</sup> R.M. Fox, a friend of Eva Gore-Booth who wrote about her in his *Rebel Irish Women*, encouraged readers not to think about her pacifism as passive: "Those who imagine that Eva Gore-Booth's pacifism means submission to wrong were never more mistaken. People, in her opinion, must gain justice by steadfastly refusing to accept less. She believed in courage as well as peace" (43).

this violence but instead put her efforts toward campaigning against Irish conscription and against the death penalty for those involved, both ideas that were consistent with her pacifism.<sup>246</sup>

Gore-Booth connected these positions not only through a practical understanding of how one form of oppression could lead to another, but also, as Joy Dixon has pointed out, through her ideas about the spiritual life: “She preached a gospel of universal love, which, she claimed, made sense of both her feminism and her uncompromising pacifism” (Dixon 191). Similarly, Cory Hutchinson-Reuss has thoughtfully analyzed the mystical basis of Gore-Booth’s pacifism: “Her pacifism grows directly out of Gore-Booth’s belief in the mystical unity of humans with each other and with the divine” (88). Building on these ideas, I suggest that all of Gore-Booth’s activism was particularly informed by the anti-hierarchical implications of her immanent theology. Her recognition of divinity within all life led naturally to an anti-hierarchical ideal and to a profound respect for life.

Gore-Booth linked the struggle for women’s suffrage directly to the idea that women’s spiritual lives deserved a place within public discourse. While our conception of the political sphere might lead us to suspect that women reformers sought to shake off the over-spiritualized image of women, in many cases they identified the problem not as society’s association of women with spirituality, but as society’s failure to accept the contributions of spiritual experience to political and social debates. Joy Dixon astutely claims in her ground-breaking study of gender politics within the theosophical society at the turn of the century that:

Many feminist writings are best read as a kind of political theology, in which women’s oppression was construed as a symbol and symptom of a larger problem, one of cosmic dimensions: the subjection of the spiritual to the material in Edwardian culture. ‘Disenfranchised womanhood’ came to stand, metonymically, for

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<sup>246</sup> Tiernan documents Gore-Booth’s public stance against Irish conscription in a letter to the *Manchester Gazette*, “The Ruin Preparing in Ireland” on 26 April 1918 (213).



the disenfranchisement of spirituality in a secular, capitalist, materialist, and male-dominated culture.” (Dixon 179)<sup>247</sup>

This idea of a metonymic relationship between political reform and theology is particularly useful in addressing Gore-Booth’s attempts to integrate her work as a reformer and poet into an overarching argument against the secularization of public life. Rather than simply using women’s association with spirituality to give herself authority as a suffragist, for Gore-Booth, suffragism was a subset of her larger argument for the re-sacralization of public life. Emma Donoghue notes that, although Gore-Booth had no particular dislike of men, her poems about women’s rights tend to construct an antagonist that represents the voice of public male power: “the enemy is the rich male politician” (24). I would add to this that the male voice Gore-Booth seeks to contradict also claims politics as a secular space and uses the association of women and religion to exclude women’s voices. In “To Certain Reformers” from her first volume *Poems* (1898), Gore-Booth speaks to her fellow suffragists about the necessity of claiming a place for spirituality in public discourse:

As long as idols stand  
In the holy place, as of old,  
And, instead of light through the land,  
Shines the tawdry glitter of gold,  
So long as the senses reign,  
And the spirit is trodden down,  
Your desire ye shall not gain,  
Ye shall not win your crown;  
For the flesh is very strong,  
And the spirit is weak in the strife,  
And the weak must suffer wrong,  
These are the ways of life:  
Yet, take your swords in hand,  
And fight for the light to be,  
And the spirit's promised land  
Of Truth and Liberty.  
White-souled women of the past,  
Heard ye not the trumpet blast?  
Were your spirits less pure then,

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<sup>247</sup> Joy Dixon believes that Theosophy offered an alternative model to political liberalism because it was based on spiritual community and consequently questioned the division between the public and private spheres, a distinction that tended to discount both women and spirituality in the public realm.

Feebler than the souls of men?  
 Men who told you, you are good,  
 Holy, be it understood,  
 And yet neither strong nor wise---  
 May the spirit purge their eyes  
 And teach the foolish world at length  
 That purity is always strength. (1-26)

Gore-Booth's message is, essentially, that the fight for women's suffrage necessitates a larger fight against materialism, the "idol" of the senses that has usurped "the spirit's" place. Although women are told that they are spiritual beings specifically to exclude them from power, rather than arguing that women should shake off the label of being pure and spiritual, she suggests that they should fight for these values to be heard in the public square.

In asking women to embrace the labels of pure and spiritual, however, Gore-Booth is not acquiescing to the idea that women and men have clearly distinct roles, but rather, refusing to recognize the dichotomous language used to separate spiritual purity and public authority. The antagonistic voice of male power tries to convince women that because they are "good" and "Holy," they are "neither strong nor wise," the virtues recognized in public life. Instead, Gore-Booth breaks down this distinction between private spiritual values and public power, asserting "that purity is always strength."

Gore-Booth also notes the consequences of what she believes are the currently accepted public values based on the "glitter of gold" and bodily strength. She implies that a public creed dependent on the superiority of physical strength perpetuates suffering based on the logic that "the weak must suffer wrong." This suffering includes but is not limited to women's disenfranchisement. She argues for an alternative public creed that does not rely on hierarchies of strength, an idea that binds together her pacifism, vegetarianism, and advocacy for women workers in addition to her work for suffrage. For Gore-Booth, this underlines the need for a publicly-recognized place for religious thought. In looking for an alternative creed, I suggest that she turned to a theological discourse of immanence.

For Gore-Booth, immanence was a radically equalizing discourse that opposed hierarchies of strength. As previously noted, one of the definitions of immanence that Underhill offers in *Mysticism* implies why immanent theology lent itself to anti-hierarchical uses. In an immanent worldview, “no part [of the world] is more removed from the Godhead than any other part” (121). For Gore-Booth, immanent theology suggests both that no one individual life has more value than another because each contains the presence of God equally and that God’s presence within all things binds life together in a single unity that trumps classification of gender, class, or species. Furthermore, she was not willing to exchange progress in eliminating one form of hierarchical thought by acceding to another, seeing her feminism, labor activism, and pacifism as part of the same system.

The mystical idea of a unity within all life that binds it together along with a focus on the immanent element of Christianity informed not only her egalitarian views on women’s rights and workers’ rights, but also led her to a strong pacifist commitment during World War One, a stance she embraced from the beginning of the war despite its unpopularity. Her 1915 pamphlet “Religious Aspects of Non-Resistance” for *The League of Peace and Freedom* articulated the mystical and religious basis of her pacifism. In this pamphlet, Gore-Booth combines an understanding of Buddhism, Christianity, and evolution to argue for non-resistance and pacifism based on the “unity” of all human life and the idea of divinity immanent within the person. She suggests that her contemporaries should focus their energies on the common human struggle to survive and find beauty in a difficult world by refusing to “struggle against other living beings” (9). While she notes that modern evolutionary science corroborates this idea, she argues that this idea has mainly been inspired by a mystical understanding of the world: “To those who believe in the oneness of the Spirit of the Universe, whether in its old Eastern form as the doctrine of the unity of all things, or put into modern theological language as the unity and Fatherhood of God, such a change of the field of battle will seem natural

enough” (9).<sup>248</sup> Thus, one way that mysticism informs non-resistance and provides an important perspective for the public discussion of war is in reminding Gore-Booth’s audience of a unity in life that should trump struggles for power between humans.

In addition to reminding her audience of life’s unity, she also uses immanent theology to remind them of its sanctity. When she turns to Christianity, Gore-Booth uses Christ’s Sermon on the Mount to illustrate why an immanent understanding of God leaves no room for violent action: “he appealed not only to this doctrine of the unity of all nature, which has indeed been the essential belief of mystics of all ages,” but also “justifies his position by a startling appeal to his conception both of the nature of God and the divine nature of human life” (13-14). Gore-Booth is suggesting two revelations that the Sermon on the Mount gives: One is the revelation of a non-retributive God. The other is that this God lives within each person. Thus, we should not, argues Gore-Booth, decide how to treat others based on what they do but based on the divine nature that we share with this non-retributive divinity. Gore-Booth concludes that:

Violence, force and hatred in public or private life only become possible when we have mistaken our own nature, and have allowed ourselves to be swept away by the pressure of circumstances, from the truth that is in us, till we are out of touch with the overwhelming inevitable purpose of all things, that spirit of unfaltering goodwill that we call God, the light and love that is also the deepest principle of our own minds (15).

Here Gore-Booth equates domestic and individual violence with the public violence of war, eroding the distinction used to justify violence for a public cause as violence with pure motives and confirming her thesis early in the piece that “It is useless to think you can ameliorate or civilise war” (5). She also suggests that acknowledging the divinity within our own natures is what allows the person to control the impulse toward violence.

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<sup>248</sup> Gore-Booth particularly uses the Buddhist idea of Karma to illustrate this point: “This doctrine of the justice and mercy of the Universe is indeed founded on a deep conviction of the unity, of the goodwill, the slow inevitable evolution, and what one might call the interchangeable sensitiveness, of all things human and divine” (13).

Gore-Booth, then, inserts an immanent understanding of religion into the public discussion of war, claiming that it is the foundation for a pacifist ethics.

At the same time, she is particularly concerned about the way the rhetoric of war usurps the language of religion, an idea she deals with in the poem “The Artist in War Time” from her 1917 volume *Broken Glory*. Lewis suggests that this volume as a whole is “full of horror at militarism, the triumph of mindless violent aggression and the loss of Christ” (143). Gore-Booth, then, viewed war as the elevation of strength over religion. Jim Haughey rightly notes that “For her, the war was a denial of God’s dominion” (75).<sup>249</sup> Beyond this, Gore-Booth was particularly distressed by the way that the war co-opted religious rhetoric. “The Artist in Wartime” examines the horror the artist feels in witnessing violence to the human form, a horror compounded by an immanent sense of divinity within the person. In the poem, she opposes two different versions of religion: the artist’s version, which worships God by preserving and celebrating the human form, and the guns’ version that claims to protect God’s kingdom through violence against man.

Oh, shining splendour of the human form  
That takes my heart by storm,  
Strong as a river, subtle as a prayer,  
Or the first moon ray in the twilight air,  
Line upon line of moving silver light,  
Building our dreams up to the spirit's height,  
Enfolding the grey dust and the earth's green  
In coloured ecstasies of light unseen!  
The Spirit that moves among the forest trees  
Has doubtless built this shrine,  
That erring men may fall upon their knees  
And worship God and man, one soul divine--- (1-12)

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<sup>249</sup> Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle argue for the importance of recovering women’s political poetry during World War One, which has been largely neglected: “Conservative critics entrenched the association of women with the personal life; a rhetoric of innate female patriotism, maternity and sentimental love undercut the goals of women’s suffrage. The myth that women eschew national or global topics is perpetuated by the excision of their political work from anthologies and other literary records. There are too few critical studies on the overlooked poetry of war” (44). They offer Eva Gore-Booth as one example of a woman poet whose activism and writing in relation to World War One merit further attention.

Ah, surely no man born dare rise and slay  
 Eternal Beauty wrapped in robes of clay,  
 Or break and blast and utterly destroy  
 Life's little ivory tower of fragile joy!  
 Loud answered the black and stupid guns,  
 "We are the darlings of man's heart, the wise  
 Call us the world's Redeemers, mighty ones  
 Have bid us clear for them the troubled skies,  
 And holy souls have blessed us, for we stand  
 For God Almighty in a godless land.  
 God, Who art feeble grown and blind and dumb,  
 Take heart, through us Thy Kingdom yet shall come."  
 Labourers in mad mechanic purpose bound,  
 They dig in vain Immortal Beauty's grave,  
 And bury the very starlight underground,  
 And crash above the song of wind and wave  
 Their monstrous rhythms of fire and steel and lead. (17-33).

In the first part of the poem, divinity is immanent in the natural world, both in "The Spirit that moves among the forest trees" and within the form of man. As an artist, the speaker is particularly attuned to the visual beauty of man's form, describing it in terms of light and color. This artist suggests that humanity has strayed from its proper sense of the divinity within the person, and "erring men" must be brought back to the altar where they will fully worship and appreciate the unity of the human and the divine. The artist's humility before the divinity that she locates within the human form contrasts sharply with the pomposity of the guns later in the poem, highlighting the guns' failure to truly engage in a religious undertaking despite their use of religious rhetoric. As with the images of idolatry in "To Certain Reformers," here the guns are "the darlings of man's heart" and claim to take on the attributes of God as "Redeemers" who will bring God's Kingdom. The clear irony of the guns' speech is that they claim to "stand, For God Almighty" even as they paint an image of a God that needs rescuing, who is "feeble," "blind and dumb."

The first part of the poem emphasizes images of the natural world that Gore-Booth often contrasted with negative images of mechanization.<sup>250</sup> In the second half of

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<sup>250</sup> Emma Donoghue discusses the natural feminine spirit that often appears in Gore-Booth's poems as well as the clash between the natural (often gendered as female) and the mechanic (often gendered as male) in "'How Could I Fear to Hold Thee by the Hand?': The Poetry of Eva Gore-Booth" (23-25).

the poem, the guns become idols that desecrate the shrine of beauty performing a sort of heresy against beauty and religion alike. This section of the poem is dominated by the disturbing sounds and rhythms of the “loud” guns whose “crash” drowns out the natural world. Men, both the industrial laborers who make the guns and those who wield them, become “labourers in mad mechanic purpose bound” to these rhythms. Thus, suggests Gore-Booth, the war both destroys men’s physical forms and their freedom of thought, removing beauty and divinity from the world.

In his brief assessment of Gore-Booth’s war poetry, Jim Haughey suggests that Gore-Booth’s focus on religion in her war-time poetry obscures some of its physical hardships: “A habitual mollifier, she advocates spiritual truth as the universal cure for all suffering” (76). This is not an entirely useful assessment of her engagement with war. Rather, Gore-Booth suggests that a spiritual understanding of human value, both the value of one’s own nature and the value of the presence of God within others, does not allow for war. In this poem, she identifies and points out the weaknesses in the predominate form of religious rhetoric being used in support of the war and opposes it with her understanding of the deep value in every life.

What Gore-Booth’s poetry and pamphlet both make clear is that her opposition to war was a direct outgrowth of her espousal of immanence. In *Shepherd of Eternity*, she expresses both her resistance to war and her stance against cruelty to animals even more directly through the lens of this theology. She also optimistically expresses the hope that a more generalized acceptance of her view will diminish human violence. In an apocalyptic poem, “Time,” Gore-Booth ends by expressing her utopian vision of a society without violence:

In time no man shall kill his brother;  
Of every living thing the friends,  
We shall all see God in one another  
Before the day when Time ends. (9-12)

This version of the apocalypse is not a typical vision of a transcendent God making an entrance to fix the world. Rather, it is a process of recognizing God's presence as it already exists within the world. This way of understanding divine presence corresponds with Underhill's definition of an immanent approach to mysticism, which she suggests sees the journey toward God as a process of realization rather than a progression toward perfection. Whereas Gore-Booth's earlier pacifist writing relied on recognizing an immanent God within the self, here she extends that recognition to God residing within the other, thus sacralizing the life of the other. She hopes that a wider recognition of this principle will lead to a world without violence, not only in the relationship of humans with one another but in their more respectful treatment of "every living thing."

Gore-Booth extends this logic even one step further in "In Praise of Life," suggesting that killing of any kind is a direct offence against the divine potential in all things. As Gifford Lewis notes, Gore-Booth and Esther Roper considered themselves "extreme pacifists" and thus abhorred violence of any kind (163):

Kill not the smallest thing,  
Nor break the frailest wing,  
For, buried in Life's stream,  
God's purpose and His dream  
Gleam gold beneath the tide.  
Time is not long, space is not wide,  
And every little river is the sea Potentially;  
Transfigured by the strange waves and waters wild,  
Time will not know his child. (25-33)

Here Gore-Booth suggests that the smallness and frailness of other beings does not render their lives any less valuable. Thus, she extends her commands to "Kill not" beyond the human world. Again eschewing hierarchies based on strength, she instead places God within "Life's stream," suggesting the great potential that lurks within all life, however seemingly insignificant. Thus, needlessly disrupting any piece of the great unified life upsets the whole world order. Here Gore-Booth takes the idea of God being held within a small physical space and reverses it to show the expansion of "the smallest thing" into a potentially grand space. In this way, she suggests not only how immanent theology



humanizes God but the extended value it gives to the most seemingly insignificant elements of the world.

A similar logic that places a theology of immanence in opposition to hierarchies based on physical and economic strength underlies much of Gore-Booth's activism. These hierarchies, suggests Gore-Booth, refuse to grant life its inherently divine status and to recognize the connection between all living things. Thus, she saw her wide-ranging activism as part of a unified immanent system of thought.

### Poetry and Religion

Although Gore-Booth was known for her poetry and her dedication to feminist and pacifist causes, she dedicated the end of her career as a writer to explaining the need for a unified life that encompassed spiritual, aesthetic, and social thought. Her largest project in these final years was an extended (363-page) prose work *A Psychological and Poetic Approach to the Study of Christ in the Fourth Gospel*. Tiernan suggests that this work had great personal importance to Gore-Booth, noting her careful treatment of the physical manuscript of this text by comparison to her other manuscripts as well as her efforts to learn Latin and Greek to enhance her Biblical interpretation (*Image of Such Politics* 238). Evelyn Underhill was impressed by the results of these efforts. In a review of the study, she called it a "remarkable reinterpretation" of the fourth Gospel (Underhill qtd. in Tiernan 241). Later, in Gore-Booth's obituary, she noted that this was "one of the few contributions made by women to Christological speculation" (11). While Dixon and Tiernan have noted the importance of Gore-Booth's feminist re-readings of biblical language in *A Psychological and Poetic Approach*, the text has as much to say about contemporary discussions of poetry as it does about the biblical text. Although ostensibly a study of the gospel of John, it also offers an account of the role of aesthetics in spiritual life and a defense of religious experience in response to materialism and secular

conceptions of morality. This text, I suggest, helps us to understand the way that Underhill and Gore-Booth attempted to use poetry as an immanent discourse.

Through her study, Gore-Booth seeks to explain why social activism and a materialist sense of aesthetics are not a replacement for locating divinity within the world. In this way, she places herself in opposition to what she sees as the secularizing impulse to define poetry and social reform as religions in and of themselves. In doing so, she does not disparage the value of poetry or reform. Instead, she suggests that the recognition of a unity in all life that inspires many poets and social movements points to a larger unity between the physical and the divine. Thus, her immanent understanding of the connection between the material and the spiritual worlds did not simply provide inspiration for her poetry and social activism, but also explicitly functioned as her counter to secular thought.<sup>251</sup>

Throughout the text, Gore-Booth uses her understanding of aesthetics to explain the need for an immanent understanding of divinity. She attempts to align poetics with the spiritual world while also opposing the idea that poetry provided its replacement; thus she seeks to inextricably entwine the aesthetic impulse with religion. Gore-Booth envisions religion's relationship to poetry in three different ways: First, she discusses poetry as a means of divine communication, using Christ's language in the gospels as an example of poetic language that uncovers divine presence in the everyday. Second, she discusses poetry's sense of unity within the natural world as a way to understand the larger but parallel unity of the whole physical world with a "divine spirit," thus suggesting that poetry should ideally point the way to religion rather than stopping at

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<sup>251</sup> Dixon also notes Gore-Booth's impulse toward immanence in this text: "This was, with some qualifications, an immanentist vision, in which the Divine Self inhabited and animated every living thing" (192). She also helps to clarify Gore-Booth's depiction of the material and political worlds within her privileging of the spiritual life: "This was clearly not a privatized spirituality, and though it was profoundly antimaterialist, it did not therefore neglect the material conditions and the need to intervene politically in the material world" (193).

materialism. Finally, she uses poetry's aesthetic beauty as an image to explain what is missing from modern systems of thought that try to separate morality from spiritual experience, even describing the human impulse toward the immortal in terms of the creative impulse to write poetry.

First, Gore-Booth demonstrates that poetry is a language suited to expressing the connection between divinity and the everyday by looking at Christ's language. She explains her own decision to take a "poetic" rather than a philosophical approach to her discussion of *John* by contending that one must understand poetic language before one can understand Christ's language. She defines Christ's language as poetic for two reasons: because of its metaphoric and symbolic qualities and because of its constant reference to everyday experience. First, she notes how Christ's language diverges from philosophy: "He does not reason and deduce and grope towards truth...He sees truth clearly, face to face, and puts it into exact words. To help people to understand it, he uses the metaphors and symbols of poetry" (xiii). Gore-Booth suggests that the mystic's challenge, like Christ's, is not the difficulty of reasoning toward truth, which the mystic grasps intuitively, but of communicating the connection between these truths and ordinary life, a task that poetic language can accomplish. She defines poetry as language that is particularly connected to the everyday: "Like the imagery of all poetry, the symbolic language in the Fourth Gospel is mainly concerned with the common things of everyday experience" (xiv). Gore-Booth's comments here illuminate her understanding of what poetry is uniquely positioned to do. On one hand, it translates intuitive or direct mystical insights for people who have not had those insights themselves. On the other hand, it gives significance and dignity to the common things that they do comprehend. She claims that Christ's use of poetic language does not arise either from an "inability to cope with the abstract complications of philosophy or a condescension to the needs of the uneducated" (xv). Rather, he uses poetry because it recognizes a unity between abstract concepts and lived experience rather than erecting a false barrier between them.

For Gore-Booth, then, poetry becomes a meeting place for humanity and divinity. On one hand, she suggests that poetry is the language God uses to place himself within everyday experience as well as the language that anyone who has had a direct experience of the divine uses to communicate it more widely. On the other hand, she suggests that poetry expresses the human desire to reach a unity with all life, a desire that ideally leads to the realization of a unity between the physical and the divine as well. Gore-Booth's second main contention about poetry, then, is that the poetic impulse can help us to identify a larger religious impulse. This is a process that involves several steps. Poetry first emerges from the author's sense of unity with the physical world: "To feel, even unconsciously, one's own psyche vibrate in harmony with the living beauty of the Eternal universal psyche, is to many the beginning of poetry" (50). Yet Gore-Booth argues that we must not stop at recognizing the connections between ourselves and "living beauty" but use this as a platform to also connect with the divine: "To feel, however dimly, the Eternal life in this beauty is for many people the beginning of Religion" (50). Here she suggests that poetry becomes a first step toward religion, and her main complaint about her contemporary poets is that they too often stop at the first step: "Modern poetry is as full as ancient legend of the sense of a living unity of things, but it is much less sensitive to the need for some wonderful change in the Universal Life" (52). In depicting an immanent God in her own poems, Gore-Booth endeavors to push past a celebration of the material world alone, instead seeing its organic connection with spiritual life.

Gore-Booth expresses her own definition of poetry and its relationship to the spiritual world in her final volume of poetry *The House of Three Windows*. In a piece titled "Poetry," she directly addresses the genre's relationship to the material world using the form of a truncated eight-line sonnet. Although this poem only comprises the octave of a sonnet, it still has an important turn in the fourth line. Like many of the short poems in this volume, it takes the form of question and answer:

O song what art thou, fairest of earth's things,  
 Thou skylark of the mind's inviolate sky,  
 Thou child of falling waters, rushing wings? ...  
 "Nay, but the echo of a voice am I,  
 The silent voice that haunts the inner mind,  
 The immortal soul of every mortal dream  
 That waves in corn, and cries in the wild wind,  
 And sings like sunlight on a mountain stream." (1-8)

Although the first speaker seems to be asking for a definition of poetry, there are already assumptions about poetry imbedded in the question. The opening address to poetry labels it "fairest of earth's things," suggesting that it is the product, albeit the pinnacle, of the material world. Poetry, however, responds using the negative "Nay" to argue that it is not primarily material, though still present within the material world. Poetry's claim that it is "the echo of a voice" suggests that it points to something larger than itself. The source of the echo proves to be the "immortal soul," a spiritual voice that is intimately connected to the material world, residing within nature and the person. In this poem, the voice of poetry uncovers a divine voice immanent within the world, illustrating Gore-Booth's understanding of how poetry points to the spiritual life.

The final way that Gore-Booth connects poetry and religion is through suggesting that the human desire for aesthetic experience contradicts the ideas of those who want to extract the moral lessons from religion leaving behind its supposedly superfluous supernatural component. Despite her own impressive career of activism, she argues that a utopian version of the world is not enough: "Socialists invent beautiful and desirable Utopias, but there are still many dreamers who will not take the fairest Utopia 'in dark lieu of Heaven'" (116).<sup>252</sup> Rather, she uses aesthetics to explain the need to integrate a spiritual understanding with social and moral endeavors, suggesting that a secular approach to morality falls short of her artistic expectations for life. Christ, she argues, was not a moralist but "taught morality as a means to religion. This is the great difference

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<sup>252</sup> The phrase "in dark lieu of Heaven" is from Francis Thompson's "To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster" (116).

between the ‘poetic’ and the practical views of life. For the practical person, it is enough to live finely, healthily, effectively, socially. But the poet would make something new out of Life” (115). Here, Gore-Booth parallels the poet’s desire to create a beauty that exceeds practical usefulness with the need to envision a system for life that goes beyond morality to encompass spiritual experience. For her, religion is more than a moral pathway; it is a creative act.

Importantly, she links aesthetic experience directly to the modern need for God: “Perhaps one needs the idea of God as an explanation of Beauty, if for no other reason” (50). This suggests that the aesthetic experience is the last portion of the world that has not been de-sacrilized, and thus becomes a means for the modern person to find the divine. She reformulates this same thought in slightly different language later on: “Perhaps the sense of beauty is the sense of immortality in things” (116). This makes her point even more explicit. It is not simply that we need beauty explained to us, but that beauty points our way to finding the divine within the material world, the “immortality in things.”

In a short poem called “The Question” from *The House of Three Windows*, Gore-Booth articulates her understanding of aesthetics in order to explain her belief in God to a skeptic, summing up her ideas about beauty as an indicator of God:

You say, how can you know there is a God at all?  
O friend, how do you know what poetry is for,  
How do you know the snowdrops and the waterfall  
Are lovely, or that silver waves break on the shore  
At twilight, bringing a great peace with the high tide  
Into men's souls: in this mysterious world and wide  
How do you know that there is beauty anywhere,  
Who know not that you know the one and only Fair? (1-8)

This poem is a dialogue with her audience that assumes the audience takes a skeptical approach to religion. Instead of offering an apologetics for the existence of God, Gore-Booth offers a question in return. She does not imply that there is any way to scientifically prove the existence of God. Rather, she sees God as a mysterious entity who

is only understood through aesthetic experience. She suggests that asking the purpose of God is the same thing as asking the purpose of poetry. To her, both of these things are self-evident because they result naturally from human acknowledgement of beauty. Conversely, the skeptical questioner's inability to acknowledge the presence of divinity suggests for Gore-Booth that the questioner is unable to see beauty in the world ("How do you know that there is beauty anywhere"). While, as an argument, this is quite circular, it suggests the extent to which beauty and belief, poetry and religion were linked in Gore-Booth's mind. In some ways, Gore-Booth's inability to explain God logically points to her own contention that one must encounter God not through a philosophical construct but as an immanent experience of connectedness.

### Conclusion

Like so many female poets, one great irony of Eva Gore-Booth's career is that she is now most remembered as an object of former admiration in a Yeats poem ("In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz") that purports to eulogize Gore-Booth and her sister, but ultimately disparages Eva's activism and Constance's involvement in Irish politics and the Easter Rising. Remembering Gore-Booth not for her contributions to literature, but for his own admiration of her youthful "gazelle-like" beauty, Yeats summarily dismisses her subsequent political activities, even attributing her decline in health (really due to intestinal cancer) to them:

I know not what the younger dreams—  
Some vague Utopia—and she seems,  
When withered old and skeleton-gaunt,  
An image of such politics. (10-13)

Yet, Gore-Booth had neither vague nor unrealistic political goals, and Yeats' dismissal of her life achievements is startling. As Evelyn Underhill notes in her much more comprehensive tribute to Gore-Booth in an obituary for the *Times*, "she played a principal part in the organizing of trade unions for women, with a view to protecting the rights and improving the economic status of women workers" (11). Underhill particularly notes

Gore-Booth's advocacy for bar-maids and for the flower girls of London. For Underhill, Gore-Booth's combination of mystical thought with advocacy made her a perfect example of the type of mystic she most admired in her study on *Mysticism*. Underhill's assessment of Gore-Booth clearly reveals her own preference for a mystical life that is both contemplative and active:

She belonged to that rare class, the practical and intellectual mystics. Her enthusiasm for the things of the spirit, far from rendering her aloof from human interests overflowed and found expression in social and political work, in passionate appreciation of beauty, both in nature and art, and in her many generous and devoted friendships, as well as in the beautiful poems which reveal the deep sources of her life. (11)

Here Underhill suggests that there was a spiritual impetus underlying Gore-Booth's political and poetic activities, an idea which Gore-Booth highlighted in her own activist poetry. Both Underhill and Gore-Booth, I suggest used a discourse of theological immanence to articulate this connection between their concrete activities, both artistic and activist, and their personal spiritual insights.

Taken together, Underhill and Gore-Booth's work represents how a discourse of immanence could provide a connecting thread between theology, poetry, and activism. For both, poetry was a space in which to act out a process of contemplation that led to the discovery of divinity within the world. In their theological works, they used poetry in order to define religion, but not to usurp it. Instead, they suggest that poetry is a mediator that points beyond itself to spiritual experience as well as a medium that forces the reader to contemplate immanent divinity within the world.

Underhill and Gore-Booth saw neither their poetry nor their mysticism as primarily private discourses divorced from their public work. Underhill's idea of the active mystic and Gore-Booth's impressive record of activism suggest that mysticism, when linked to an immanent theology, was not always a discourse that retreated into the private sphere. Indeed, Gore-Booth directly insists on its public relevance in her poems about reform and war and in her activist essays. Within their poetry, Underhill and Gore-



Booth explore the implications of a divine presence pervading all aspects of the world, thus suggesting the importance of their own insights about the God they hold within and discovering the anti-hierarchical implications of his presence within the life around them.

Underhill's obituary for Gore-Booth reveals her own understanding of the ideal modern mystical life, one that was practical as well as contemplative. It was also a fitting tribute for Gore-Booth, for it recognizes the interconnected nature of her many endeavors, political, poetic, and spiritual, and thus acknowledged her life as a "unified" whole.

## CONCLUSION

In 1912, Evelyn Underhill had paid tribute to the importance of immanent theology within early-twentieth-century Christian thought by titling her first volume of poetry “Immanence.” Yet, by 1930, in her introduction to the twelfth edition of *Mysticism*, she perceived that the theological landscape was changing and noted a swing back toward transcendence among prominent religious thinkers such as Karl Barth: “This re-instatement of the Transcendent, the ‘Wholly Other,’ as *the* religious fact, is perhaps the most fundamental of the philosophic changes which have directly affected the study of mysticism” (ix). More than simply noting this change, she expresses her disenchantment with the ascendancy of immanence:

Determinism—more and more abandoned by its old friends the physicists—is no longer the chief enemy to such a spiritual interpretation of life as is required by the experience of the mystics. It is rather a naturalistic monism, a shallow doctrine of immanence unbalanced by any adequate sense of transcendence, which now threatens to re-model theology in a sense which leaves no room for the noblest and purest reaches of the spiritual life.  
(viii)

In particular, she argues that, because the challenges to spiritual interpretations have shifted, it is now clear that the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of immanence. For Underhill, too great a focus on immanence has itself become a threat to religious belief rather than a response to secular thought.

This about-face in Underhill’s thinking highlights the extent to which the women in this study turned to immanence because they saw it as an anti-secular discourse particularly suited to meet the doubts of their time. Literary scholar Philip Davis suggests that “throughout the ages the emphasis in the religious temper has oscillated between two doctrines of God—God as transcendent, the Creator separate from the world; and God as

immanent within His creation” (139).<sup>253</sup> The nineteenth century, he suggests, was an age of immanence. Underhill’s 1930 comments seem to indicate that the pendulum was beginning to swing in the opposite direction.

Although Davis and others have suggested a general trend toward immanent thinking among Victorian and early-twentieth-century religious thinkers, immanence proved a particularly productive discourse for religious women writers. My study suggests that embracing a theology of immanence helped women writers to simultaneously articulate the importance of their everyday embodied experiences and to connect personal religious experiences to wider public debates. Within public debates, women used immanent theology to illustrate their equal access to God, thus justifying their authority, and as a rhetorical tool to question hierarchies that valued some individuals over others.

These women poets’ ideas about theology and about genre anticipate and are still pertinent to many current discussions, two of which I will address here. First, their embrace of immanent thought anticipates the turn toward immanence in feminist theology and feminist philosophy of religion. Recent discussions of immanence by feminist scholars across these fields have called attention to the importance of immanence as a concept that relates divinity to women’s embodied experiences and provides a basis for anti-hierarchical critiques.<sup>254</sup> The elevation of immanence within

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<sup>253</sup> Knight and Mason point out one caveat to this argument: that we must also recognize that the interplay between transcendence and immanence has always been integral to Christian theology (*Nineteenth-Century Religion* 162).

<sup>254</sup> Much of this work responds to Luce Irigaray’s conceptions of immanence and transcendence as gendered discourses, although her critics see this as gender essentializing. For Irigaray, women have been trapped within embodied experience. She at first celebrated women’s embodiment through immanence but more recently has introduced the idea of the sensible/transcendental, a concept of religion that she believes does not create gendered hierarchies in the way that transcendence-based religions do. Summarizing the legacy of Irigaray’s ideas, Patricia Haynes notes: “Given the customary association, certainly in western culture, of the female body with the constraints of bodily immanence, the hierarchical distinction between divine transcendence and material immanence inevitably encourages the denigration and disgracing of the female body” (“Problem of Transcendence” 279). Irigaray’s response to this suggests the importance of recovering immanence as a way of relating to the divine.

feminist philosophy and theology arises from a sense that narratives of religious transcendence are specifically hostile to female experience. In many cases, as Nancy Frankenberry points out in summing up trends within feminist philosophy of religion, feminist scholars have thrown out ideas of transcendence altogether: “contemporary women’s articulation of a relation between God and the world depicts the divine as continuous with the world rather than as radically transcendent ontologically or metaphysically. Divine transcendence is seen to consist in total immanence” (Frankenberry 11). Seeing immanence as a subordinate partner within theism, suggests philosopher Patricia Haynes, has led many feminist thinkers to reject theism and its reliance on a transcendent God altogether. Conversely, many theists, while not disagreeing with the hierarchical nature of transcendence, point to the importance of immanence within religions like Christianity that have been labeled transcendence-focused (“The Problem of Transcendence” 279-280). Recently, theologians such as Catherine Keller and philosophers such as Patricia Haynes have looked for ways to reinscribe transcendence within the immanent, not divorcing the two, but seeing immanence as the dominant discourse, much as the authors in this study make room for the idea of a spiritual beyond within everyday life.<sup>255</sup> These women sought to create a place for their experiences and insights within traditional religious thought by emphasizing immanence.

For many feminist thinkers, an immanent approach to divinity is also one that questions gender hierarchies. In recent years, the feminist search for a conception of divinity that relates more positively to the physical world has extended this questioning of hierarchy beyond issues of gender. In an introduction to *Transcendence and Beyond: A*

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<sup>255</sup> In *Immanent Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy* (2012), Haynes suggests that the turn toward immanence need not mean a complete rejection of transcendence but a reinscription of it in immanent terms.

*Postmodern Inquiry*,<sup>256</sup> John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon sum up the immanence-focused critique of positions like Levinas' that rely on extreme versions of transcendence. They note the possible social consequences of conceptions of the divine/human relationship that rely too heavily on transcendence: "It is a classically patriarchal model, representing a top-down, hierarchical, even imperial way to conceive the relationship of the divine to the human, and which has served, by unhappy extension, as a model of the relation of the masculine to the feminine and of the human to the nonhuman" (4). The logic of Caputo and Scanlan's comment clearly resonates with the ideas of the women in this study. For them, God's material presence within all life established the basis for radically anti-hierarchical views that encompassed but extended beyond issues of gender to question hierarchies based on political, economic, and physical power.

The legacy of these writers can also be applied to current discussions of poetry's public role, a second issue on which their work offers insight. The scholarly narrative that links poetry to Victorian religion as part of the secularization thesis can be summed up as follows: as the British church lost its spiritual authority through a process of religious privatization, poetry began to carry the church's public moral weight and spiritual significance before it too succumbed to the same fate of privatization. In this way, the secularization thesis, which assumes the inevitable decline of religion, has bled into our discussions of poetry as well. The rhetoric of "privacy" is used to promote narratives of irrelevance and decline in both cases. My study of religious women poets not only questions the dominant narrative of nineteenth-century secularization, but also highlights a tradition that can help scholars and teachers address all-too-familiar contemporary

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<sup>256</sup> Caputo and Scanlan note that many scholars have found "transcendence" to be an inadequate term to describe divinity within postmodern thought but have responded in two different ways. On one hand, scholars such as Levinas have suggested that our concept of divinity as otherness does not go far enough and that we must be willing to embrace the "wholly other." On the other hand, many feminist scholars suggest "it goes too far and must be rehabilitated for a more worldly life, where it must be refitted for a more material, gendered and planetary existence" (2).

assertions about poetry's waning public relevance. These authors insisted that writing poetry was an act of vital public engagement rather than of private fulfillment. Women both directly engaged social debates through their religious poetry and argued that poetry depicting their personal religious development enabled their activism as well. Thus, they suggested that poetry was a flexible genre that could be used to confront issues head-on or provide a developmental space. In this way, they model how poetic depictions of personal, intimate, and embodied experiences can be integral to discourses of social reform rather than antithetical to them.

In July, 2013, Mark Edmundson, an English professor at the University of Virginia, created quite a furor in literary circles with an article for *Harper's Magazine* called "Poetry Slam: Or, the Decline of American Verse." His assessment of contemporary poetry uses a language of privatization and decline that startlingly mirrors the language of the secularization thesis. Edmundson argues that "Most of our poets now speak a deeply internal language... They tend to be oblique, equivocal, painfully self-questioning... timid, small, in retreat... ever more private, idiosyncratic, and withdrawn" (62). Suggesting that poetry is too wrapped up in self-observation, he accuses prestigious poets of writing "as though the great public crises were over" (68). Edmundson's generalizations about poetry's withdrawal from public life prompted an outpouring of articles defending poetry's importance, among them poet Seth Abramson's impassioned defense that "poetry nourishes and enlivens and congregates and educates and in some cases even saves us the very same way poetry has always done for those with the willingness to stop speaking and listen." Poetry, he suggests, is a tradition that remains vital, much in the way that a religion does.

Still, there are those who turn to statistical evidence to suggest poetry's waning influence. "The End of Verse?" asks a March 2009 *Newsweek* article, citing NEA study results that poetry reading was at its lowest level in sixteen years (Bain). Others suggest, however, that some of the statistical ways we measure interest in poetry do not represent

all of the ways we encounter it in the modern world. In a May 2013 article for *The Guardian*, poet Billy Mills suggests that “hardly a week goes by without someone assuring us that poetry is dying.” He suggests that assertions of poetry’s irrelevance based on declining sales among poetry publishers miss the ways in which poetry is adapting: “where some see poetry as a dying art, I see it as an early and enthusiastic adopter of new technologies.” Poetry, he points out, now appears on websites that use a range of digital media, in numerous small presses, and at events encouraged by the oral poetry movement.

Religious women poets’ responses to narratives of secularization and poetic privatization may also help us to explain the persistence of poetry within our public imagination. As innovative writers revitalize our appreciation of poetry through oral performance, digital media, and experimental poetics, I hope that revisiting a tradition insistent on poetry’s public engagement will reinforce efforts to reclaim its place in our classrooms and communities.

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