

# The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion



Edited by Mark Knight

# THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO LITERATURE AND RELIGION

This unique and comprehensive volume looks at the study of literature and religion from a contemporary, critical perspective. Including discussion of global literature and world religions, this Companion looks at:

- key moments in the story of religion and literary studies from Matthew Arnold through to the impact of 9/11;
- a variety of theoretical approaches to the study of religion and literature;
- different ways that religion and literature are connected, from overtly religious writing to subtle religious readings;
- an analysis of key sacred texts and the way they have been studied, rewritten, and questioned by literature;
- political implications of work on religion and literature.

Thoroughly introduced and contextualized, this volume is an engaging introduction to a huge and complex field.

**Contributors:** Matthias Bauer, Devorah Baum, Arthur Bradley, Lori Branch, Jo Carruthers, John D. Cox, Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, Duc Dau, Anthony Domestico, Mark Eaton, Ziad Elmarsafy, Luke Ferretter, William Franke, Abir Hamdar, Kevin Hart, Trevor Hart, Dayton Haskin, Stanley Hauerwas, Peter S. Hawkins, Jared Hickman, Alan Hodder, Gavin Hopps, Valentina Izmirlieva, Peter Jaeger, Colin Jager, Joshua King, Mark Knight, Deidre Shauna Lynch, Krista Lysack, Emma Mason, Susannah Brietz Monta, James Najarian, Yolanda Pierce, Ben Saunders, John Schad, Jan-Melissa Schramm, Andrew Tate, James H. Thrall, Samantha Zacher, Jens Zimmermann and Angelika Zirker.

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*Edited by Mark Knight*

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As I discuss in the introductory essay, the work of this Companion benefitted from the June 2014 Religion and Literature Symposium that we held at the University of Toronto. The symposium provided an opportunity for many of those involved with the project to share their work with each other, and the event as a whole was a delight to be part of and host. I entered the symposium with high expectations, and these were surpassed during our three days of formal and informal conversation. Our time together was facilitated by financial assistance from Deidre Lynch and also the award of an SIG grant from the Department of English at the University of Toronto. I am grateful, too, for the other support offered by my department. In addition to letting us use a meeting room, the interest of academic colleagues (especially Paul Stevens, Joshua Gang, and Smaro Kamboureli) and the generous administrative support provided by Clare Orchard, Cathy Chong, Cristina Henrique, and others, was greatly appreciated. I would also like to pay tribute to the many smart and personable graduate students from my department who joined in with the symposium and helped ensure that everything ran smoothly. Their interest in the work of the symposium was inspiring, and our time together was made all the richer by their active and insightful involvement.

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of a project like this. My mother passed away a few months before the manuscript went to press, and I dedicate the book to her.

The image on the cover is the work of Linda Ekstrom. She is an extremely talented artist, and I am thrilled to have the chance to reproduce one of her pieces.

The essay by Kevin Hart reproduces the poem “Psalm” by George Oppen, from *New Collected Poems*, copyright ©1965 by George Oppen. Reprinted by permission of Carcanet Press and New Directions Publishing Corp.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Literature, Religion, and the Art of Conversation

*Mark Knight*

The conversation between those interested in literature and those interested in religion has been going on for a long time. Well before we get to the emergence of literature as a formal subject of academic study in the nineteenth century, one with a complex relation to religion, or to the scholarly apparatus of journals, conferences and book series that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century and continue to play such an important role in shaping interdisciplinary work in this area, works of literature and religion, as well as the communities that read them, have shared mutual concerns.<sup>1</sup> These concerns include, but are certainly not limited to, an emphasis on textual form and canons, attention to the hermeneutics of reading, awareness of the representational limits of language, efforts to write about belief and religious experience, reflections on the role of narrative, responses to common cultural and historical markers (e.g. the role of the Church, the rise of print, national revolutions, the Enlightenment, war, imperialism, capitalism, and changing attitudes to gender), and a seemingly insatiable appetite for thematic breadth. The last of these makes it hard to articulate the precise ways in which literature and religion overlap and differ. Writers in both disciplines have something to say about almost everything, and regularly exceed any presumed focus on texts or God. There is little that does not garner attention from those working in the two disciplines, even if Kevin Hart is right to suggest that there are different rationales at play:

If philosophy and theology expand themselves vertically, by gathering more and more under their purview because, by right, everything is subject to them ... literary criticism increases itself horizontally, adding itself to anything it happens to come across: feminism, history, law, linguistics, medicine, music, philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, religion, sociology ...<sup>2</sup>

In spite of this breadth, we can see areas of common thematic interest, including, in the last twenty years or so: political theology, the relation between religion and the secular, ecology, hospitality, cognitive science, and the future/apocalypse.<sup>3</sup> To track these (and other) common areas of debate, one only has to consult books in the area, turn to special issues of the journals *Literature and Theology*, *Christianity and Literature*, and *Religion and Literature*, or attend interdisciplinary conferences on literature and religion. But while common areas of debate are certainly fostered by scholarly books, journals and conferences, they also seem to

exist independently of them, suggesting that the conversation between literature and religion is more deeply rooted and more far-reaching than the various scholarly networks behind collaborative efforts such as this Companion can fully account for.

Faced with the task of introducing a long and wide-ranging conversation between literature and religion in ways that are not misleading, it seems most sensible to begin with my own experience of the conversation. Matters of religion were prominent at several points in my undergraduate work, which majored on English and History, but I began to think about such matters more substantially, and in more focused relation to literary form, during my doctoral work on G. K. Chesterton's fiction and theological accounts of evil. Though heavily indebted to and invested in literary studies, this research was carried out in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College London, a department I joined more by accident than design, but one in which I was hugely grateful to work. Being there was an early lesson that interdisciplinarity is harder and more exciting than our casual use of the term sometimes might lead us to think, and not just because my training in literature and history initially left me floundering amid some of the more technical theological discussions. The language and grammar of different disciplinary communities is noticeably different, and differences can also be found within the disciplines. King's struck me as a harmonious and hospitable place when I was there in the second half of the 1990s, but the title of the department was a reminder that the discipline had its own tensions and methodological differences. On the one hand, we have theology or divinity, an approach most likely to be receptive to religious interpretative communities and mostly likely to entertain, though not necessarily require, a more confessional perspective. Its focus typically centers on biblical studies, systematic theology, philosophy of religion, religious history, religious ethics, and pastoral theology. Christianity is usually of central concern, though many departments of theology now find increasing space for other traditions, particularly the Abrahamic ones. Religious studies, on the other hand, tends to draw heavily from the methodology of the social sciences (sociology, anthropology, and also history); it initially appears more open to a range of world religions, but its hesitation to embrace confessional viewpoints and entertain more personal forms of knowledge is frequently evident, and its methodological commitments have of late proved an impediment to ongoing disciplinary enthusiasm for the arts.<sup>4</sup> The department I entered at King's sought to have it both ways—the Department of Theology *and* Religious Studies—though the preference for theology was apparent. But its title was a reminder that a join was needed, and despite some areas of overlap—particularly in history and ethics—the two parts of the department remained fairly distinct. The issue that the title of the department sought to address remains with us, and is one of the many complications in structuring a volume such as this. In the course of putting this Companion together, I have used the term religion, not because I have an intrinsic preference for religious studies over theology but because the word “religion” signifies more broadly in the community of literary studies that I now find myself in. This has not stopped me, however, from including contributions from those in theology as well as those in religious studies.

If religion found and still finds it hard to agree on its methodology and focus, then it is unsurprising to find scholars in literature and religion also thinking and working differently, despite sometimes asking similar questions and sometimes reading the same material. My need post-PhD to choose one discipline or other for a departmental academic home was hard, for I felt, and still feel, an affinity with both. Yet the choice was one that had to be faced in the segmented world of the academic job market. I chose literature, and I have worked in departments of English ever since—Roehampton (including a six-month fellowship at Birkbeck); Toronto; and, since January 2016, Lancaster. This base in English, which echoes the fact that much of

the recent intellectual energy behind contributions to literature and religion has come from those who identify mostly with literary studies, is the reason I have reversed the traditional order of terms in the title of this volume, i.e. literature and religion rather than religion and literature.<sup>5</sup> During my time in literary studies, I have been a specialist in religion, the person to whom colleagues and students could turn if they were confused by or interested in something religious or theological. The fact that my knowledge of religion, particularly the Christian religion, stands out is significant; a further reminder, if one were needed, that literature and religion do not always map onto each other smoothly. While my experience of working on religion in the world of literary studies is a largely happy one, my work has on occasion met with suspicion, whether overtly, as in the jarring moment several years back where a prominent Victorian scholar at an academic conference told me and my fellow panel members that 9/11 demonstrated why we should not talk about religion, or more indirectly, as in the experience of one unsuccessful job talk for a position in literature when I was asked whether I was reading too much religion into Victorian novels and left with the distinct impression that my questioner thought religious enthusiasm might take us too far.

My experiences of working within and between literature and religion have much in common with the experiences of others. One of the seminal attempts in recent times to draw on such experiences and think through the nature of the interdisciplinary relationship is the 2009 special issue of *Religion and Literature* (41.2), which featured approximately 35 contributors commenting on “what sorts of intellectual projects, disciplinary configurations, and scholarly practices might be called into being by thinking about religion and literature together.”<sup>6</sup> The eclectic nature of these contributions is a reminder of the need for caution when choosing language to describe the relation between literature and religion. One of the most readily available terms is “field,” a term that positions literature and religion alongside other fields within the two disciplines (biblical studies, philosophy of religion, Romanticism, Victorianism, Contemporary Literature, and so on). Yet speaking of literature and religion as a field brings with it difficulties, for, as Wesley A. Kort notes, “fields” require more than common areas of intellectual interest: the term would “suggest several characteristics, such as a delimited terrain, pioneers and predecessors whose work forms a foundation upon which advances could be made, some established methods, standard specifics to it by which the quality of work and its contribution to the field could be judged, and shared goals.”<sup>7</sup> I am less pessimistic than Kort about the extent to which these characteristics are present in the “field” of literature and religion, but I take his point and maintain a few reservations about describing literature and religion in this way. Methodological starting points vary considerably, as the contributions to this present volume demonstrate, and although the journals, book series, and conferences that support work in literature and religion go some way to providing the structure that a field needs, there is less of a sure footing when it comes to institutional programs of study and broadly agreed canons of texts and authors. Offerings at institutions such as Glasgow, St Andrews, Lancaster, Chicago, Notre Dame, Baylor, and Duke are very divergent, in intensity and design, and together may constitute inadvertent support for Kort’s suggestion that we are better off speaking about literature and religion as an “interest” rather than a field.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, many of the institutions with strengths in literature and religion focus their activity around research centers, sometimes offering support for and training in graduate study but rarely sponsoring the more systematic offerings that one looks for in a program of undergraduate studies.

When it comes to canons of literature, there are further problems for attempts to describe literature and religion as a field. The traditional focus on writers such as John Milton and William Blake, apparent in the work of a twentieth-century scholar such as Northrop Frye, is no longer

possible because of the myriad of other writers and traditions that now feature heavily across literary studies. The opening up of the canon is something of which I am generally in favor, but it does entail a level of fracture that makes the cohesion of a discipline or field more difficult. As a consequence, I have made little attempt in compiling this Companion to identify and then check off the “major” writers in literature and religion. And there are difficulties, too, with identifying the scholars, Kort’s “pioneers and predecessors,” whose work might be seen as foundational for interdisciplinary work in literature and religion. While certain names loom large enough to hold out the distant possibility of agreeing some sort of canon of scholarship—Mieke Bal, Jacques Derrida, Northrop Frye, Geoffrey Hartman, David Jasper, Elisabeth Jay, David Lyle Jeffrey, Frank Kermode, Julia Reinhard Lupton, Barbara Newman, Paul Ricœur, Stephen Prickett, Regina Schwartz, Nathan Scott, Graham Ward, and Ralph Wood, to highlight some of the prominent figures in the field from the last 50 years or so—the expansive nature of literary studies, and also theological/religious studies, makes the task virtually impossible to complete. Even if one were to compile a much longer and fuller list of key scholars, a list that would surely include many of those contributing to this Companion, the interests of one or more sub-areas of scholarly activity in literature or religion (medieval studies, early-modern studies, contemporary American literature, Canadian literature, European literature, World literature, Jewish studies, Islam, Buddhism, Christian systematic theology, comparative religion, literary theory, and so on) would likely be under presented or marginalized. The disciplines of literature and religion are now so voluminous, and their significant thinkers and texts so expansive, that it is difficult to fix the lines that define them and their interdisciplinary subset, even though such lines remain visible enough to make us think that they can still be traced.

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I began the previous section with talking about literature and religion as a conversation rather than a field, an interest, or a specialty. Doing so is not without its problems, and I am aware that we can subject the word “conversation” to the same kind of scrutiny and find it wanting. The word is, after all, rather familiar and informal, the sort of activity we undertake with friends and family rather than the more serious scholarly activity to which the academy feels it must aspire. Furthermore, to frame the relationship between literature and religion as a conversation sounds similar to previous attempts to emphasize disciplinary interaction, such as the “Cross-current in Religion and Culture” title of the book series that David Jasper and Elisabeth Jay edited for Palgrave-Macmillan. Yet neither instance of our familiarity should stop us from exploring further how conversation might configure our understanding of, and approach to, literature and religion. Talking about a “conversation” emphasizes the fluidity and movement between the disciplines, reminding us that the nature of their relationship is in a continual state of flux even though it has a traceable history, and discouraging us from getting tied up with trying to detail the points of similarity and difference. And talk of conversation encourages us to acknowledge that the relationship between literature and religion is dependent on interpretative communities, whose interpersonal networks and debates shape the contours of all interdisciplinary work. The word also helps register the fact that people from different disciplines sometimes disagree and sometimes take discussion in directions their partners do not anticipate. As Hans-Georg Gadamer insists in *Truth and Method*:

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one I wanted to conduct. ... No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation.<sup>9</sup>

Gadamer puts the metaphor of conversation to extended use in *Truth and Method*, using it to describe the theory of hermeneutics that he thinks distinguishes the arts and humanities from the natural sciences. According to Gadamer, the hermeneutic of the human “sciences” is a dynamic interaction between text and interpreter, with both partners shaped by the historicity of a critical tradition that is mediated in and through language. The meaning of a text is an event, a moment in a much longer history, one that represents a prejudicial account of our present understanding of how we read the words before us and how we do so in dialogue with others—those beside us in the present and those who have gone before. On this account, meaning is not innate or static, and it does not exist prior to interpretation. It is an event, to use one of Gadamer’s descriptions, and a conversation, to use another. Conversation enables Gadamer to talk about understanding in a more interpersonal way and to locate each of us as co-participants in the work of interpretation. The word also conveys the dynamic nature of all understanding and the limitations on our agency that follow from this:

[I]t is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led.<sup>10</sup>

In a manner that models the conversation he seeks, Gadamer encourages a plurality of critical voices to speak throughout his book. Ostensibly, *Truth and Method* offers the sort of detailed engagement with the history of philosophy that is characteristic of the German philosophical tradition. Yet unlike the writing of so many of his predecessors and peers, Gadamer’s treatment of his conversation partners keeps their writing alive and makes them co-participants in what is being said. At its best, Gadamer’s style of writing is openly partial yet careful not to overwrite the perspective of others completely. Other voices shape Gadamer’s own line of thought; they can be heard throughout the book, although the distinction between them and Gadamer’s own position is frequently blurred. The “to and fro” between Gadamer and the conversational partners he engages with is a distinctive feature of *Truth and Method* and one of its most fascinating (and under-explored) aspects. This style of writing is a feature strangely ignored by Jacques Derrida and some of the other critics who have seized on Gadamer’s talk of tradition to criticize his account of hermeneutics for being inherently conservative and incapable of accommodating any ruptures in thought.<sup>11</sup> Without such revolutionary potential, they argue, conversation becomes the polite repetition of the status quo that we sometimes see in the public sphere—an expression of thought that fails to entertain different perspectives or hear from those on the margins. Yet the subtle but persistent “to and fro” of Gadamer’s writing helps guard against this, and the conversation he enacts retains a radical possibility because it is never allowed to ossify and fall into being solely the one that Gadamer wants to conduct.

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Although Gadamer’s work holds out the possibility of talking meaningfully about a conversation in a book authored by one person, a collaborative work such as this Companion, or, more broadly, any sort of dialogue between scholars, is more obviously suited to being thought about as conversation. There is value, I think, in thinking about how conversation might become the means by which we configure a whole range of interdisciplinary relations. But rather than pursuing this possibility further, I want to remain within the world of literature and religion and consider what our conversation might look like. What do Gadamer’s observations

on the art of conversation mean for those of us who work in this area? How might we respond to his following remarks?

To conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes. ... The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us. ... To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing.<sup>12</sup>

Gadamer is not alone in insisting on a conversation that exceeds our attempts to control it. In his essay "Conversation after Pentecost: Theological Musings on the Hermeneutic Motion," Trevor Hart considers "the sort (or sorts) of exchanges that may prove beneficial in interdisciplinary and cross-cultural exchanges in particular, and the tone or register of voice most befitting constructive participation in these."<sup>13</sup> Drawing heavily on the language of the Christian tradition, Hart wonders what it is "that makes a conversation a *conversation*."<sup>14</sup> He concludes that "we join it for the sake of participating in it rather than to secure some predetermined (economically driven) goal or output, and any benefit we gain from doing so (besides the enjoyment of the conversation itself and as such) arises serendipitously, from the unpredictable interplay or collision of difference."<sup>15</sup> This leads Hart to prefer conversation over dialogue, a mode that he worries "generally has some clearly specified goal or outcome."<sup>16</sup>

Synthesizing these insights from Gadamer and Hart, the conversation we are looking for is one that tests and probes but also remains open to being led in a new direction. It is a fine sounding ideal, but, as all of us can attest, it can be exceptionally hard to put into practice. The difficulties we experience when we talk with friends, family, colleagues, and strangers—as we try and come to terms with what they have to say and its discordance with our own viewpoint—are just as apparent in the academy. Whatever hope we might have for the university as the place where different ideas converse, the process of that conversation is rarely easy, and the practice of being led in unexpected directions, tested, and provoked into new perspectives is not usually comfortable. One only has to listen to accounts of students'/scholars' hurt at the hands of negative assessments and reviews to realize that good, constructive conversations are far from the norm. Aware of this, and in search of the forms of writing and scholarly interaction needed for the sort of conversation in literature and religion that I want to participate in, I am impressed by Geoffrey Hartman's essay, "Paul Fry's Wordsworth, and the Meaning of Poetic Meaning, or Is It on-Meaning? Letter to a Colleague and Friend."<sup>17</sup> A dense piece of writing, even by Hartman's high standards, the essay is, at the same time, a complex philosophical exploration of poetic meaning, a review of the book written by his colleague at Yale, a dialogue about Wordsworth, and a letter to a friend. The last of these is especially important, for Hartman's essay is critical and complimentary of his friend and colleague's work; it eschews the language of distance and abstraction in favor of language written *to* his colleague and friend, and a form that might sustain conversation. Hartman's style in this essay has been described to me as an example of "a hermeneutics of friendship," and I repeat that description here to try and get at the type of conversation I glimpse in earlier work on literature and religion and want to continue in this Companion.<sup>18</sup>

I cannot claim that all, or even most of the contributors to this volume, are friends. Some of them are. But many are scholars I do not know well outside of their published work, and there are a few contributors here that I am yet to meet in person. I want to remain with the term friend, however, albeit in a more aspirational sense, for it introduces a more intimate



dimension to our notion of conversation. As Hartman's letter to his friend makes clear, a conversation among friends does not have to avoid disagreement, and the testing that is so crucial to the work of the academy remains possible. But a conversation between friends, or at least one between those who might become friends, is also, potentially, one that matters, where what is spoken about is seen to be of value by all parties, and where the participants in it work hard to hear and respond to what the other is saying. It is, moreover, a conversation that we remain committed to even when it takes us in directions that we did not expect or leads us to places where we did not want to go. And it is a conversation that acknowledges a debt to the willingness of religious texts, including the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, to introduce the language of friendship in unlikely places.<sup>19</sup>

To try and create a more intimate conversation in the pages that follow, all of the participants to this Companion were invited to present a draft of their work at a three-day symposium held in Toronto in July 2014. Just over half were able to attend, and it was a privilege to be part of the resulting conversation.<sup>20</sup> When planning the symposium, the loftier ambitions I ascribe to it here were half formed and only vaguely present in my mind. In large part, the symposium was conceived to build an additional level of peer review into the editorial process, to create stronger connecting threads between scholars, and to encourage my fellow contributors to make a start on their essay in advance of the deadline. From a functional perspective, this is what the symposium accomplished. But I think it went further, too, modeling the sort of intimate conversations in which smart people find ways of disagreeing with each other creatively and coming closer as they do so.

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Not everyone in this volume would be comfortable with the more intimate forms of conversation I am calling for here, and, as the subsequent essays quickly make clear, the Companion brings together a whole host of different beliefs, voices, and registers. But if authentic conversations bring us closer, without, crucially, collapsing our points of difference, then I want to find ways of talking about our conversation in more intimate terms and trying to encourage that intimacy further. One small contribution is acknowledging my own prejudices, which include the Christian faith that has helped shape my thought and work up until this point, and with which I continue to identify. The conversation I set out to conduct, then, though not polemically directed or evangelistic in outlook, does have a degree of Christian orientation. This raises some important questions about the efficacy and wisdom of trying to host a broader conversation about literature and religion from the perspective of Christianity, which I want to address briefly.

There are clear reasons why Christianity has traditionally received more attention than other religious traditions in work on literature and religion. The discipline of English Literature began with the aim of studying the canon of English writers, and although the discipline quickly included other literary traditions (American literature, Canadian literature, mainland European literature in translation, and, more recently, World literature), the English literary tradition, or at least the Anglo-American literary tradition, has remained dominant. Of late, the content of literary studies has begun to transform significantly, but to complete a course of study in most departments of English Literature still involves spending the majority of one's time reading works from British and American writers. In the Anglo-American literary canon, Christianity (and, to a lesser extent, its parent religion, Judaism) has been most influential historically. Nearly all of the Western literature written before our contemporary context has more to say about Christianity than it does about the Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or Islamic faiths.



Where we do find references in older literary texts to other religious traditions, they often take the form of negative and stereotyped depictions rather than more thoughtful engagements, and this limits the capacity of those texts to provide fertile ground for scholars who want to think about a much fuller range of world religions.

One response to the historic dominance of Christianity in Western literature is to turn to comparative religion, a method of study that became popular in the late-nineteenth century and one that seeks to compare the religious traditions rather than allowing any one to predominate. But such comparison can often end up seeking to flatten the differences, and starting to read about another religious tradition is hardly equivalent to the body of knowledge one may have accumulated over many years of thinking and reading about the Christian tradition. In my own case, I do not have the same level of expertise in Hinduism as I do in Christianity, and I am unlikely to ever do so. This should not be thought about as an intrinsic scholarly failure, any more than a specialist in the history of art should be made to feel guilty for not having an equivalent knowledge of musicology. While there are points of overlap between religious traditions, they vary considerably, and knowing much about any of them is a considerable challenge in and of itself. And, as I have indicated already, I have concerns about the viability or desirability of insisting that we study religion only from the outside. It seems to me that the best way to make other world religions more pivotal to the study of literature and religion is to invite those immersed in them (and also conversant with the work of literary studies) to contribute to and shape our discussions. But the numbers of such scholars remain limited, although they are steadily increasing, and I do not see how a goal of religious neutrality will make their voices any more prominent.

My aim, then, in editing this Companion has been to try and host a conversation about literature and religion from the perspective of Christianity, without ever suggesting that this faith retains control over where the conversation goes or becomes a requirement for those contributing to the conversation or ignores the considerable disagreements between those who identify with the Christian tradition. Theological resources for this aim can be found in the work of Alan Jacobs, Sarah Coakley, and Kathryn Tanner, among others. Jacobs's vision of a Christian hermeneutic that creates space for others is articulated in *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love*, where he seeks to combine discerning judgment with gratuitous play, a term he roots in Trinitarian perichoresis.<sup>21</sup> Another vision that finds intellectual resources in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is offered by Sarah Coakley in *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity*. Seeking to describe how Christian theology relates to secular thought, a relation she realizes is porous and complex, Coakley calls for "a *contrapuntal* relationship ... with Christian thought and practice, not secular philosophy, providing the *cantus firmus*."<sup>22</sup> In setting out this agenda, Coakley is keen to ensure that the work of theological critique is turned inward as much as outward, "always undoing and redoing itself, not only in response to shifting current events, but because of the deepening of vision"<sup>23</sup> that comes when we see the finitude and failures of our knowledge. In this respect, Coakley's position finds support from the work of Kathryn Tanner, who also understands "the antidote ... to an intolerance based on dogmatic or fanatical adherence to one's own convictions" theologically, in "an honest recognition of human finitude and therefore of human fallibility."<sup>24</sup>

While I have been anxious when working on this Companion to ensure that my own Christian beliefs and experiences did not assimilate the other perspectives with which they came into contact, in hindsight I did not need to worry, for assimilation is impossible in a genuine conversation. Christianity has never been a religion purged of all other perspectives, anyway, and the mingling of perspective that we see throughout the history of Christianity

## Introduction

has been repeated and intensified here. The result reveals an ongoing and sizeable debt to the Christian tradition, but is also, I hope, a conversation that takes seriously what other faith traditions have to say.

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The prominence given here to a wider variety of religions and to literary works written from different countries (i.e. not just the United Kingdom) marks a clear distinction between this Companion and *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology* that Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay edited for Oxford University Press in 2007.<sup>25</sup> There are other differences, too: the presence of different scholars and interpretative communities than appeared in the earlier volume; a greater emphasis in this Companion on twentieth and twenty-first century literature; and, perhaps more arguably, the emphasis here on more theoretically inflected work. As always, the gains are accompanied by losses, and I acknowledge that the Oxford Handbook gives more weight to older works of English Literature and has more to say about a greater variety of Christian theological forms. Certain differences between the two volumes are deliberate editorial choices and equate to critical shifts in the field; but it is probably more accurate to think about the two volumes as complementary rather than competing attempts to configure the field. Certainly the excellent work already available in the 2007 Handbook has influenced some of my commissioning choices here, pushing me to feature the sort of work that did not find a place in the Oxford University Press publication.

The structure of this Companion is fairly straightforward, in an effort to leave my contributors as free as possible to take their work in different directions.<sup>26</sup> Part I deals with the modern story of literature and religion, beginning with the emergence of English literary studies in England and North America during the nineteenth century, and going on to note some of the writers, scholarly apparatus and events that have shaped the history of work in literature and religion since then. Parts II and III deal with theory and form, respectively. Recognizing the impossibility of commenting on all the theories and forms that have been so influential for studies in literature and religion, I sought a range of topics that would give readers a taste of the very different work being done in these areas, and my initial suggestions were modified through consultation with contributors. Part IV presents material on the literary afterlives of sacred texts and traditions, and moves across different religious faiths. In this section and throughout the volume, I have resisted the temptation to solicit generic essays on each of the world religions, as though it might be possible to say anything meaningful about the whole of Islam and literature in around 6,000 words. Instead of seeking universal coverage, I have privileged diverse particularity. This approach continues in Part V, which features a number of essays on the politics of literature and religion, addressing topics such as pluralism, reconciliation, and fundamentalism in relation to particular writers and groups of texts. Though in some ways the loosest category in the Companion, this final section reflects the more politically charged interest in literature and religion that we have seen in recent years, a direction that says much about the now widely recognized need to overturn the privatization of religion favored by secularism and think seriously about how religion and politics come together. Inevitably, none of the material in these five sections is entirely discrete, and readers will quickly see why I have welcomed, rather than discouraged, instances of structural promiscuity—e.g. Susannah Brietz Monta's beautifully judged essay on Donne's sonnets, which shows the contribution that form can make to the politics of faith, and John Schad's evocative and suggestive essay on the form of theological memoir, written in the creative-critical style that marks one of the major developments in recent literary theory.

In seeking a format for the Companion that could facilitate an open-ended conversation, I am probably reflecting the seismic theoretical move in the second half of the twentieth century away from anything that might be construed as controlling or totalizing. Be that as it may, the result is a conversation in which I have enjoyed participating. If the form of Companions and Handbooks is one that is always at risk of being overly conservative and staid—by focusing mostly on what is known already and carving out clear-cut divisions—then this is an instance where I, as editor, have had my thinking changed and my horizons enlarged. I am acutely aware that interdisciplinarity can easily give rise to small insular worlds, as we slip into talking only with those who seem to understand our strange ways of thinking, but the conversations in this volume seem to have grown bigger since we started. My hope, looking ahead, is that readers will find this conversation between literature and religion a welcome place in which their own contributions can prove formative.

## Notes

- 1 For more on the emergence of literary studies and its relation to religion in the British and American contexts, see the first two chapters of this Companion. Other accounts of the broader intersection between literature and religion can be found throughout the pages that follow. The primary journals in the field are *Literature and Theology*, *Christianity and Literature*, and *Religion and Literature* (see Chapter 5 for more information on these), although other publications (e.g. *Renascence* and *Religion and the Arts*) also play a significant role. *Literature and Theology* and *Christianity and Literature* are linked with organizations (the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture, and the Conference on Christianity and Literature, respectively) that help promote the field and support regular conferences. There are many other conferences, too, focused on literature and religion, including named units in the Modern Language Association (“Literature and Religion” division) and American Academy of Religion (“Arts, Literature, and Religion” program unit). Additionally, work in the field is supported by several books series, including, presently, Bloomsbury’s *New Directions in Religion and Literature*, Ohio State University Press’s *Religion, Literature and Postsecular Studies*, the *Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts*, and two series published by Baylor University Press (*Studies in Christianity and Literature*, and *The Making of the Christian Imagination*).
- 2 Kevin Hart, “Religion and Literature?” *Religion and Literature* 41.2 (2009), 143–44.
- 3 There are many examples, just a few of which are listed here. On political theology and literature, see work by Julia Reinhard Lupton, Hent de Vries, and Arthur Bradley; on debates about the secular, see the influence of Talal Asad and Charles Taylor, the use of the term “postsecular” in the title of the book series that Lori Branch edits for Ohio State University Press, and the 2014 CCL conference “The Religious Turn: Secular and Sacred Engagements in Literature and Theory”; on ecology, see the choice of Dallin Lewis’s “After Eden: Religion, Literature and the Environment” for the first annual syllabus prize in the journal *Religion and Literature* (46.2–3, 2014) and also the 2008 special issue of that journal on “Ecotheology and Literature”; on hospitality, see the 2011 interdisciplinary conference, “The Hospitable Text: New Approaches to Religion and Literature” (Notre Dame Centre, London); on cognitive science, see the special issue of *Literature and Theology* on “Thinking with God: Cognition, Religion and Literature” (2014); and on the apocalypse, see the special issue of *Literature and Theology* on “Apocalypse Now and Then” (2012) and the recent book by Tiffany Eberle Kriner, *The Future of the Word: An Eschatology of Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).
- 4 My impression is that departments of religious studies (as opposed to departments of theology) have become less willing in recent years to recruit faculty that work primarily on religion and literature (or religion and the arts).
- 5 As Theodore Ziolkowski notes, “the priority of nomenclature proclaims a certain priority of perspective,” “Forum on Religion and Literature: A Mildly Polemical Position Statement,” *Religion and Literature* 41.2 (2009), 199.
- 6 Susannah Brietz Monta, “Introduction,” *Religion and Literature* 41.2 (2009), 1.
- 7 Wesley A. Kort, “What, after all, is ‘Religion and Literature,’” *Religion and Literature* 41.2 (2009), 105.

- 8 “By saying, as I have, that “Religion and Literature” is not a field or a specialty but an interest ... I am not trying to demean or demote work of this kind” (Ibid., 110).
- 9 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 385.
- 10 Ibid., 385.
- 11 See Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds., *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989); and also Richard J. Bernstein, “The Conversation that Never Happened (Gadamer/Derrida),” *The Review of Metaphysics* 61.3 (2008): 577–603.
- 12 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 360–61.
- 13 Trevor Hart, “Conversation after Pentecost? Theological Musings on the Hermeneutical Notion,” *Literature and Theology* 28.2 (2014), 165.
- 14 Ibid., 169.
- 15 Ibid., 170.
- 16 Ibid., 170.
- 17 Geoffrey Hartman, “Paul Fry’s Wordsworth, and the Meaning of Poetic Meaning, or is it on-Meaning? Letter to a Colleague and Friend,” *Partial Answers* 8.1 (2010), 1–22.
- 18 The phrase is Fan Wu’s and the context is a short discussion paper he presented in my graduate class on “Faithful Reading” (Department of English, University of Toronto, Fall 2014).
- 19 I am thinking here of Jesus calling his disciples his friends, but also, more broadly, the importance of hospitality and welcoming the stranger over a meal that we find in both the Jewish and Christian traditions.
- 20 Those who could not attend were invited to read and comment on one another’s work.
- 21 Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), 145–51.
- 22 Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay “On the Trinity,”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18.
- 23 Ibid., 18–19.
- 24 Kathryn Tanner, *The Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 199. Tanner insists on the theological distinctiveness of her description of human fallibility by insisting, contra “straightforward humanism” (199), that her “account of Christian belief ... is compelled by directing attention to a divine standard that human beings, because of God’s transcendence, cannot claim to achieve” (200).
- 25 For further reflection from the editors on the thinking behind the Oxford Handbook, see the introductory essays by Elisabeth Jay (“Now and in England”) and David Jasper (“The Study of Literature and Theology”), and also the afterword by Andrew Hass (“The Future of English Literature and Theology”). In *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. Andrew W. Hass, David Jasper and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Another recent attempt to frame literature and religion, roughly concurrent with the work of this Companion, is Susan Felch, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
- 26 Among several introductions to the study of literature and religion are David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); T. R. Wright, *Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Ralph Wood, *Literature and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2008); and my own *An Introduction to Religion and Literature* (London: Continuum, 2009). There is also plenty of good material in Robert Detweiler and David Jasper, eds., *Religion and Literature: A Reader* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000). In addition, see the useful distinctions between “Literature and Theology,” “Christianity and Literature,” “Religion and Literature,” “The Bible as Literature,” and “The Bible and Literature” in Rebecca Lemon, Emma Mason and Jonathan Roberts, “General Introduction,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature*, ed. Rebecca Lemon et al. (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009) and the taxonomy of different approaches to literature and religion that Matthias Bauer and Angelika Zirker provide in Chapter 5 of this *Companion*.

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## PART I

# The Modern Story of Literature and Religion

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# 1

## THE INWARD TURN

### The Role of Matthew Arnold

*Joshua King*

In the introduction to *The English Poets* (1880), later retitled *The Study of Poetry*, Matthew Arnold proclaims “most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.”<sup>1</sup> This statement has been tirelessly quoted by twentieth-century critics to (mis)represent Arnold as an early champion for setting up poetry and its academic study in the place of religion. So firmly associated is this idea with Arnold that it has been dubbed “the Arnoldian replacement theory.”<sup>2</sup> Yet Arnold does not say that “religion” in general will be replaced by poetry, but “most of what now passes with us for religion,” Christianity as it was then popularly understood: a metaphysical system of “dogma[s],” such as the divinity of Jesus, that is supported by miraculous “evidences,” such as the resurrection (CPW IX:161–62). In the 1870s and 1880s, Arnold argued that this form of Christianity would vanish before the advance of modern knowledge, and that the Bible and Christian worship should be retained as “poetry.” That is, the old forms of Christian worship and the Bible use “literary, not scientific language; language *thrown out* at an object of consciousness not fully grasped, which inspired emotion” (CPW VI:189). This “language of figure and feeling” is better equipped than that of “literal fact and science” (VI:189) for grasping human beings’ deepest experiences of a transcendent force for good at work in them and the world, popularly called “God.”

Arnold, then, promoted a public role for a transformed Christianity that depended on literary tact. On this project’s success, Arnold argued, depended Britain’s escape from chaos. He believed the chief agents of anarchy were middle-class evangelicals, especially Nonconformists, or Protestants who dissented from the state-supported Church of England. In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Arnold identified the danger of middle-class Dissenters in their combination of anti-intellectual and tasteless moralism, or “Puritan . . . Hebraising,” with blind faith in economic gain and individualism, or “Philistinism” (CPW V:243). Such qualities, thought Arnold, were the reason the middle classes were failing to win influence over the lower classes who would soon determine Britain’s democratic future. Most distressingly, the Puritans’ “unlovely present[ation] of Christian dogma and practices” was driving “the lower classes” from “Christianity” (CPW IX:154). Arnold, with other Victorian middle-class commentators, feared that disaffection from the Bible and Christianity would deprive the working classes of their best guide to “conduct,” and so fuel their hasty pursuit of self-interest through riot and revolution (CPW VI:362–63).



The antidote to anarchy, Arnold contended, was transformation of the middle classes into a force that would supply “an ideal to ennoble the spirit of the nation and keep it together” (CPW II:25). A primary medium for this transformation, Arnold preached with increasing determination after becoming a school inspector in 1851, was well-rounded, humanistic, and state-supported education. In language borrowed from the Puritans he sought to convert, Arnold hoped this education would bring about a new birth in individuals, causing them to die to their “old, untransformed self” and raising them into their “*best self*” (CPW V:134–35), whose qualities Arnold identified with “culture,” or “the ideal of a human nature harmoniously perfect in all points” (V:188). This combination of moral conviction, intellectual flexibility, and love of beauty would be created only by “the disinterested and active use of reading, reflection, and observation” (CPW VI:204). Arnold famously entrusted secular poetry with a major role in this process of formation, arguing in his reports to the Education Department for its power to “elevate and humanize” working-class children.<sup>3</sup> As he puts it in “The Study of Poetry,” lines from great poetry should be internalized “to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us” in ways that rise above dogmatic controversies and sectarian politics (CPW IX:161).

Less recognized is Arnold’s equally intense campaign in the 1870s and 1880s for a tolerant state Church capable of leading the nation’s divided population in rehearsals of Christianity as a unifying, morally transformative poetry. In the words of “The Study of Poetry,” he felt the “strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry” (CPW IX:161). St. Paul’s language about death to sin and resurrection, for example, had been distorted into rigid Protestant formulas about atonement and justification by faith, obscuring its nature as imagistic, emotional language that conveyed the struggle of conforming to Christ’s ethical pattern. Recovered consciously *as* poetry, as passionate rather than propositional language, the words of the Bible and the liturgy could fulfill more powerfully and widely the goal Arnold set for poems of the kind written by Wordsworth and Milton—that of “form[ing] the soul and character” by “suggest[ing] ... high and noble principles of action” and “inspir[ing] the emotion so helpful in making these principles operative” (*Reports* 200–201). Arnold therefore likened a Church of England clergyman “to a school inspector” and “public functionary” (CPW VI:129). Performing the ethical poetry of the Bible and liturgy in a future national Church tolerant enough to win back and modify the Dissenters, Anglican ministers would call citizens to die to their ordinary selves and enter “into one harmonious and truly humane life” as a nation (CPW IX:6).

Despite this concern for public institutions, Arnold delimits an *inward* influence for religion and poetry: they impact character and perception rather than political action. In this, Arnold’s religious criticism of the 1870s and 1880s participates in a larger relocation of religion and literature, especially poetry, in the imagined social geography of the North Atlantic world. We might call it “the inward turn,” by which poetry and religion are imagined to flourish in self-cultivation but to lose authenticity when introduced into public controversy and collective political action. As Arnold put it in 1865, “direct political action is not the true function of literature” (CPW III:118). By muting stubborn doctrinal and political forms of opposition, this inward turn can enable consolidation of secular state and corporate power.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Arnold sought to thwart political reform and social equality by promoting an “inward” view of religion and literature. Early and late in his career, Arnold defended democracy (CPW II:7) and socio-economic equality as necessary goals (CPW IX:157–60), lambasted the plundering of the poor under *laissez-faire* industrial capitalism (CPW V:213–16), and strove valiantly to improve the affordability, quality, and material facilities of public education for all classes of society (*Reports* 3, 79–81, 103–6, 119, 216). He

also feared police states and the use of force for its own sake.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, his stress on the inwardness of poetry and religion can, as I will highlight, encourage indifference to exploitation and suppression, and this legacy continues to be seen in discussions of poetry, the arts, and religion today.

### **I. A Long Shadow: The Influence of Chartism on Arnold**

Arnold's mature writing on poetry and religion responds to other, laboring-class and radical, ways of imagining the public roles of religion and literature, which he first encountered in Chartism. It seems odd to find a counterpoint to Arnold's later prose in Chartism, the British laboring-class movement that flourished from 1838–48 and linked a wide array of economic and religious concerns to a campaign for universal manhood suffrage and electoral reform. Nearly two decades separate the demise of Chartism from Arnold's first major work of cultural criticism, *Culture and Anarchy*, and nearly a quarter of a century stands between it and his most influential work on literature and religion, *Literature and Dogma* (1873). Yet Arnold's experience of 1848, the year of Europe's revolutions and the last great Chartist demonstration in London, cast a long shadow over his efforts to find in poetry and "poetic" religious language a bond of unity for the nation as it advanced, without revolution, into a more democratic future.

While working as a personal secretary in London, Arnold attended speeches at the Chartist convention and worriedly observed the last major Chartist mass gathering at Kennington Common on April 10, 1848.<sup>5</sup> In letters written in 1848, Arnold distances himself from the radicalism of his friend Arthur Henry Clough, hoping that the "feudal industrial class" in France "will be clean trodden under," and fearing that "the great mob in Trafalgar Square" portend "a wave of more than American vulgarity, moral, intellectual, and social, preparing to break over us."<sup>6</sup> Years later, Arnold's uneasiness over 1848 continued to shape his work, including the final lines of his most anthologized poem, "Dover Beach" (comp. 1851), which alludes to the "ignorant armies" of the 1840s that "clash[ed] by night" on the continent and demonstrated in British streets.<sup>7</sup> Arnold's reaction to Chartism and mid-century radicalism helps explain his subsequent tendency, in poetry, cultural criticism, and aesthetics, to strike a pose of aloof detachment from political passions and agendas.<sup>8</sup>

Chartist mass politics impressed into Arnold's imagination a vision of Britain threatened with self-destruction by its working classes. In March 1848, he told his sister that "such is the state of our masses that their movements now *can* only be brutal and plundering."<sup>9</sup> Twenty years later in *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold warns that the fever for "doing as one likes," the worship of individualism in a *laissez-faire* society, has spread beyond the Philistines and infected "immense numbers" of the laboring classes, whose passion for pursuing self-interest through mass agitation will "increase ... anarchy and social disintegration" (CPW V:123). Arnold began work on lectures that would become *Culture and Anarchy* only a year after witnessing the 1866 suffrage demonstrations that erupted into public vandalism in Hyde Park and Chester Square.<sup>10</sup> His condemnation of the protestors recalls his earlier private comments about the Chartists. In a passage from the original conclusion to *Culture and Anarchy*, judiciously removed in the second edition, Arnold prefaces his denunciation of "monster-processions in the streets and forcible irruptions into the parks" by praising a remark in one of his father's letters (CPW V:223): "As for rioting, the old Roman way of dealing with *that* is always the right one; flog the rank and file, and fling the ringleaders from the Tarpeian Rock!" (CPW V:526). If Dissenters and leaders of mass meetings will ideally someday be transformed into their better selves by national schools and churches, then, in the uncertain meantime, the

“State” must defend its “sacred” order by repressing what—from Arnold’s vantage point—is “vulgar, and unstable, and contentious” (CPW V:223–24).

## II. The People’s Advent: Chartist Poets and the Second Coming

Poetry was vital to Chartism: it was performed and quoted at mass gatherings, read aloud in public houses, widely distributed in Chartist newspapers, and published by many of the movement’s national and local leaders.<sup>11</sup> Although Arnold’s work does not often directly engage Chartist poetry, he was aware in 1848 of his friend Clough’s responsiveness to Chartist verse, and Chartist poetry had a long afterlife, continuing to be published in anthologies and receiving renewed interest after the revival of socialism in the 1880s.<sup>12</sup> Arnold’s *Empedocles upon Etna* (1852) evasively alludes to Thomas Cooper’s well-known Chartist epic *The Purgatory of Suicides* (1845),<sup>13</sup> and as late as the 1870s, Arnold quotes for his own ends a popular poem associated with Chartism (CPW VII:71). Thus Arnold was conscious of the strikingly different use of poetry by Chartists and working-class activists as he developed his own vision of poetry and its social role.

Poetry granted the ideologically and geographically scattered Chartists a sense of individual and collective “agency” by encouraging them to imagine “a radically reconstituted social order.”<sup>14</sup> To do so, Chartist poems and hymns drew upon the widespread use of Christian language in Chartist camp meetings, non-institutional religious services, and Chartist churches.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the only surviving copy of a Chartist hymnal intended for such meetings, *The National Chartist Hymn Book*, contains a hymn that reworks the tentative prophecy at the end of Shelley’s sonnet “England in 1819,” where Shelley portrays England’s corrupt establishment as “graves from which a glorious Phantom *may* / Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.”<sup>16</sup> The Chartist hymn reclaims from Shelley’s uncertain “*may*” the “Burst” of apocalyptic illumination, grounding its certainty in Christ’s resurrected victory over his oppressors: “Hail glorious morn! when Christ arose, / And *burst* the fetters of the tomb.” Christ’s bursting from the tomb is tied to an innate longing for freedom, “the *burstings* of the soul” that “kings, and priests, and tyrants join / To crush.”<sup>17</sup> The hymn thereby turns “the resurrection of Christ” into an “analogue of the human desire for freedom and a guarantee of its eventual realization.”<sup>18</sup> Recalling St. Paul’s claim in Romans 8 that by the power and love of the “risen” Christ (8:34) believers will be “conquerors” of “persecution . . . peril, [and] sword” (8:35), the hymn’s third stanza asserts, “Nor fear, nor sword, nor dungeons vile, / Shall quench the ever-burning spark” of truth that prompts “the burstings of the” freedom-aspiring “soul.” The final two stanzas affirm that this indwelling spark of truth will catch fire in “All men” as the Chartists act in the confidence of Christ’s “glorious victory”: “Then follow him—The Truth—your Head, / Demand your Charter, and be free.” Christ’s resurrection inaugurates the potential and paves the way for collective human action to be realized in secular time. The hymn’s verses seek to channel this potential into Chartist meetings, where the attainment of Chartism’s “goals was” often portrayed “in the light of the Second Coming.”<sup>19</sup>

Even after the Charter’s defeat in April 1848, identification of Christ’s resurrection and advent with collective political agency persisted in Chartist poetry, as shown in Gerald Massey’s 1849 newspaper poem “The People’s Advent.” Massey equates human freedom and brotherhood with the transformation of creation at Christ’s return. Here, however, the people act as Christ, empowered “within” by “God” and by previous martyrs of freedom, whose “thought” and “deeds” charge their memories like “live lightning” that awaits resurrected release in action. A radical rupture with the past—the advent of humanity as a liberated “People”—will be at once the result of “God’s own endeavour” and the contingent fulfillment of human aspirations and actions whose force accumulates across secular time.<sup>20</sup>

### III. Bringing in the Cultural Kingdom: The Bible and Burial Service as Poetry

Like the Chartists, many other nineteenth-century, working-class radicals grounded their politics in forms of Christian faith, often Nonconformist.<sup>21</sup> Yet in an 1876 lecture to Anglican clergy, Arnold implies that the “leading part” of the working classes is losing its religion and is “simply zealous about social and political questions” (CPW VIII:71). Here Arnold extends a hermeneutical strategy developed in response to Chartism, by which middle- and upper-class commentators ignored “any genuinely Christian motivation” in radical activists, since this might legitimate demands for immediate and far-reaching changes to the “public order.”<sup>22</sup> As Arnold remarks elsewhere, “Politics are a good thing, and religion is a good thing; but they make a fractious mixture” (CPW VI:104). The supposed godlessness of working-class leaders lends urgency to Arnold’s view that the Church of England is “estrang[ed] from the working classes” because it caters “to the propertied and satisfied classes ... preaching submission, and reserving transformation in general for the other side of the grave” (CPW VIII:71). Yet, he says, the vanguard of the working classes demand “a future on earth, not up in the sky” (CPW VIII:71). This spells upheaval, unless middle-class Dissenters and the working classes can be persuaded to embrace the established Church, reconceived not as a Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, but as “a great national society for the promotion of what is commonly called *goodness*” (CPW VIII:65), an advocate of “*the kingdom of God ... here on earth*” (CPW VIII:76).

If, in seeking to advance the kingdom of God on earth, Arnold partially coincides with Chartist poets, he markedly differs from them in his use of biblical language about the resurrection and second coming. Arnold’s first major effort in this direction was *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), in which he labors to rescue St. Paul’s writings from their distortion into proof texts for favorite Protestant doctrines, such as justification by faith. The result is “a machinery of covenants, conditions, bargains, and parties-contractors, such as could have proceeded from no one but the born ... man of business, British or American” (CPW VI:14). Similarly, continues Arnold, Dissenters treat the Bible as a policy book for “church-polity and church-management” (CPW VI:122), and this fuels their sectarian protest against any legislation that seems to favor the Church of England or grant too much liberty to Catholics, so “that the State is required to frame its legislation in consideration of them” (CPW VI:116). Arnold’s campaign against anarchy requires that he deliver the Bible from Puritan hermeneutics, which in his view propel middle-class sectarianism and alienate the skeptical working classes, thereby preventing both classes from receiving the Bible as poetic language that can enable them to die to their supposedly lower class-based selves and rise into tolerant, better selves able to partake in a shared national Church and a more harmonious society of the future.

Arnold labors to replace the British Protestant image of Paul as the great defender of justification by faith with the image of Paul as a spiritually inspired eastern prose poet, in line with the Eurocentric discourse of late-nineteenth-century Orientalist philology and comparative religion.<sup>23</sup> Paul, says Arnold, shares the “Hebrew genius” for the “poetic” rather than the “scientific” and philosophical fields of inquiry supposedly more innate to the “Greeks” and Western European cultures (CPW VI:21), and he therefore “Orientalises,” or uses vivid figures (CPW VI:22). “His language is, much of it, eastern language, imaginative language” (CPW VI:69), rooted in his primary experience of God as the “source of the moral order” and the “divine power from which all life and wholesome energy proceed” (CPW VI:37). Arnold relies on this Orientalist image of Paul to reinterpret the stronghold of British Protestantism, the Epistle to the Romans:

The three cardinal points in Paul's theology are not ... those commonly assigned by Puritanism, *calling, justification, sanctification*; but ... *dying with Christ, resurrection from the dead, growing into Christ*. And ... the essential sense in which Paul in his Epistle to the Romans uses the term *resurrection* is that of a rising ... from the death of obedience to selfish impulse, to the life of obedience to the eternal moral order;—in Christ's case first, as the pattern for us to follow; in the believer's case afterwards, as following Christ's pattern through identifying himself with him.

(CPW VI:56)

This rests on the claim that for Paul "*resurrection from the dead*" has "no essential connection with physical death" (CPW VI:50), and on the assumption that as Paul matured spiritually, "he came to think ... more and more of a gradual inward transformation of the world by a conformity like Christ's to the will of God, than of a Messianic advent" (CPW VI:43). Crucially, Arnold grants the "primary" importance of Romans chapter 8 to "Paul's line of thought," but largely sidesteps it hermeneutically (CPW VI:57). This chapter is the climax of the central section of Romans, in which Paul proclaims that God's people will be bodily raised to share in the Messiah's just reign over a creation they will help to renew, a destiny anticipated in their transformed lives now.<sup>24</sup> In skirting this passage of scripture, Arnold avoids the challenge it implies to all existing social orders. By contrast, the Chartist hymn I discussed earlier seems more responsive to this part of Romans when it finds in Christ's resurrection and reign a reason for confidence amidst immediate political struggle.

Arnold shows disdain for such apocalyptic and messianic elements of the Bible. Praising Paul's supposedly "spiritualised" application of "Jewish language" about "the Messiah's kingdom," Arnold denigrates its crude display "in the Apocalypse" (CPW VI:41–42). He dismisses interest in Revelation's visions as signs of the "materialism" of "the multitude" (CPW VI:71). Later, in *Literature and Dogma*, he says that "those who use the Bible most unintelligently have a peculiar fondness for the apocalyptic and phantasmagoric parts of it" (CPW VI:283). Here Arnold points to the Rev. John Cumming (1807–81), a popular evangelical preacher who held that the last vial of the Apocalypse was to be poured out from 1848 to 1867 (CPW VI:478n); but he might also have in mind the Chartists and radicals who in those same years invoked the resurrection and Second Coming to mobilize Christian political reform, as had a long line of diverse radical English prophets and poets before them. In stringently separating Paul's inward identification with Christ from the world-changing mythos Paul shares with the author of Revelation, Arnold limits the degree to which the "poetry" of the Bible might be given immediate political and social application by Puritans and "the multitude."

Arnold characterizes the apocalyptic and messianic elements of Paul still attractive to the "multitude" as relics of a pre-rational Hebraic mindset. Yet, when prophesying that a more discerning use of Paul and the Bible will prevail, Arnold resuscitates the language of resurrection: "The doctrine of St. Paul will arise out of the tomb where for centuries it has lain buried; it will edify the church of the future. It will have the consent of happier generations, the applause of less superstitious ages" (CPW VI:71). Arnold is, to borrow his own unfortunate words, "Judaising," trusting in "the talismanic virtues of a verbal sanction from" Scripture (CPW VI:60). He supports his prophecy with the secularized "talismanic virtue" of biblical language, what he elsewhere calls "the force and charm of poetry" (CPW VIII:334). Properly interpreted, Arnold increasingly asserts in his religious prose, the Bible and forms of Christian worship will become the poetic charm, the magic, for connecting modern consciousness with the inwardly experienced eternal power for good, enabling death to self and class on the gradual path to a better social order.



By extracting Paul's "personal experience" (CPW VI:60) from Paul's "Judaizing," Arnold tries to avoid what theologians have called "the scandal of particularity." The idea that God could be uniquely connected to the life of a chosen people and a crucified Judean prophet is inimical to Arnold's search for a "poetic" biblical language that, cleansed of Jewish fanaticism, will raise people out of the accidents of history—classes, sects, and parties—into inward conformity with their better selves. A related revolt against particular identities or peoples who might stand in the way of the cosmopolitan "infallible Catholic Church," or "the whole human race, in its onward progress" (CPW VI:161), quickens Arnold's desire for good poetry to fill "the soul" of a working-class child with love for "high and noble principles of action" that will immunize her to her class's penchant for mass demonstrations.<sup>25</sup> Arnold repeatedly portrays the Jewishness of the Bible and its authors as an example of dangerous provinciality, a tendency in any group of people to become locked in their "narrow, rigid, sectarian, unintelligent, [and] impracticable temper, their heads full of some impossible politics of their own" (CPW IX:18).

Preachers of culture must fight this Judaic defect, guided by critical tact "insensibly" formed in their "mind" as if it were the mysterious gift of an unacknowledged Holy Spirit; spread through state-supported schools and churches, this tact will lift others into a more humane—more human—society, "without any turmoil of controversial reasonings" (CPW VI:168). Arnold's way of rescuing the gospel of literary education from the scandal of particularity, when also shorn of his own demand for a national Church, was useful to defenders of the "Arnoldian replacement theory" in the twentieth century. This included members of the 1921 Newbolt Committee, who promoted English poetry as a means of spiritual grace and national unity, and literary critics such as F. R. Leavis, who touted literature as a redemptive escape from the evils of mechanized mass society.<sup>26</sup>

In 1876, Arnold published an essay defending statutes that required an Anglican priest and Prayer Book for burials in Anglican graveyards. He resisted those who wished to permit all religious groups to conduct burials on these sites with their own ministers. In taking this stance, Arnold reveals the deep congruity between his emphasis on the inward, charming work of the Bible and Christian liturgy and his belief in the nonsectarian state's power to discipline citizens' bodies, rituals, and collective actions into displays of public order. Public order is Arnold's standard for deciding between competing Christian burial rituals. He portrays burial rites as "a kind of schooling" for citizens in the "pure, noble, and elevated" style of speech and procession that preserves an image "of national character" (CPW VIII:91). This image of "deliberate public consent" (CPW VIII:96) would, Arnold claims, be destroyed by "ignorant and fanatical"—and largely middle- and lower-class—"sects . . . parad[ing] themselves" through "churchyards" (CPW VIII:97) with their spontaneous "speech-making and prayer-making" (CPW VIII:104). Such spontaneous speech-making, it would seem, could all too easily cultivate a habit of ranting and assembling in public. By contrast, for Arnold, son of a beloved master of Rugby and Oxford don, it seems obvious that the "noble form" of the Anglican burial service is "consecrated by use and sentiment" (CPW VIII:104), offering supposedly universal Christian moral truth to "Englishmen" in ways that "suit and unite the English nation" (CPW VIII:94).

With a few moderate reforms, Arnold concludes, the state can rely on the burial service of the Book of Common Prayer to charm burials into performances of national, spiritual, and ethical unity, even as contentious theological differences are reserved for "private places" (CPW VIII:91). Then, despite all variations of belief and skepticism among individuals, the Prayer Book's declaration that "'We commit his body to the ground in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life'" can "affirm our sure and certain hope, that for *man*

a resurrection to eternal life there is" (CPW VIII:104). That is, this poetic liturgy could be accepted as "certain" in a more literal sense by those still clinging to hope of an afterlife or second coming, but also by those "certain" of the inward sense promoted by Arnold: the ethical resurrection into moral life through identification with Christ's example, and, in the long run, the kingdom of God realized in just societies on earth. Leaving witnesses to sort out their theological responses in private, the British state could forge a public liturgy that represented citizens to themselves as a national society passing together from birth to death in patient hope of a better future, without riot and with apparent consensus.

#### IV. Afterword: The Inward Turn after Arnold

Andrew Carnegie displayed a "great need for moral and humanitarian justification of his life," and he found a tellingly powerful aid in Arnold's friendship and writings. In "The Gospel of Wealth" (1889), Carnegie uses Arnoldian terms to describe religion as a "beautiful and enchanting realm," a "magic circle" that sustains "an inner life more precious than the external."<sup>27</sup> Carnegie might have had psychological and economic incentives for regarding the external life, especially of his workers, as decidedly less important than the inner circle charmed by religion and the arts, and Arnold's statements could seem to leave the door open for this (mis)use of his ideas. By the time Arnold met Carnegie in 1883, Arnold had been promoting his own editions of Isaiah, first for working-class school children, and then for a general audience. In the prefaces, he claims that Isaiah's closing vision of "the world's salvation" (CPW VII:67) can be lifted from its Jewish context and applied to "universal history" so as to nourish readers' confidence in the "'good time coming,' for which we all of us long" (CPW VII:71). Quoting "The Good Time Coming," published in 1846 by Charles Mackay, a poet often associated with Chartism,<sup>28</sup> Arnold hopes that reading Isaiah will "extricate" working-class readers from their misery as their spirits are "animat[ed] and consol[ed]" by visions of a better future (CPW VII:72). Replacing heaven with a humanly constructed society, Arnold recalls a strategy common among Chartists and later radical activists. Yet instead of urging his readers to political action, he offers the vague comfort that society will organically and inevitably reform itself over time. He arguably practices what he condemned in Anglican clergy who "preach[ed] submission and reserv[ed] transformation in general for the other side of the grave" (CPW VIII:71).

In "The Gospel of Wealth," Carnegie effectively hands to private capitalists the role Arnold championed for the British state, urging capitalists to devote their surplus to cultivating the inner life of the nation by spreading sweetness and light. Donating an estimated \$350 million to institutions of art and education in his lifetime, Carnegie eagerly appropriated and privatized Arnold's mission of furthering culture's inward ministry, demonstrating how fluidly this schema could accommodate not only state but also corporate power.<sup>29</sup> In 1892, a year after Carnegie Hall opened, the Homestead Strikes erupted at Carnegie's Steel Company, with unions reeling, wages falling, and Carnegie's profits rising in its bloody aftermath.

The abiding tendency to associate the "essence" or "true" work of poetry and religion with inward spaces might play a role not entirely disconnected from the adaptability of Arnold's prose to Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth." The inward turn, poetry's "'Arnoldian' function ... of inculcating a broad-minded appreciation of the many-sided nature of truth," has come to be seen as an essential dimension of "'real' poetry" in ways that the collective, political, and action-oriented poetics represented by Chartism has not.<sup>30</sup> This view of the inward work of poetry coincides with the conviction, arguably still pervasive in the modern West, that high art and culture and their supporting institutions transcend any particular social or political concern.

Saddiyat Island (“Island of Happiness”), just off the coast of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, is an unfortunate case in point. There, N.Y.U. has constructed a new campus as part of its global network of academic centers on six continents, through which “students and faculty will circulate seamlessly” on their way to becoming “global citizens.”<sup>31</sup> The campus sits near new outposts of the Louvre and Guggenheim Museum, still under construction, so that the island represents a shiny new effort by Western institutes of art and culture to transplant (for the enjoyment of an elite) values of free expression and inquiry to a region where criticizing the government is a crime. Yet protests by international artists and reports by *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* indicate that workers on all three sites have endured conditions many would equate with modern-day slavery.<sup>32</sup> The experiences of “cosmopolitan” culture that N.Y.U. promises students in its global network, and the “shared universal” vision of art the Louvre Abu Dhabi guarantees its visitors, are advertised as inwardly enriching goods that conspicuously transcend the institutional, commercial, and bodily means by which they are made available.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, in the West and areas affected by Western values through globalization, inward experience is increasingly regarded as the authentic realm of modern spirituality, as opposed to loyalty to dogma, institutions, and communities. Assumptions about the inwardness of spirituality can encourage ignorance of the ways it is in fact shaped by institutional and commercial forces. Sociologist Bryan Turner claims that global expansion of capitalist consumerism, expressive individualism, and (especially digital) communications have created a competitive global spiritual marketplace “in which people try out religions rather like the way they try out a new fashion in handbags” and “[p]ious lifestyles are marketed by religious entrepreneurs who need to brand their products.”<sup>34</sup> One consequence of this development, Turner suggests, is that religion “as an agent of social change has been further compromised by the loss of any significant contrast between the sacred and the world,” as “religious groups” tend to adopt “the methods and values” of “the leisure industries.”<sup>35</sup>

Courtney Bender exposes the ease with which personal spirituality can unconsciously affirm aggressive ideologies and power structures. Bender analyzes a mystical experiences discussion group in Cambridge, Massachusetts that she attended on the eve of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The leader encouraged members to meditate and transport their spiritual light and love to people in Iraq. The “entire ritual,” notes Bender, “reproduced a spiritualized imperialism, in which those in the United States could travel quickly and effortlessly to other parts of the world, lift up ... ‘real’ women and children from the lock of spiritual and religious tyranny, enter into others’ hearts, and then return untouched to the familiar.” While pursuing apparently inward “spiritual self-formation,” these practitioners revealed their “entangle[ment] with ongoing American projects of political and cultural expansion.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet the inward turn need not always be co-opted by the interests or ideologies of the state and market. In *My Bright Abyss* (2013), the American poet Christian Wiman discusses his struggle to practice Christianity after a long period of estrangement. By subtitled his book *Meditation of a Modern Believer*, Wiman implies that his meditations are somehow representative of a *modern* experience of Christian faith in a lived environment that seems closed to transcendence: “Modern spiritual consciousness,” Wiman writes, “is predicated upon the fact that God is gone, and spiritual experience, for many of us, amounts mostly to an essential, deeply felt and necessary, but ultimately inchoate and transitory feeling of oneness or unity with existence.”<sup>37</sup>

Wiman partially agrees with Arnold, observing that poetry is often better than Christian doctrine at responding to quicksilver intuitions that pull one beyond this sense of a purely immanent, secular world.



We feel God in ... the coming and going of consciousness ... We are left with these fugitive instants of apprehension, in both senses of that word, which is one reason why poetry, which is designed not simply to arrest these instants but to integrate them into life, can be such a powerful aid to faith (28).

By contrast, the “equipment” of dogma feels “worn and inadequate” (117). Yet Wiman acknowledges that dogma could be necessary for “gather[ing] in” and sharing the visitations of divinity that penetrate modern consciousness (123). While Wiman suggests that contemporary Christians try using “poetry as liturgy,” he also calls for dialogue: “mystical experience needs some form of dogma in order not to dissipate into moments of spiritual intensity that are merely personal, and dogma needs regular infusions of unknowingness to keep from calcifying” (138). This does not require rereading Christian dogma as poetry, but seeking means for these languages to address and mingle with each other: “We need a poetics of belief, a language capacious enough to include a mystery that, ultimately, defeats it, and sufficiently intimate and inclusive to serve not only as individual expression but as communal need” (124).

Wiman indicates that at least some contemporary inheritors of the inward turn have found a way to agree and disagree with Arnold’s suggestion that “most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry” (CPW IX:161–62). Wiman suspects that artists and thinkers “outside of religious institutions” are finding a language more adequate for the lived subtleties of modern faith (124), but he does not feel this requires embarrassment with the particularity of dogmas and the communities through which they have had, and still have, their fitful evolution. Perhaps because of these assumptions, Wiman is more willing than Arnold to conclude that God is encountered “here in what appalls, offends, and degrades you, here in what activates and exacerbates all that you would call not-God” (121). Insofar as a creed points to a God who enters history to be crucified, it motivates the conviction that “God [is] not above or beyond or immune to human suffering, but in the very midst of it” (134). This conviction propels Wiman not only to share Arnoldian faith in poetry’s power to expose the deficiencies of utilitarian, profit-oriented modernity, but also to attempt politically oriented poems of the kind that Arnold would exclude from great poetry’s “high seriousness” (CPW IX:177). Wiman’s “Country in Search of a Symbol,” while not one of his best poems, nonetheless seeks to balance critical distance with recognition of complicity (through the first person), as it confronts his nation’s corporatism, international aggression, and environmental destruction: “We gave our name to a new disease. / We creatured nature with our cries.”<sup>38</sup> Wiman’s meditations and poems suggest, however incompletely, that the inward turn encouraged by Arnold, for all its faults, can empower collective life and sharpen critical resistance to political and economic oppression.

## Notes

- 1 Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1960–1977), IX:161–62. All quotations of Arnold’s prose are from *The Complete Prose Works*, and are cited in the text in the following format: (CPW volume: page).
- 2 Michael Kaufmann, “The Religious, The Secular, and Literary Studies: Rethinking the Secularization Narratives in Histories of the Profession,” *New Literary History* 38.4 (2007): 616.
- 3 Matthew Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools, 1852–1882*, Introd. F.S. Marvin, new ed. (London: Wyman & Sons, 1908): 17; hereafter *Reports*.
- 4 Park Honan, *Matthew Arnold: A Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1981), 341.

- 5 Matthew Arnold to Mary Penrose Arnold, April 12, 1848, in *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Cecil Lang, 6 vols. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996–2001), I:101; Antony Harrison, *The Cultural Production of Matthew Arnold* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), 9–11.
- 6 Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, February 24, 1848, *Letters*, I.82; Arnold to Mary Penrose Arnold, March 7, 1848, in *Letters*, I.91.
- 7 Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach,” in *Matthew Arnold*, ed. Miriam Allott and Robert H. Super (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), I. 37.
- 8 Harrison, *The Cultural Production*, 14–26; Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (1993; repr., London: Routledge, 2003), 204–07.
- 9 Matthew Arnold to Jane Martha Arnold, March 10, 1848, in *Letters*, I.94.
- 10 Honan, *Matthew Arnold*, 341.
- 11 Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6–7.
- 12 Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 190–95; Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism*, 38–40.
- 13 Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 210.
- 14 Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism*, 28, 23.
- 15 Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 195–228.
- 16 Percy Bysshe Shelley, “England in 1819,” in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002), II 13–14.
- 17 *The National Chartist Hymn Book* (Rochdale: National Chartist Association, n.d.), Todmorden Public Library, Todmorden, UK, in *From Weaver to Web: Online Visual Archive of Calderdale History*, <https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/wtw/search/controlservlet?PagelD=Detail&DocId=102253> (accessed June 1, 2014).
- 18 Mike Sanders, “‘God is our guide! our cause is just!’ The National Chartist Hymn Book and Victorian Hymnody,” *Victorian Studies* 54.4 (2012): 699.
- 19 Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit*, 207.
- 20 Gerald Massey, “The People’s Advent,” *Minor Victorian Poets and Authors*, [http://gerald-massey.org.uk/massey/dpm\\_poems\\_and\\_ballads\\_part3.htm#152](http://gerald-massey.org.uk/massey/dpm_poems_and_ballads_part3.htm#152) (accessed June 1, 2014).
- 21 Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian England: How Secular Was the Working Class?* (Bangor: Headstart History, 1993), 36–42.
- 22 Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit*, 228.
- 23 Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 20–21.
- 24 N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 256–59.
- 25 *Reports*, 200–201.
- 26 Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture: A Study of English and Its Teachers* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1975), 69–77; Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27–29.
- 27 Mary G. McBride, “Matthew Arnold and Andrew Carnegie: The Religion of Culture and the Gospel of Wealth,” in *Matthew Arnold in His Time and Ours: Centenary Essays*, ed. Clinton Machann and Forrest D. Burt (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 60; quoted in McBride, 62.
- 28 Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism*, 260–66.
- 29 McBride, “Arnold and Carnegie,” 64–67.
- 30 Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism*, 12, 29.
- 31 “The Global Network University,” *NYU Abu Dhabi*, <http://nyuad.nyu.edu/en/about/global-network.html> (accessed August 29, 2014).
- 32 Nicolai Ourssoff, “Abu Dhabi Guggenheim Faces Protest,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2011; Holland Cotter, “Door to Art of the World, Barely Ajar,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2014; Glenn Carrick and David Batty, “In Abu Dhabi, they call it Happiness Island. But for the migrant workers, it is a place of misery,” *Guardian*, December 21, 2013; David Batty, “Conditions for Abu Dhabi’s migrant workers ‘shame the west,’” *Guardian*, December 21, 2013; David Batty, “Campaigners criticize UAE for failing to tackle exploitation of migrant workers,” *Guardian*, December 22, 2013; Ariel Kaminer and Sean O’Driscoll, “Workers at N.Y.U.’s Abu Dhabi Site Faced Harsh Conditions,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2014.

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- 35 Ibid., 154–55.
- 36 Courtney Bender, “Things and Their Entanglements,” in *The Post-Secular in Question*, 65–67.
- 37 Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 121.
- 38 Christian Wiman, “Country in Search of a Symbol,” in *Every Riven Thing* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), ll 19–20.

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## 2

# RELIGION AND THE RISE OF ENGLISH STUDIES

*Dayton Haskin*

### I.

The phrase “the rise of English” could be employed to name any number of phenomena. To native speakers of English it might suggest a narrative that celebrates the unprecedented global currency of their language. In the narrower academic world, however, for at least half a century it has served to name a historical development so successful that its principal outcome is assumed to have been in place from time out of mind: the making of literature in English into a school subject. That universities now offer courses devoted to vernacular literature seems utterly natural. Such courses routinely proceed as if there were nothing anomalous about re-addressing to persons making their way into adulthood works that were long ago composed in vastly different circumstances. Few students know anything about when and how English literature began to be considered a worthy part of a curriculum leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree.<sup>1</sup> Even their instructors are likely to regard as of merely antiquarian interest the history of the pedagogical innovations by which English was made into a respectable academic subject.

The story of origins, even if it is barely known, inevitably bears on the self-understanding of those engaged in English Studies, whatever they judge their current purposes to be. This essay means to probe the prevailing story about the rise of English. The standard narrative, besides tending to celebrate the displacement of the study of the Latin and Greek classics, was framed in ways congruent with the assumption that in the progress of civilization “religion” would largely disappear. This feature of the story warrants rethinking.

Since the publication of D. J. Palmer’s book of 1965, *The Rise of English*, the account furnished there about how Oxford University came to institute a School of English has been made the basis for a generalized narrative about the origins of an academic discipline. Told in relation to England by Palmer and, more recently, in relation to North America by Robert Scholes, it re-reflects the trope of progress with the idea of organic maturation.<sup>2</sup> Palmer recounts the ways in which the subject, once it was rendered worthy of the university, eclipsed the earlier promise of an “English” that would provide a poor man’s classics adaptable for the likes of foreigners, workers, and women. Both he and Scholes (in *The Rise and Fall of English*) organize their materials into a plot that emphasizes that many of the earliest instructors in English literature were clergymen who confounded the subject with religion. Both duly tell how other

obstacles (put up by stodgy old classicists in England, for instance, and by denominational overseers in the U.S.) were overcome. Both stories climax when the discipline, having developed disinterested protocols that freed it from biases inherent in traditional religion, achieved maturity. These features of the narrative long served to establish boundaries within which leading professionals in the field were expected to operate and to reassure them that theirs was an autonomous discipline.<sup>3</sup>

The most widely disseminated version of “the rise of English” is found in the opening chapter of Terry Eagleton’s *Literary Theory*, where the author deftly couches in a hypothetical an influential claim about why literary study expanded so rapidly and dramatically in the nineteenth century: “If one were asked to provide a single explanation” for how it came to be that people study English literature, “one could do worse than reply: ‘the failure of religion.’”<sup>4</sup> Eagleton’s account gives little consideration to other grounds for the spread of literacy in the period. Nor does it acknowledge that the word “religion” carries many more senses than the historically specific one that prevailed in Victorian England. It ignores the possibility that the purposes for which English literature was made a legitimate object of study in the Academy could have differed significantly in various locales. Proposing that literature was made to replace religion at a moment when “every creed” was “shaken” and every “dogma” “questionable,” Eagleton slips easily into one of the hallmark linguistic displacements employed by his predecessors in relating the story, allowing that Matthew Arnold might be regarded as the movement’s patron saint.

It is curious that the so-called “Arnoldian replacement theory,” which relies upon a foundational binary opposition between literature and religion, should have proved durable long after similarly influential binaries were deconstructed in gender and race studies. Observing this lag, Michael Kaufmann has called for a thoroughgoing re-examination of the origins of literary study in the Academy, one that does not presuppose that the categories of the religious and the secular are stable and the demarcation between them clear. Already in the late nineteenth century, when “English” became a minor but compulsory subject in the London University B.A. examination and in the colleges of North America came increasingly to be integral to attaining a Bachelor of Arts degree, the Academy itself had begun to redefine “religion” to open up the study of phenomena outside Christianity and Judaism. Religion, contrasted by some with theology, came gradually to constitute an academic subject in its own right. Today, what we call religion, far from occupying the merely marginal spaces to which the standard narrative about the rise of English relegates it, has neither disappeared nor been replaced by Arnold’s “poetry.” Beyond this, from Lisbon to Nairobi to Singapore, universities have been creating new programs of English Studies with no thought of finding in England’s literature a substitute for Christianity or for religion generally.

There are many reasons to re-examine the complex relations of literature and religion in the period when vernacular literary study was incorporated into higher education. The preceding essay by Joshua King makes plain that the assertion that English studies emerged into a vacuum created by “the failure of religion” involves a highly selective appropriation of Arnold’s authority. Chris Baldick has shown, moreover, that it was not until after the First World War that Arnold was made to play a large role in constructing the claim.<sup>5</sup> Arnold had helped to create a rationale for supposing that the study of English literature could be understood not simply as supplementing the Bible. The study of the Bible for its “poetry” entailed a significant refinement of Protestantism’s foundational self-representation as having eclipsed Judaism and Catholicism. He demonstrated how biblical literature and Christian ritual might be emptied of a “fleshly” or “Judaizing” literalism that had yielded dogma. There is no doubt that this model was important to many persons who felt that they had “lost” their religion but

loved literature, including the literature of the Bible. This kind of story is movingly told in the autobiographies, for instance, of Edmund Gosse (*Father and Son*, 1907) and Logan Pearsall Smith (*Unforgotten Years*, 1938). It would be worth looking into how personal narratives such as theirs were made to contribute to a general theory about the social utility of literary study. As important as literature was to those who looked to it for the challenges, comforts, and moral guidance that they did not find in religion, it also offered to others, unaccustomed to accepting a ready separation of the sacred and the profane, a genuine enhancement to living religiously.

## II.

To develop an account of the rise of English that respects the myriad means by which it was brought about will require something like an “archeology of the classroom.”<sup>6</sup> I borrow this phrase from Caroline Winterer, whose investigation of the curricular innovations wrought by classical scholars and teachers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offers a model. Familiar as English Studies are, the canons for recognizing excellence in the discipline have directed scholarly inquiry away from evaluating the effects that teaching literature has on students. Specialists, valuing original contributions to scholarship, often deign mere pedagogy unworthy of historical investigation. Historians of higher education have taken a far greater interest in the development of graduate research programs than in what went on in the undergraduate classrooms where most people make serious acquaintance with many authors for the first time. Existing scholarship offers large abstractions: English studies rose due to a failure of religion, they contributed to the creation of a professional class, they provided an elite with cultural capital.<sup>7</sup> These broad claims discourage looking into how, concretely, lecturers and the makers of textbooks managed to induct English literature into higher education. They also suppress curiosity about the experiences of students *qua* students, which have received relatively scant attention in histories of the discipline.

To carry out a study of how English literature came to be taught is more complicated than we might suppose. Productive investigation of the cultural work done in the classroom starts with openness to discerning contingencies. It benefits from attending to local circumstances. While English studies were made institutionally legitimate earlier in North America than in England, and colleges developed programs independently of one another, only a few institutions took sufficient interest in their own curricular innovations to preserve relevant materials. Some archives hold annotated textbooks, notebooks, and essays and memoirs written by students, professors’ class-notes, correspondence that touches on teaching and learning, diaries, and the like.

The richest trove of materials is found in the same geographical locale where religion first became the object of university study. In James Turner’s recent study of the origins of the scholarly study of religion in America, the starting point is similar to Palmer’s in *The Rise of English*: Turner probes the reasons that it took so long for such study to enter the Academy.<sup>8</sup> From Antiquity onwards, although Christian and Jewish apologetics had been prolific and had given rise to schools of divinity, until the later nineteenth century there was no comparative academic approach to religion, that is, to “religion” as referring to many of the myriad phenomena with which the several essays in this volume engage. While acknowledging that Max Müller began studying religion at Oxford in the 1870s, Turner charts early academic treatments of the subject in the U.S., where in 1873 Boston University’s appointment of a “professor of comparative religion” apparently marks the first creation of this sort of academic position. Crucially, he emphasizes that New England Unitarianism provided a climate conducive to the development of the new discipline. It



bracketed out the assumption that Christ is central to religion, which involved a commitment that discouraged interest in spiritual phenomena that were not recognizably Christian. It held out the possibility that non-Christian materials might offer supplements to the Bible and promote progress in religion. In particular the Transcendentalists cultivated an interest in religious traditions that had three common characteristics, two of which bore profound affinities with the objects of literary studies: ancient scriptural texts, historic longevity, and geographic range. The approach was rooted in an assumption that religion was a universal phenomenon. The religions first judged apt for scrutiny in the university were therefore those that presented familiar characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

The loosely Unitarian ethos of Harvard University proved especially hospitable to devising various ways of studying and teaching both religion and literature. Allegiance to the institution's roots in Puritanism had long since been repressed. The dogmatic features of Christianity were quietly downplayed. In the 1870s, the Overseers altered traditional policies and boldly hired the agnostic Charles Eliot Norton to create a new Department of Fine Arts. Compulsory attendance at daily prayers ceased in the 1880s. By the mid-1890s, somewhat belatedly compared with other colleges,<sup>10</sup> Harvard resolved to make its English Department the largest and most influential in the U.S. The growth of "English" owed a great deal to the University's president, Charles W. Eliot, who liked to think that his institution was more responsible than any other for the radical change in the principal medium through which higher education was increasingly being conducted: in a modern university a new set of disciplines coded in the vernacular was dislodging the classical languages and mathematics from their dominant position. Books in English were central to the enterprise. It was becoming possible—and Harvard set the decisive precedent—to receive the A.B. degree without studying any Latin or Greek.

The transformation by which English became the default medium of instruction brought new prestige to the language itself. More influentially than anyone else, Eliot promoted the idea that there was a reciprocal relationship between the language in which university education was now to be carried out and a body of literary works that was larger, more diverse, and more aesthetically accomplished than any other in world history. Greek and Homer, Eliot insisted, are "infantile" compared to English and Shakespeare. "It cannot be doubted that English literature is beyond all comparison the amplest, most various, and most splendid literature which the world has seen." Although the study of this literature had begun earlier in Scotland and in India, Eliot envisaged for it a more integral role in American education, where there would now be unprecedented opportunities for teaching young people to deploy the "tongue of nations which are preeminent in the world by force of character, enterprise, and wealth, and whose political and social institutions have a higher moral interest and greater promise than any which mankind has hitherto invented."<sup>11</sup>

When Eliot published these views fifteen years into his presidency, courses on English literature were surprisingly under-subscribed at Harvard.<sup>12</sup> The only literature courses that to his mind were attracting a satisfactory number of students were those on Shakespeare and on nineteenth-century literature. Taking a risk, he decided to augment the English faculty and to increase dramatically the range of course offerings. In the event, Eliot and Francis Child sought to exploit the interest in Child's course on the Bard and to direct the students' attention to literature from the Elizabethan period. "Elizabethan" literature (understood as extending into the seventeenth century) was midway between the periods in the history of the language that required a heavily philological approach and the contemporary period in which students were inclined to take an interest almost by default. Studying Elizabethan literature required instructors and students to confront linguistic instability. Indirectly, it often entailed their coming into contact with materials connected with religion.



In 1887, a new brochure for students announced that the Department would hereafter be teaching two different kinds of literature courses. The first was epitomized in the sort that Child had been teaching: “the method of study” was “a minutely critical examination of a limited number of works” geared especially to illustrating the development of the language in works by Chaucer, Spenser, Bacon, and Milton. A new set of courses, listed under the rubric of Group Two, would eventually “attempt to cover the field of English Literature” from about 1600 to “the present time.”<sup>13</sup> The new Group Two courses actually on offer featured the name of the Bard in their titles, even though none of his works appeared on their syllabi. English 14 was called “The Drama (exclusive of Shakspeare) from the Miracle Plays to the Restoration.” English 15 was called “English Literature (exclusive of Milton) from Shakspeare to Dryden.” (“Shakspeare” was the preferred spelling at Harvard well into the twentieth century.)

Within a generation, both courses proved extraordinarily influential. English 15, taught by LeBaron Russell Briggs, was the first university course in the world to present John Donne, rather than Milton, as the most influential English writer of the seventeenth century. English 14, invented by Barrett Wendell and taken over three years later by G. P. Baker, became the country’s best-known drama course and remained so well into the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> For both courses, there are to be found in the archives—not only at Harvard but at other institutions where students of Briggs and Wendell and Baker went on to teach—unusually ample traces of how they were taught. In the remainder of the essay, as an earnest of what an archeology of the classroom can contribute to developing a richer picture of the emergence of English studies in higher education, I mean to explore some ways in which the relations between religion and literature were negotiated in Harvard’s drama course. Wendell, despite teaching a Group Two course (which was supposed to cover literature after 1600), began with the origins of native English drama, the better to show where Shakespeare came from and what he had to work with. He started with the medieval miracle plays and the moralities. Compared with what can be reconstructed about how these plays were taught elsewhere, we can say that Wendell’s teaching of them was not characteristic. The archival data show that at Harvard the standard narrative about the rise of English studies was already taking shape in the design and execution of Wendell’s course.

### III.

Harvard’s Group One and Group Two represent, respectively, courses with a philological orientation and courses with a historical one. The way that the brochure articulated the difference between them helps to clarify an aspect of how Wendell maneuvered between religion and literature in a seminal course that was taken by men who went on to teach at Dartmouth and Oberlin, Brown and Chicago, Columbia and Yale (to name a few institutions that hired students whose English 14 class-notes are extant). While both kinds of courses gave the instructor a platform, those labeled Group Two, meant to provide coverage of periods, invited (but did not necessitate) organization according to a narrative. The Group One courses stuck closely to the central task of trying to establish just what the language in a given passage means. The Group Two courses promoted more ambitious theorizing, about cultural periods and the dynamics of history.

When Harvard instituted its first Group Two courses, there was nothing unusual in the fact that the lecturers’ own views would color their selection, arrangement, and presentation of literary texts. Although this was not a conspicuous feature of Child’s teaching, it was commonplace elsewhere. But the new goal of providing discrete courses that would contribute to “cover[ing] ... the field ... to the present time” set in motion a larger collaborative agenda that

at once inflected every, and transcended any, individual course. Temporally defined starting and ending points signaled pieces that fit within a grand narrative larger than any course could begin to exhaust. When “[t]aken together,” the department’s brochure promised, the Group Two offerings would give students a picture of the whole of English literature. In only a few years these courses became so numerous that no student could take them all. President Eliot discouraged undergraduate specialization, and no curricular concentrations in one field or major subjects were to be defined while he was president. (“Majors” began to emerge in U.S. colleges in the first decade of the twentieth century.) As a concession, in 1894 the Department added to its offerings English 28, “History and Development of English Literature in outline.” It was an acknowledgment that everywhere English literature was now a subject being studied piecemeal and that students needed some orientation to a larger whole. Unlike Wendell’s English 14, however, the new course, taught by four or five different instructors, provided no controlling narrative to which authors and their works were made to contribute.

Something similar may be said of Briggs’s English 15 (the Seventeenth Century), but not of English 14 (the drama). Briggs played host to a succession of writers, first the poets, then the prose writers. He delighted in calling attention to what later seventeenth-century poets owed to Donne and to Ben Jonson.<sup>15</sup> Wendell organized his treatment of the predecessors and contemporaries of the Bard within a particular chronological framework. Beginning with the anonymous medieval dramas enabled him to fit each play on which he delivered his impressions into a story about how the genre began, developed, climaxed (with Marlowe and Shakespeare), and then decayed. Shakespeare was the elephant in Wendell’s classroom. Every play was to be measured in relation to the Bard’s achievements.

By contrast, Milton may have seemed to Briggs’s students to have never written a word. Ostensibly, this other twin pillar of English literature was omitted because his output would have dwarfed everything else. There was, in any event, already a Group One half-course devoted to a “minutely critical examination” of Milton’s minor poems. If any part of *Paradise Lost* came into the ken of Harvard students, it was only the first two books, treated in the waning days of the term. The political and religious energies in Milton’s writings were successfully muted. The neglect of Milton’s major poems, all on biblical subjects, was consistent with a nearly pervasive reticence among the English faculty when it came to literature that was connected with religion.

That by the 1880s such a reticence, regarded as manly behavior, was well in place is revealed in some remarkable documents found among Wendell’s papers. Wendell had been hired as an assistant to mark essays for composition teachers. The principal experience of teaching literature that he brought to his course on drama he had gained at the new institute for women (later, Radcliffe College). Child entrusted to him the teaching of Shakespeare at “the Annex,” and Wendell took the course in an altogether new direction. Whereas Child’s year-long “Shakspere” for Harvard men met three hours a week and covered five or six plays in “minute” detail, Wendell’s met for one hour a week, each time taking up a different play,<sup>16</sup> on which the lecturer would give “the girls” his “impressions.” We know both that Wendell referred to the students as “the girls” and that he delighted in proclaiming his status as a mere amateur who did not descend to doing “drudge-work” because, after each week’s meeting, he recorded in a notebook the gist of what he had said and, sometimes, how the students had reacted.<sup>17</sup> It was on the day that he lectured on *Richard III* that his jottings reveal what expectations he had learned, from his own Harvard education, to bring to matters that touched on religion.

On November 24, 1884, Wendell reports that teaching is helping him understand the plays. Suddenly, and uncharacteristically, however, he tells how something he remarked in class led